Converse College
Quality Enhancement Plan

Converse Across Boundaries:
Learning Through Diverse Experiences

SACSCOC On-Site Review
March 28-30, 2017
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Converse College

Quality Enhancement Plan

Converse Across Boundaries:
Learning Through Diverse Experiences

Executive Summary

As a historic women’s institution, Converse College was founded on an ideal of providing an environment of tolerance, pluralism, and informed social engagement: the “Founder’s Ideal,” a statement of guiding purpose adopted by trustees in 1889, expresses a commitment to cultivating in students the ability to “act justly,” to participate in the well-being of their country, and to embracing differences “liberally and tolerantly.” In this spirit – and inspired by the institutional core values of diversity, exploration, and community – Converse’s Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), Converse Across Boundaries: Learning Through Diverse Experiences, focuses on enhancing student learning by fostering the skills to engage with and dialogue about diverse cultures, perspectives, and life experiences. In this way, Converse Across Boundaries equips graduates with the ability both to “converse” (i.e. communicate) across social boundaries, and to appreciate what may be the “converse” to their own background (in the logical sense of seeing something in an unfamiliar order, and in the semantic sense of a difference which is complementary).

Converse Across Boundaries represents an integration of existing and new initiatives and programs. In the classroom, students take core courses dedicated to non-European or non-Anglophone content, an existing general education requirement. The QEP also inaugurates a new minor track in Interfaith Studies, accompanied by a campus resource center, that aims to celebrate the religious diversity of the region and to broaden knowledge of diverse faiths and worldviews and the way they shape experiences in perspectives in real-world arenas such as health care and counseling. Outside the classroom, the QEP sponsors a series of visiting speakers, film screenings, and workshops in which students occupy or are exposed to roles or perspectives from different cultures, backgrounds, or identities. Within the wider community, Converse Across Boundaries advances student internships as a vehicle for crossing social and personal boundaries. And the QEP expands an existing study-abroad program with opportunities for domestic study-travel as a powerful way to learn both about other cultures and about cultural variation within our own society.

The QEP topic and goals were developed as part of a year-long process involving students, staff, and faculty and including regular consultation with trustees. Analysis of the educational and social environment of Converse revealed that while significant diversity already exists in some respects within the college community, particular constituencies and identities are too often balkanized and many students lack exposure to different cultural traditions and life experiences. In this way, Converse Across Boundaries: Learning Through Diverse Experiences, integrates specifically diversity-related themes with approaches drawn from experiential learning initiatives. Converse has embraced a culture of broadening personal and social boundaries that will develop graduates better equipped to constructively navigate a pluralistic world.
II. Process Used to Develop the QEP

The development of the Converse QEP took place as part of a year and a half long process involving a broad range of the college community, including students, faculty, staff, administration, and trustees. (See Appendix A in §XI below for the completion timeline of development activities.) The process for developing the new Converse QEP started in December 2014 as part of an institution-wide internal review of programs called LEAD – “learning, enrollment, access and activation, and development” – under the leadership of then-President Betsy Fleming. The process progressed in the following steps:

—Step 1—
A pro tem QEP Committee was composed of faculty and staff members involved with the LEAD process who were also identified as representatives of key constituencies for development of the QEP topic leading up to the SACSCOC reaffirmation effort.

QEP Pro Tem Committee
Kevin DeLapp, Chair
Dr. Harold E. Fleming Associate Professor of Philosophy;
Chair of Department of Religion and Philosophy
Jeff Barker
Vice President for Academic Affairs
Zach Corbitt
Chief Information Officer
Molly Duesterhaus
Dean of Student Life
Robin Leslie
Chief Financial Officer
Trevor Pittman
Director of Institutional Research, Assessment, and Effectiveness
Kelly Vaneman
Associate Professor of Oboe and Musicology; Chair of Department of Music Performance

The pro tem committee closely reviewed the SACSCOC parameters for the QEP articulated in the Principles of Accreditation, the Resource Manual, and the Handbook and discussed possible development methodologies. The importance of broad-based involvement, concretely-assessable outcomes, and a theme intimately tied to institutional character, need, and feasibility were all stressed. The committee chair then spent spring 2015 helping campus constituencies understand the importance of a QEP in enhancing student learning and its place in Converse’s reaffirmation effort, in presentations during faculty meetings and sessions of the President’s Cabinet and the Faculty Senate. Proposals for potential QEP topics were invited from various constituencies, yielding the following general themes:

1. Digital Fluency – enhancing students’ ability to navigate in a professional way the world of digital information, social media, and visual marketing. (Proposed by Lydia Anthony, staff Web Content Manager)

2. Arts Appreciation – doubling-down on Converse’s historic strengths in the visual, musical, and other performing arts, and also leveraging the relatively newly-redesigned School of the Arts curriculum, this QEP would build arts appreciation into a new cross-disciplinary first-year program. (Proposed by Kelly Vaneman, Associate Professor of Oboe and Musicology)

3. Media Literacy – enhancing students’ abilities to recognize, utilize, and interpret rhetorical analysis of specific kinds of texts as well as the production of texts in different mediums. (Proposed by Emily Harbin, Assistant Professor of English)
4. **Interfaith Dialogue** – enhancing students’ readiness to engage constructively in pluralistic world by equipping them with basic knowledge and ability to facilitate positive discussions about and between different religious and philosophical worldviews. (Proposed by Jason Loscuito, Chaplain)

5. **Diversity** – expanding students’ respectful interaction with individuals from different socio-economic backgrounds and life experiences as well as increasing more diverse representation within the faculty. (Proposed by Erin Templeton, Associate Professor of English; Jessica Backman, 2015 Student Government Association President)

6. **Leadership** – increasing students’ leadership opportunities in the community through internships, service learning, and involvement in student governance. (Proposed by Betsy Fleming, President)

7. **Critical Thinking** – enhancing student learning through a more explicit first-year curriculum centered on the logic, the principles of argumentation, and the interpretation and evaluation of evidence as they are used in different fields. (Proposed by Kevin DeLapp, Associate Professor of Philosophy)

Working *ad hoc* with the SACSCOC Reaffirmation Leadership Team, the QEP chair then recruited membership for the following QEP Development Committee which would supersede the pro tem committee, and which was charged with identifying existing institutional strengths and needs related to possible QEP topics and to further develop each topic.

**QEP Development Committee**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Title and Position</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kevin DeLapp</td>
<td>Chair; Dr. Harold E. Fleming Associate Professor of Philosophy; Chair of Department of Religion and Philosophy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeff Barker</td>
<td>Provost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brant Bynum</td>
<td>Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs and Director of Student Development and Success; Associate Professor of Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Witney Fisher</td>
<td>Dean of Professional Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boone Hopkins</td>
<td>Dean of the School of the Arts; Associate Professor of Theatre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yongmei Li</td>
<td>Director of Institutional Research, Assessment, and Effectiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ann Pletcher</td>
<td>Dean of the School of Humanities, Sciences, and Education; Associate Professor of Accounting</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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In addition, the QEP Chair reviewed the content and assessment history of Converse’s previous QEP, reviewed by SACSCOC in 2007, and pursuant to the statement in the Handbook (2012: 31) that, “The new QEP should be derived from an assessment of its previous QEP, have distinct goals and institutional outcomes from its first QEP, and continue to focus on student learning outcomes and/or the environment supporting student learning and quality enhancement.” Converse’s previous QEP theme was *Communication Fluency*, and focused on enhancing student learning through improvements in the teaching of effective writing and public speaking within both the general education program and co-curricular venues. Although our implementation efforts of these communication goals resulted in measurable improvements in writing and speaking within our student populations, two limitations were identified which the new QEP could provide the impetus to redress. (See Appendix B in §XI below for the executive summary of the 2007 QEP.)
First, from the perspective of assessment, the 2007 QEP looked at improvements exclusively at the level of student cohorts, i.e. whether a given class improved in their writing and speaking from their first year to their graduating year. Relatedly, the older QEP assessed goals just in the first year and the senior year, with very little assessment opportunities in the sophomore or junior years. These features made it difficult to determine which particular courses, initiatives, or events, if any, were causally responsible for the measured improvements. The new Converse Across Boundaries has improved upon this by instead now measuring improvement within individual courses, initiatives, and events tied to the QEP theme. (See the assessment plan in §X below.)

Second, the 2007 QEP conceived of effective writing and speaking in rather general terms, irrespective of differences in disciplinary methodologies or conventions. This made the attainment of inter-rater reliability challenging when faculty and staff evaluators were operating within sometimes incommensurable frameworks of what counts as effective communication. Moreover, it was found to be difficult to adequately articulate what counts as effective writing and speaking without taking the content of such writing and speaking into account. The new Converse Across Boundaries was conceived partially as a way of remedying this: while Converse continues its efforts to enhance student learning through the cultivation of effective writing and speaking (both still assessed as part of the General Education Program, the First-Year Experience, and within individual degree programs), the new QEP provides a shared content for student communication fluency. In this way, the 2007 QEP provides the general form for which the new QEP supplies the specific subject matter.

—Step 2—

Having learned from the old QEP theme, having familiarized the Converse community with the nature and importance of the QEP, and having gleaned initial ideas for the new QEP theme, the QEP Development Committee then initiated in fall 2015 a series of more detailed inquiries with different college constituencies. These took the following forms.

Graduating Exit Survey
Graduating seniors already take a survey at the end of their final semester asking them to evaluate their experience at Converse with respect to both the academic and co-curricular environments. As a way of testing the resonance of some of the incipient QEP themes proposed during Step 1 (outlined above), the QEP Development Committee added the following questions to this survey:

1. What is the single most valuable skill that Converse helped you develop during your time here?
2. If Converse could have better prepared you for an aspect of life/work after success, what would it have been?

These questions were designed to prompt open-ended reflection on what sort of learning environment and opportunities students thought Converse already provided (in an effort to not create a new QEP theme that would be redundant with existing strengths), as well as what students perceived as necessary for their post-graduation success. Responses varied widely, with the highest percentages clustering around the following general areas in which students thought that Converse could have better prepared them: financial and other personal life-skills (32%); internships or other out-of-the-classroom experiences (19%); and dealing with diversity and different perspectives (9%).
Focus Groups
Working with Amy Cox (Associate Professor of Marketing), students in an upper-level marketing course (Business and Design 442, “Marketing Research,” Fall 2015) designed a moderator’s guide for focus groups to discuss possible QEP topics (see Appendix C in §XI below). The marketing students themselves facilitated two different group discussions with fellow students, one group composed more of post-traditional, transfer, and commuter students and the other composed more of traditional and residential students. Most students in both groups were juniors and seniors, and so in a good position to appreciate the strengths and needs of the Converse community from a curricular and co-curricular perspective. A variety of majors was also represented, from the humanities, sciences, and the arts.

The QEP Development Committee then created a separate, but commensurable list of questions for focus groups of staff and faculty, so that feedback could be compared according to specific categories. Members of the QEP Development Committee moderated a faculty focus group and two staff focus groups, representing perspectives from all of the following.

- Campus Life
- The Honor Board
- The Library
- Administration and Leadership (the President, Vice Presidents, and Deans)
- The Offices of Marketing and Communications
- Academic Support and Success
- The Chaplain’s Office
- Study-Travel and Study Abroad programs
- And most academic departments from both The School of Humanities, Sciences, and Education and The School of the Arts

In both the moderator’s guide for the student focus groups and the prepared questions for the staff and faculty focus groups, questions were crafted in an open-ended way and in a way explicitly focusing on student success. Discussion questions included the following:

- What are some things that you think Converse already does well in terms of promoting student success and preparing graduates for life and work after college?

- Converse has committed itself to trying to strengthen student writing and speaking. Do you think Converse does enough to challenge students to improve their ability to communicate effectively? Has student writing and speaking improved at Converse since you’ve been here?

- What are some things (skills, abilities, etc.) that you think correlate with “success” after graduation, either personally or professionally? Does Converse do anything to promote or develop these skills? If not, or if more could/needs to be done, how and where might devote more effort?

- Converse takes pride in several defining initiatives and strengths, including creativity and the arts, service and leadership opportunities, travel experiences, our esteemed honor tradition, collaborative projects between students and faculty... and of course being a historic women's institution! Are there any ways in which these things help students succeed after graduation? Are there any other programs or aspects of Converse which might impact student success?
Converse’s core values include excellence, integrity, exploration, diversity, respect, community, and progress. Is there one of these which strikes you as most distinctive of the Converse experience? Can you think of ways in which any of these values relate to student success after graduation?

Refreshments were provided at each focus group and participants were entered into a drawing for a gift card to a downtown Spartanburg establishment. See Appendix D in §XI below for minutes and participant lists from each focus group.

QEP Survey
On the basis of this initial induction from the focus-group feedback, the QEP Development Committee composed 20 short questions targeting the five general themes listed above. These were sent out as a survey to all students, faculty, and staff via Survey Monkey, and the survey was open from 13 November-6 December 2015. The survey was anonymous and used a five-point Likert scale. Participants had the option of being entered into a raffle for prizes in the form of gift cards to downtown Spartanburg establishments. There were 554 responses.

Of those statements in the survey pertaining to characterizations of the Converse community, here was notably lower agreement with the statement “The Converse community is a diverse place” (mean 3.53/5), although there was somewhat stronger agreement with the statement that “Converse welcomes people of different backgrounds and beliefs” (mean 3.94/5). Strong agreement was expressed with the claims that travel experiences (mean 4.12/5) and internships (mean 4.17/5) were valuable and important ways to both have meaningfully diverse experiences and to learn about diverse societies. The lowest level of agreement concerning satisfaction with the skills Converse currently encourages was with respect to the encouragement of global awareness (mean 3.46/5). By comparison, there was more general agreement with claims that Converse already does a satisfactory job of encouraging research skills, technology use, leadership, and professional conduct. Encouraging diversity and global awareness also emerged as the area most respondents judged that Converse should be doing more to promote (mean 3.79/5).

(See Appendix E in §XI below for the survey questions; a spreadsheet of all survey responses is available upon request.)

IDEALS
In summer-fall 2015, the Converse Chaplain’s Office coordinated Converse’s participation in the Interfaith Diversity Experiences and Attitudes Longitudinal Survey (IDEALS) sponsored by the Interfaith Youth Core. This yield approximately 130 student respondents. Noteworthy trends included the fact that 63% of these respondents identified as “worldview majority” (i.e. mainline Christian) and about 50% as specifically Protestant. Respondents were also White in much larger numbers than at the peer and national-level institutions included in the IDEALS report (84% at Converse as opposed to 78% at peer schools and 60% nationally).

Converse respondents scored generally lower than our peer institutions and national comparison class in terms of positive levels of appreciative attitudes toward atheism and many non-Christian religions. For example, 82% of Converse respondents showed medium to high appreciative attitudes towards atheists, compared to 86% and 92% of respondents at the peer and national levels, respectively. Positive levels of appreciative attitude were similarly lower at Converse than at peer and national institutions with respect to Buddhists (92% versus 96/98%),
Hindus (93% versus 95/97%), and Muslims (87% versus 91/95%). There was also slightly less appreciative attitudes toward people of different political affiliation. In addition, only 26% of Converse respondents had traveled outside the United States – much lower than the percentages at our peer and national-level institutions (44%).

—Step 3—
The QEP Development Committee worked in January 2016 to collate feedback and data from the initial topic proposals, the senior exit survey, the focus groups, IDEALS, and the campus-wide survey into discrete and coherent topics. The following five central themes emerged, with the identified pros and cons, as potential new QEP topics.

1. Diversity/Global Citizenship
This theme was especially popular with faculty and also with one of the staff focus groups. For faculty and staff, “global citizenship” was cashed out in terms of the GEP “non-western” requirement, study-travel, interfaith dialogue, and the emerging Converse International School, a new administrative unit for international students enrolling in cohort programs. The student groups also commented positively on diversity, but more in the context of travel opportunities and campus demographics. In terms of the campus-wide survey, although Converse was generally viewed as a welcoming place (75% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this characterization; see question 10), response to the claim that Converse is a diverse place (question 4) was one of the lowest of the entire survey (only 59% agreement) and there was relatively low agreement with the claim that Converse currently does enough to encourage diversity or global awareness (52% agreement; see question 14).

A QEP topic based on the theme of diversity and global citizenship could tap into existing programs, initiatives, and strengths such as study-travel, our foreign language and non-western GEP curricula, the new International School, the International Students’ Organization, the Diversity Coalition, several interfaith initiatives (such as the Interfaith Studies Program), and course offerings on topics including non-western history, religion, philosophy, music, and literature. “Diversity”, moreover, needn’t be exclusively interpreted in terms of ethnicity, race, or culture, but could also be extended to address disciplinary, methodological, and cognitive diversity. In terms of Converse’s core values, this topic would have particular resonance with exploration, diversity, respect, and community.

2. Informational Literacy
This was a recurrent theme amongst both faculty and staff. For these groups, whereas discussion of diversity and global awareness tended to emerge later in the focus groups and in a way that focused on things Converse is already doing well or could do better, discussions of informational literacy tended to emerge in a sharper way earlier in the focus groups and in a way that lamented what students are currently not learning. Students, by contrast, seemed more confident in their current knowledge of technology and research skills. Informational literacy was

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1 Positive attitudes at Converse towards Jews was about on par with those at the peer and national level, as were positive attitudes towards people of different sexual or gender identities and people of different races.
2 91% of Converse respondents showed medium to high appreciative attitudes towards political liberals, compared to 93% and 96% of respondents at the peer and national levels, respectively. 89% of Converse respondents showed medium to high appreciative attitudes towards political conservatives, compared to 94% and 93% at the peer and national levels.
cashed out in terms of research skills (vetting quality information sources), technological familiarity, and proficiency with digital media and design. In terms of the survey, claims about the importance of technological proficiency (95% and 91% agreement, respectively; see questions 1 and 2) received the highest level of agreement out of the entire survey, and there was the strongest agreement with the claim that Converse should do more to encourage this (68% agreement; see question 20).

A QEP topic based on informational/technological literacy would be a natural extension of the older QEP topic of “communication fluency.” It would also dovetail nicely with other recent college initiatives, including the Mellon grant-funded library review and collaboration project with Wofford College. Note, though, that our prior QEP topic had an original technology component which we eventually had to remove as it proved too expensive to implement. Moreover, it might be difficult to mark and measure the threshold of “fluency” when it comes to technology. And of course, it’s not clear that all participants in the focus groups were envisioning the same thing: some responses were clearly in terms of “technology” in the form of computers, others drifted more into the digital Humanities; some participants were more focused on generic research and critical thinking skills, while others emphasized trendy social media and marketing outlets. If “informational literacy” is interpreted in the context of design skills, it would at least resonate with our unique strength in the arts. But it also has less clear connections with our core values and broader institutional vision.

3. Leadership
Leadership was a popular theme among the staff groups, although less so in the student and faculty discussions. As a potential QEP topic, the idea could be to leverage some of Converse’s existing programs (e.g., internships, student government, etc.) and try to promote not only leadership skills (e.g., confidence, teamwork, communication) but also an awareness of the different forms that “leadership” can take (viz., social, community, business, active, collaborative, political, academic, etc.). In terms of the survey, questions 5-7 revealed that respondents are very happy with the current leadership opportunities and agree with the claim that Converse is already an empowering place (agreement with the characterization of Converse in terms of leadership was higher, for instance, than agreement with the characterization of Converse in terms of diversity). However, in terms of what Converse should be doing more to encourage, leadership scored the lowest (only 46% agreement; see question 19). Leadership is already closely related to a lot of the messaging and institutional identity of the college. It is also a logical extrapolation from our previous QEP topic of “communication fluency” and it intersects nicely with our core values (see §III below).

4. Experiential Learning
This was popular within each of the focus groups, although not with as much zeal as the three previous topics. There were narrow interpretations of experiential learning which focused mainly on service learning, study-travel, and internships; as well as broader interpretations which brought in independent research, presentations and performances, collaboration of various types, and interdisciplinarity. Experiential learning is a popular QEP topic at a number of other institutions, so we would have plenty of models to help us in the development and implementation phases. Its potential breadth also can help accommodate a number of existing programs and opportunities, and it would be relatively easy to find locations and activities for assessment. In practice, “experiential learning” could involve elements from each of the previous possible three topics. (For this reason, however, it is also perhaps the most generic.)
5. Personal Skills
This was identified primarily by staff, but also some faculty. The idea of “skills” would include virtues such as courage, informed risk-taking, proper study habits, professionalism, and empowerment. Students touched on a similar theme, but for them it was less in terms of character traits and more in terms of concrete skills such as personal financial management, filling out employment papers, how to choose careers, etc. This topic could potentially give us the same attractions as the “leadership” option described above, but with much greater flexibility. It would nicely tap into both academics as well as student life, and it would seem to be the most affordable of all the QEP topics presented in this report. On the downside, students themselves seemed much less interested in this idea (at least in the more general form of personal character), threatening to render the topic perhaps too paternalistic and condescending.

—Step 4—
Equipped with this short list of narrowed topics, members of the QEP Development Committee attended the SACSCOC annual meeting in Atlanta, GA in December 2016 and participated in sessions related to QEP development as preparation for Converse’s wider reaffirmation effort.

Following the Atlanta conference, and looking closely at the pros and cons of each of the above potential topics, including documented institutional need, financial and personnel resources, assessment feasibility, and fit with Converse’s mission, core values, existing and emerging initiatives, and other institutional research data (see §III below), the QEP Development Committee identified two particular topics – Diversity and Experiential Learning – that stood out as most appropriate and in-alignment with our internal institutional research efforts described above in Step 2. Experiential learning, for example, was the most recurrent theme across each of the focus groups, and specific extensions of experiential learning (such as internships and study-travel) met with high levels of agreement in the campus-wide survey in terms of areas that are important to student success and areas that Converse should be doing more to foster.

Diversity, as noted in Step 3 above, was an area revealed by the campus-wide survey as well as the focus groups to be one in which Converse should be doing much more to cultivate.

A review of existing QEPs at other institutions revealed each topic to have precedents and models. Rather than privilege one of these topics over the other, however, the committee worked creatively in spring 2016 to combine them into a single topic of *Converse Across Boundaries: Learning Through Diverse Experiences*. This integrated topic would capture the data-driven salience of both diversity and experiential learning, while using the specific content of the former to augment a perceived over-generality of the latter.

Diversity QEPs at other institutions, by contrast, commonly emphasize issues of demographics and representation, usually focusing mostly on race and ethnicity. The new Converse QEP by contrast was designed as a way of also cultivating the ability of students to learn diversely, where “diversity” is broadened to reflect the intersectionality of identities emerging out of religious faith, economic class, physical disability, sexual orientation, and political affiliation as well as disciplinary methodologies. Thus, the Converse QEP is less focused on diversity itself, but rather on the ability to learn *diversely* by “conversing” about the boundaries of one’s perspective and life experiences, and learning to appreciate the “converse” of those perspectives and experiences.
Converse Across Boundaries: Learning Through Diverse Experiences had already been presented and openly discussed during faculty meetings and faculty Senate, but as a final step in its official selection as the new Converse QEP it was submitted for a vote by the full faculty. The following is an addendum from the minutes of the February, 2017 faculty meeting reflecting the outcome of this vote:

Addendum to the Converse College Faculty Minutes
February 8, 2017

The Converse College faculty voted by electronic voting to approve Converse Across Boundaries: Learning Through Diverse Experiences as the 2017 Quality Enhancement Plan topic. The motion to approve the topic carried by a majority vote.

Kyle Keefer, PhD, Faculty Senate President

---Step 5---

Having identified Converse Across Boundaries as the new QEP topic, the Development Committee was dissolved in May 2016 and replaced by the following QEP Implementation Committee which was charged with articulating the learning outcomes, the assessment plan, and institutional resources and budget, and new initiatives and programs to support this QEP.

QEP Implementation Committee

Kevin DeLapp, Chair
Dr. Harold E. Fleming Associate Professor of Philosophy; Chair of Department of Religion and Philosophy

Jeff Barker
Provost

Sarah Bosler
Campus Technology Support Technician, Alumna, Class of 2016

Brant Bynum
Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs and Director of Student Development and Success, Associate Professor of Spanish

Zach Corbitt
Chief Information Officer

Joy Couch
Director of Athletics

Tyler Favors-Wood
Student Diversity Initiatives Chair, Class of 2017

Witney Fisher
Dean of Professional Development

Cathy Gowan
Director of Internships and Corporate Relations

Mirko Hall
Associate Professor of German Studies and Chair of Languages, Cultures and Literatures

Boone Hopkins
Dean of the School of the Arts; Associate Professor of Theatre

Bill Johnson
Vice President for Finance and Administration

Rich Keen
Associate Professor of Psychology

Beth Lancaster
Director of Media Relations

Yongmei Li
Director of Institutional Research, Assessment, and Effectiveness

Jason Loscuito
College Chaplain

Rhonda Mingo
Dean of Community Life
Step 6

Through the spring, summer, and fall of 2016, the QEP Implementation Committee made presentations of the new topic to different constituencies of the Converse community, including trustees. The Implementation Committee also helped sponsor and support a variety of pre-launch activities in an effort to help broaden the reach of the QEP theme beyond the traditional undergraduate curriculum. None of these activities represent implementations of the QEP that are part of the official assessment plan (see §X below), and while they address the essence of the QEP student-learning outcomes (see §IV below), they do so more indirectly by helping shape a campus culture that supports the official and assessed QEP implementations outlined in §XI below.

QEP Pre-Launch Activities

- **Logo** – Working with an independent design company and spearheaded by Leah Anderson (Converse Public Relations Director), the Office of Communications crafted a logo to represent the QEP. [See cover page.]
- **QEP Jingle** – To help advertise the QEP theme of *Converse Across Boundaries: Learning Through Diverse Experiences*, and to bring a little fun to the implementation effort, Douglas Weeks (Babcock Professor of Piano) and the students of the Converse Chorale composed and recorded a short original song: [https://youtu.be/wk2RgLX4nP8](https://youtu.be/wk2RgLX4nP8)
- **Convocation Credit** – Converse students are required to attend a certain number of campus and community events and activities each year as a graduation requirement. These are referred to as “Convocation Credits.” To support the new QEP theme of enhancing student learning through increased exposure to diverse representations, the Convocation Credit series was revamped to include a specific and required sub-category of Diversity. The system for pledging and logging participation in these events was also overhauled to allow students to indicate their attendance online, and to better publicize upcoming QEP-related activities that are eligible for Diversity Convocation Credit.
- **C3 Grants** – Converse awards competitive internal grants to groups of students, faculty, and staff who propose creative collaborations that enhance the learning environment of the college. To support the new QEP, these grants were reworked to explicitly encourage and reward proposals that addressed the themes of diversity or learning through diverse experiences. The grant program was retitled “Creativity, Community, and Cultural Enrichment (C3)” to better reflect this new emphasis.
- **SSS Advising Plan** – As a part of the first-year experience, Converse students take a Student Success Seminar (SSS), much of which focuses on academic mentoring related to the declaration of majors, navigating the general education program, and becoming familiar with community opportunities and support services. To support the new QEP, added to the advising plan used by SSS instructors is a section highlighting for students the diversity and experiential learning co-curricular opportunities planned for and available in the concomitant advising year.
- **International Dance** – Converse’s Lawson Academy is a pre-college music and dance program that serves the wider Spartanburg community, sharing the strengths and
resources of Converse’s renowned School of the Arts and also exposing the culture of Converse to prospective students and their families. As a way of showcasing Converse’s QEP commitment to diversity, the Lawson Academy inaugurated new international components into their dance curriculum under the leadership of Director Valerie MacPhail (Assistant Professor of Voice).

- **Interfaith Baccalaureate** – As an institution founded on an ideal of being “truly religious,” Converse hosts a Baccalaureate service as part of yearly graduation ceremonies. Traditionally, the service has been Christian, though not denominational. But in the spirit of Converse’s QEP theme of diversity, the service has transitioned under the leadership of Jason Loscuito (Chaplain) to an explicitly interfaith event. To celebrate this new tradition, Professor Ingrid Mattson (University of Western Ontario), a key figure in American Muslim and interfaith thought and named as one of TIME’s 100 people to watch in 2007, spoke at the 2015 event.

- **Opening Convocation** – At Converse’s opening convocation ceremony each year, the winner of the Kathyrne Amelia Brown Award for Excellence in Teaching gives a speech. The 2016 recipient, Kelly Vaneman (Associate Professor of Oboe and Musicology) devoted her speech to masterfully and humorously engaging the entire audience – which comprised all students, faculty, staff, the Board of Trustees, many alumnae, and members of the community – in a variety of interactive activities highlighting the importance of the QEP theme *Converse Across Boundaries: Learning Through Experiences*. See Dr. Vaneman’s QEP speech here: [https://youtu.be/7SbUcAvglWQ](https://youtu.be/7SbUcAvglWQ)

- **West Meets East** – To help support the new QEP theme of diversifying the student learning environment, and in anticipation of the Chinese students to be admitted through the International School in fall 2017, Converse sponsored a year-long series of campus activities focused on exposing students to elements of East Asian society and culture. Events were publicized across campus through the Daily Announcements and flyers, and open to all members of the student body, the faculty and staff, and the citizens of Spartanburg. Students participating in these activities filled out questionnaires related to the QEP learning outcomes (see §IV below). Specific *West Meets East* activities to date include...

  - **Film Screenings** – *The Soong Sisters*, a movie about the rise and fall of China’s Nationalist Party (facilitated by QEP Implementation Committee Chair Kevin DeLapp and member Yongmei Li); *Hero*, a kungfu film about the foundations of China’s first imperial dynasty (facilitated by QEP Implementation Committee Chair Kevin DeLapp); and *Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter... and Spring*, a film about Buddhist monasticism and human nature (facilitated by QEP Implementation Committee Chair Kevin DeLapp). All film screenings were preceded by presentations on the new QEP topic, and were followed by guided discussions.

  - **Etiquette Luncheon** – A comparison of certain American and Eastern customs concerning travel, business, and especially food and dining. The luncheon was hosted in Converse’s Gee Dining Hall and led by Huaiying Kang, Chinese Culture and Education Center in Spartanburg (coordinated by Karen Hill, Instructor of Clarinet and Saxophone, in collaboration with members of the QEP Implementation Committee).

  - **Story Hour** – An interactive workshop exploring cultural differences, stereotypes, and assumptions in mainstream American versus Chinese and Chinese American children’s books, facilitated by QEP Implementation Committee member Yongmei Li and Julie Jones (Assistant Professor of Education).
—Step 7—
In the early stages of identifying particular initiatives and programs that would support the QEP and that could be adequately assessed, the Implementation Committee encountered unexpected complexities regarding the initial learning outcomes that had been articulated by the Development Committee. The final learning outcomes that were revised as a result of deliberations by the Implementation Committee can be found in §IV below. The initial outcomes were defined as follows:

1. Students will demonstrate appreciative knowledge of the practices and characteristics of diverse societies and methodologies.
2. Students will charitably examine and interpret diverse viewpoints and perspectives.
3. Students will compare different experiences and perspectives to their own cultures and backgrounds.

The specific problems the Implementation Committee identified were twofold. First, the evaluative language (namely, “appreciative knowledge” and “charitably examine”) were thought to be both problematic from an assessment point of view, insofar as such evaluations might vary subjectively, and also potentially heavy-handed, insofar as the exposure to diverse perspectives and experiences that the QEP envisions necessarily carries with it the open possibility of discovering that one does not, or cannot, agree with or condone aspects of the perspective or experience in question. To mandate that such exposure result in appreciation (in the sense of endorsement or affirmation) might threaten the very openness to discovery that is part of the spirit of the QEP. Much discussion revolved around the appropriateness and even inescapability of building certain normative commitments into the QEP. Ultimately it was decided to eliminate such language from the learning outcomes themselves, but to retain evaluative elements within the rubric categories for assessing these outcomes. (See the literature review in §V below for the philosophical defense of this.)

The second revision to the learning outcomes undertaken by the Implementation Committee involved the category of “disciplinary methodologies” which the Development Committee had originally included as an aspect of “learning through diverse experiences.” While the Implementation Committee affirmed the importance for student success of being able to navigate the different conventions and frameworks of different academic disciplines, including this as part of the explicit QEP theme was determined to make the QEP overly broad in scope, given that the QEP already embraces diversity of social identities (encompassing racial, ethnic, religious, economic, sexual, and disabled identities) and diversity of life experiences.

—Step 8—
On May 13, 2016, members of the Implementation Committee also met with Dr. Charles A. Taylor, SACSCOC Vice President, for an advisory visit related to the QEP. While expressing enthusiasm for the originality and relevance of the new topic, Dr. Taylor also recommended reducing the number of overall initiatives and programs that were proposed to support the QEP, and to rely less on existing initiatives and programs. In early deliberations, the Implementation Committee had identified six existing initiatives and programs that would be expanded to support the QEP, plus the addition of another six new supporting initiatives and programs, for a total of 12 such implementation actions. Following Dr. Taylor’s recommendations, the Implementation Committee worked to streamline this from the original twelve into a total of six actions. (See §VI below.)
III. Identification of Topic

The identification of the new QEP theme Converse Across Boundaries: Learning Through Diverse Experiences celebrates aspects of Converse’s historical legacy that are at the heart of the institution’s identity, building on existing and emerging strengths while also responding to student needs that Converse is not adequately meeting (or perhaps meeting in theory but not practice). This fitness between the QEP and Converse is evident as follows:

A. Mission and Core Values

The Converse QEP – which integrates diversity with experiential learning – underscores several key aspects of both the college Mission Statement and the articulation of institutional Core Values.

College Mission

“The primary mission of Converse College, founded in 1889, is the liberal education of undergraduate women in a residential setting. Converse reaffirms its founders’ original conviction that a small undergraduate residential college of the liberal arts is a powerful environment for developing the talents of women. As a community of scholars, where students and faculty pursue excellence and collaborate in the search for truth, Converse develops in students scholarly excellence, personal honor, confidence, and skills to be life-long learners. The college draws much of its character from its Christian heritage and welcomes students of all faiths. Converse expands its mission by offering graduate degrees and other programs for women and men. Ultimately, graduates embody the qualities of a Converse education as they assume roles of leadership, service, and citizenship.”

This Mission chartered Converse on an ideal of providing an environment of tolerance, pluralism, and informed social engagement. The original language of the “Founder’s Ideal” – namely, that Converse prepares graduates to “see clearly, decide wisely, and act justly” – requires that students learn how to engage with and dialogue positively about diverse cultures, perspectives, and life experiences. Like the Mission statement, the Ideal also affirms Converse as a learning environment grounded in its Christian legacy while embracing differences “liberally and tolerantly.” Converse’s Core Values expand upon these themes by unpacking seven particular qualities necessary for achieving the vision articulated in the Ideal and Mission.

College Core Values

“The Converse College commitment to creativity and the development of adaptable individuals with clear vision, wise decision and just action is guided by seven core values. These enduring beliefs serve as the compass for the College. They transcend time, extend across the institution and guide our actions and decisions.”

1. Excellence drives us to achieve the best in all that we pursue; to develop competence, confidence and courage to realize full potential in mind, body and spirit.
2. Integrity calls us to cultivate and exercise honor, character and vision in daily decisions and actions; to act honestly and justly when confronted with ethical dilemmas and life’s challenges.
3. Exploration compels us to think critically and creatively in the acquisition of knowledge and skills; to discover and enrich scholarship and research, disciplines, methods and vocations through hands-on learning and leadership and through discovery, discourse and debate.
4. Diversity inspires us to embrace the different perspectives, experiences, cultures, backgrounds, talents and contributions that comprise a global society; to enhance and
expand inclusivity as we build a stronger multi-dimensional community.

5. RESPECT leads us to value self and others, recognizing the legitimacy of individuality in belief, expression and perspective; to exercise civility, mindfulness and responsibility in words and actions.

6. COMMUNITY motivates us to develop a dynamic network of relationships through a balance of work and play that nurtures the abilities of each member in order to establish a better whole; to mentor, collaborate and communicate as engaged citizens who effect positive change.

7. PROGRESS challenges us to think strategically toward the future by employing creativity, adaptability, ingenuity and innovation; to advance and transform the world around us.”

Converse Across Boundaries: Learning Through Diverse Experiences is especially inspired by the core values of Diversity, Exploration, and Community. The QEP learning outcomes (see §IV below) are calibrated to target these three values in the following ways:

**DIVERSITY** – the QEP helps foster in students the capacity to understand the practices and characteristics of diverse cultures and societies. [Outcome #1]

**EXPLORATION** – the QEP broadens students’ worldviews by encouraging them to constructively and critically encounter other traditions and perspectives. [Outcome #2]

**COMMUNITY** – the QEP integrates the discovery of different societies and perspectives with reflective attention to students’ own local identities and communities. [Outcome #3]

In the spirit of these Core Values, therefore, and in effort to better live up to the themes of tolerant and pluralistic engagement with difference, the Converse QEP Converse Across Boundaries equips graduates with the ability both to “converse” (i.e. communicate) across social boundaries, and to appreciate what may be the “converse” to their own background (in the logical sense of seeing something in an unfamiliar order, and in the semantic sense of a difference which is complementary).

**B. Institutional Research**

Converse itself is a remarkably diverse place in certain ways, insofar as the college community is characterized by a mix of legacy students (those whose parents or grandparents are alumnae), first-generation students, post-traditional or returning students, students from a wide variety of socio-economic backgrounds, students with physical disabilities, numerous students who balance work and other life commitments with school, and students with political beliefs across the spectrum. However, in other ways, Converse is quite homogeneous insofar as most of our students are from South Carolina and have limited exposure to diverse societies or religions. The new Converse QEP is designed to help expand students’ horizons in these ways.

Student surveys reflect the above ambiguity regarding the diversity at Converse. On the one hand, according to recent comparison results from the 2013-2014 Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE) and National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), the Converse community does an impressive job cultivating conversations with diverse others. In response to the question “How often do you include diverse perspectives (political, religious, gender, etc.) in course discussion or assignments” (question 2c), incoming first-year students were split nearly in half between those who never or only occasionally (49%) and those who often did so (51%). After their first year at Converse, these students slightly increased their
inclusion of diverse perspectives, with the percentage of those who never or only occasionally do so dropping to 41% and those who often do so rising to 59%. In a similar vein, in response to the question “How often do you try to better understand someone else’s views by imagining how an issue looks from his or her perspectives” (question 2e), first-year students who reported doing this often increased from 68% to 73%. In this respect, the BCSSE-NSSE data reveals Converse to be helping facilitate student learning through diverse experiences as well as exposure to diverse perspectives already.

However, the same survey comparison also revealed disturbing weaknesses in the way Converse students encounter diversity outside the classroom. For in response to the question “How often do you have discussions with people from different groups,” first-year students reported an overall decrease compared to their high school experience in their contact with members of a different race or ethnicity (question 8a): whereas only 9% of prospective students claimed to have never or only occasionally had such encounters, this percentage jumped to 15% once they were at Converse; and whereas a full 91% of prospective students claimed to have often had discussions with someone of another race or ethnicity, once at Converse, that percentage fell to 85%. Student experiences related to encounters with economic and religious diversity also declined upon matriculation (questions 8b-c). The only relative constant from high school to Converse was with respect to encounters with political difference (question 8d).³ It should be noted that the NSSE 2014 Engagement Indicators, which includes comparison across institutions, also shows that Converse fares remarkably better at facilitating discussions with diverse others than peer co-educational and women’s institutions.⁴ Nevertheless, the fact that high school is apparently doing a better job than college is in exposing students to diverse experiences and perspectives supports the need for the new Converse QEP.

The lack of diversity and diverse learning experiences was also explicitly commented upon in the QEP development focus groups described in §II above (see Appendix D for specific comments). Students in one focus group emphasized the lack of religious and racial diversity, both in terms of demographics and curricular and extra-curricular representation. There was also general consensus amongst the student focus group participants that educational travel experiences were essential for deeply learning a subject matter and for personal growth, but were also too few, cost prohibitive, or poorly advertised. As one student participant in the focus-group discussion expressed it, study-travel “is an incredible personal experience, but this is especially critical for those who can’t afford it because it’s not just for fun, and I want those who can’t afford it to be able to experience it.” More generally, in the words of the student moderators for the two student focus groups, “Several participants expressed a desire for more money to be allocated towards study abroad trips... one participant discussed the possibility of including more academic departments in [study-travel] trips. There was general consensus that study travel is an important part of students’ education because of the exposure to other cultures and the ability to broaden their knowledge.”

³ These survey results were controlled for representativeness, in that the percentages of respondents by category (race, ethnicity, etc.) roughly corresponded to the percentages of those same categories in the student population.
⁴ Specifically, the percentage of Converse students who responded that they “very often” or “often” had discussions with people of other ethnicities (question 8a), different economic backgrounds (question 8b), different religious beliefs (question 8c), and different political views (question 8d) were, respectively, 85%, 88%, 77%, and 82%. Responses for other women’s colleges, by comparison, were 78%, 81%, 76%, and 65%, and responses from other institutions within Converse’s Carnegie Class were 68%, 71%, 68%, and 68%. Thus, Converse’s indicators were higher along each dimension.
In summer 2016, Converse also hosted a college forum discussion related to diversity and race, facilitated by the community organization “Speaking Down Barriers.” Consistent with the student focus-group responses, discussion during this forum highlighted the importance of diversity and learning through diverse experiences, while also stressing Converse’s lack of important dimensions of heterogeneity, which can be isolating to individuals who identify or are identified in particular ways, especially with regard to race and religious or non-religious status.

C. General Education Program

The Converse QEP helps to grow several existing curricular programs that have lacked adequate resources or that have faced other limitations. In particular, the Converse General Education Program (GEP) already involves a commitment to “learning through diverse experiences” in the form of a requirement that graduates take at least one course designated as focusing on “non-European or non-Anglophone” content. However, the number or frequency of available courses that may satisfy this requirement has been severely limited, often making it difficult for students to find accessible offerings and often leaving a very small number of faculty disproportionately responsible for such offerings. In fall 2016, for instance, there were only ten available sections, four of which were cross-listed, three of which were different sections of the same course, and three of which were prohibitive for general education purposes due to prerequisites, e.g. foreign language competency or required lower-division coursework in the field. Thus, when these factors and redundancies are taken into consideration, the effective number of diversity-related GEP offerings in fall 2016 amounted only to six, spread out amongst only five different professors. Previous semesters and years typically saw even more restricted availability of diversity-related GEP offerings.

Because such courses directly target the learning outcomes of Converse Across Boundaries (see §IV below) and vitally connect the GEP with the college mission and core values, the Converse QEP will help support the courses being more frequently offered, more equitably distributed across faculty and disciplines, and more available to general education students. (See §VI below for more details about the curricular actions to be implemented as part of the QEP; and see §IX for details concerning the resources pertaining to these actions.)

In addition to the GEP, certain major degree programs at Converse (e.g. Art History) require either internships or travel-based studies (generally referred to at Converse as “study-travel” programs). As with the “non-European/non-Anglophone” category discussed above, these degree requirements can be difficult for all students to satisfy given the paucity or irregularity of appropriate opportunities. The emphasis in the Converse QEP on the importance of learning through diverse experiences will help support the availability of these opportunities. (See §VI below for more details about the curricular actions to be implemented as part of the QEP; and see §IX for details concerning the resources pertaining to these actions.)

D. Converse International School

Although not built into the QEP as a direct implementation for any purposes of assessment of the desired learning outcomes, Converse Across Boundaries nevertheless grows out of and helps support and unify other nascent college initiatives, most notably the emerging Converse International School (CIS). The CIS, which echoes the Converse QEP in its aim of providing “learning without borders,” involves partnerships with universities outside the United States to study at Converse within specific major program tracks. CIS students work at their home
universities satisfying certain general education and prerequisite curricula, and complete their degrees at Converse. Faculty and staff from Converse and from foreign partner institutions have enjoyed hosting and visiting one another, and opportunities are being pursued for Converse students to study abroad in CIS countries. Currently, the CIS has partnered with a number of universities in China and expects its first cohort of students to arrive in 2017. Much of the preparation for the CIS has been tied to key themes in the QEP, such as the Core Values of Diversity, Exploration, and Community mentioned above, insofar as the exchange experience is designed as a way of learning about and celebrating cultural differences, exploring other traditions and learning environments, and expanding the Converse community.

E. Pre-Implementation Benchmark Assessment

Although most of the assessable actions related to the QEP represent new programs that are just now being implemented (spring 2017), a small number of initiatives have pre-existed the implementation of the new QEP in inchoate form. Although these initiatives (e.g. existing courses, internships, etc.) were not initially designed with the new QEP learning outcomes in mind, QEP assessment was nevertheless performed on them in an effort to identify benchmark data for future modification and to see what we were doing that was already (or not) working to cultivate students’ capacities to learn through diverse experiences. This pre-implementation assessment was conducted using the QEP rubric (administered as a direct measure by instructors) and survey (administered as an indirect measure by students on themselves) described in §X and attached as Appendices F and G respectively. Benchmark assessment was acquired from all courses or activities during fall 2016 that would become QEP implementation sites, including all non-European/non-Anglophone General Education sections, internships, and diversity-themed Convocation Credit events (see §VI below for details about each category), as follows:

PHI 265.01 Classical Chinese Thought
REL 265.01 Classical Chinese Thought
SPN 309.01 Latin American Novel and Drama
POL 470.01 Islamic and Middle East Politics
HST 470.01 Islamic and Middle East Politics
REL 264.01 Hinduism
REL 104.01 World Religions
REL 104.02 World Religions
REL 104.95 World Religions
ART 200.01 Art Beyond the West
MMD 450.01 Music Media Internship
SPN 496.01 Spanish Internship
West Meets East screening of The Soong Sisters
West Meets East screening of Hero
West Meets East screening of Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter...and Spring

The results of these pre-implementation efforts were quite encouraging. Surveys deployed in the abovementioned courses and activities (see Appendix G) revealed that the overwhelming majority of students agreed or strongly agreed that the experience made them more knowledgeable about the practices, beliefs, or characteristics of whatever cultures or societies they were focused on (95%), and offered them the opportunity to interpret different perspectives (94%). There was slightly less agreement (76%) that the experience caused students to reflect on their own background, culture, or beliefs. On the one hand, this survey information is
evidence of the effectiveness of these existing courses and activities in addressing the QEP theme of “learning through diverse experiences.” On the other hand, these pre-implementation assessment efforts also revealed what a dearth there is in terms of courses and co-curricular opportunities that touch on this theme: in the above list from fall 2016, there were only three co-curricular events (all sponsored by the same series) and only six different courses (four of which were consolidated with the Humanities division, and two of which were taught by the same individual). Given the potential for successfully achieving the learning outcomes set forth in the new QEP, the number, frequency, and distribution of such courses and events should be greatly expanded (see §VI below for action steps related to this).

Data from rubrics (see Appendix H) administered as part of the pre-implementation assessment were also encouraging: faculty judged that 79% of students were either “competent” or “exemplary” by the end of their course experience in demonstrating knowledge of the practices and characteristics of the diverse cultures or societies that were examined in the course; 71% became “competent” or “exemplary” in their ability to examine and interpret diverse viewpoints and perspectives; and a full 93% proved themselves “competent” or “exemplary” in being able to compare different experiences and perspectives to their own culture and background. However, based on informal conversations with faculty members administering these rubrics, there needs to be more explicit training aimed at achieving inter-rater reliability and an understanding that the QEP rubric is calibrated to expectations for a graduating senior (regardless of the actual status of the student being evaluated) and need not be coextensive with the grade earned in the course itself (which is measured by the course’s own individual learning outcomes). Furthermore, given the fact that faculty judged students highest, but students judged themselves lowest, when it came to relating different experiences and perspectives to one’s own background and culture, future QEP assessment development will work to better align these measures (see the Assessment Plan in §X).

The following chart lays out these results of these pre-implementation benchmark assessment efforts and the alignment between them, the survey and rubric measures, and the QEP student learning outcomes (defined in §IV below):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Learning Outcomes</th>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>Achievement Target Level</th>
<th>Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Students will demonstrate knowledge of the practices and characteristics of diverse cultures and societies.</td>
<td>M 1. QEP rubric (Dimension 1)</td>
<td>At least 70% of the students will achieve at least competent (3 pts) on this dimension of the rubric.</td>
<td>79% of students evaluated as part of this pre-implementation benchmark set achieved rubric scores of at least “competent” (3) on this dimension.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Description: The instructor administers the QEP rubric on a designated assignment or activity at the conclusion of a course. The rubric has three dimensions. The first dimension is used to assess this learning outcome. There are four levels of performance, ranging from beginning (1 pt) to exemplary (4 pts).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M 2. QEP Survey (Question 1)</td>
<td>At least 70% of students will rate</td>
<td>95% of students surveyed as part</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Component</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Outcome</td>
<td>Pre-Implementation Benchmark</td>
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</table>
| 2. Students will examine and interpret diverse viewpoints and perspectives. | **M 1. QEP rubric (Dimension 2)**  
Description: The instructor administrators the QEP rubric on a designated assignment or activity at the conclusion of a course. The rubric has three dimensions. The second dimension is used to assess this learning outcome. There are four levels of performance, ranging from beginning (1 pt) to exemplary (4 pts). | At least 70% of the students will achieve at least competent (3 pts) on this dimension of the rubric. | 71% of students evaluated as part of this pre-implementation benchmark set achieved rubric scores of at least “competent” (3) on this dimension. |
| | **M 2. QEP Survey (Question 2)**  
Description: The instructor/adviser/facilitator will have students assess themselves using this survey at the conclusion of a course, internship, or other specified activity. The second question is used to assess this learning outcome. This question concerns students’ perceptions about their ability to demonstrate knowledge of the practices and characteristics of diverse cultures and societies. Response options range from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (5). | At least 70% of students will rate agree (4) or strongly agree (5) or above on this question. | 94% of students surveyed as part of this pre-implementation benchmark set agreed (4) or strongly agreed (5) on this question. |
| 3. Students will compare different experiences and perspectives to their own cultures and backgrounds. | M 1. QEP rubric (Dimension 3)  
Description: The instructor administers the QEP rubric on a designated assignment or activity at the conclusion of a course. The rubric has three dimensions. The third dimension is used to assess this learning outcome. There are four levels of performance, ranging from beginning (1 pt) to exemplary (4 pts). | At least 70% of the students will achieve at least competent (3 pts) on this dimension of the rubric. | 93% of students evaluated as part of this pre-implementation benchmark set achieved rubric scores of at least “competent” (3) on this dimension. |
|---|---|---|---|
| M 2. QEP Survey (Question 3)  
Description: The instructor/adviser/facilitator will have students assess themselves using this survey at the conclusion of a course, internship, or other specified activity. The third question is used to assess this learning outcome. This question concerns students’ perceptions about their ability to compare different experiences and perspectives to their own cultures and backgrounds. Response options range from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (5). | At least 70% of students will rate agree (4) or strongly agree (5) on this question. | 76% of students surveyed as part of the pre-implementation benchmark set agreed (4) or strongly agreed (5) on this question. |
F. Wider Spartanburg Community

Converse Across Boundaries leverages several unique and often underappreciated assets of the local community and region, including the availability of internships and service-learning venues and a high degree of racial, ethnic, and economic diversity. Of particular significance for the Converse QEP is religious variation. Converse’s wider community of Spartanburg boasts remarkable cultural diversity for a county of its size (population 290,000), with vibrant Greek, Hmong, and Eastern European communities, and nearly 40 places of worship for traditions in a spectrum of Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist congregations. The new Interfaith Studies (IFS) program which is being sponsored by the QEP is a way of celebrating and harnessing this existing religious pluralism. (See §VI below.)

G. Summary

The QEP theme of Converse Across Boundaries is an attempt to build on our existing strengths pertaining to diversity as well as provide an organizing framework for otherwise disparate programs and initiatives related to diversity. The QEP is also a response to the troubling ambiguity within our community regarding diverse identities and experiences. Converse Across Boundaries is an effort to better equip students with the ability to dialogue (“to converse”) constructively and critically about such diversity, and also to better understand perspectives and cultures that might be different and challenging to one’s own (i.e. the converse of one’s own). The identification of this specific QEP topic makes use of aspects of the college’s historical legacy in addition to information from recent student surveys and curricular assessment which all highlight the need to more explicitly address issues of diversity and to offer more accessible, frequent, and quality opportunities to “learn through diverse experiences.” Finally, the Converse QEP supports the college’s mission to produce globally informed citizens who understand and value the perspectives and worldviews of different societies (including one’s own), aligning with the college’s core values of “exploration” and “diversity”.
IV. Desired Student Learning Outcomes

The goal of the Converse QEP, *Converse Across Boundaries: Learning Through Diverse Experiences*, is to enhance student learning by cultivating the skills to constructively engage with and dialogue about diverse cultures, perspectives, and life experiences. This goal is supported by three student learning outcomes:

1. **[QEP-SLO-1]** Students will demonstrate knowledge of the practices and characteristics of diverse cultures and societies.
2. **[QEP-SLO-2]** Students will examine and interpret diverse viewpoints and perspectives.
3. **[QEP-SLO-3]** Students will compare different experiences and perspectives to their own cultures and backgrounds.

These three outcomes progress in conceptual complexity, moving from the purely cognitive “knowledge” of SLO-1, to the more critical “examination” and “interpretation” of SLO-2, and culminating in the deeper personal reflection involved in SLO-3. For these reasons, SLO-3 has special priority within the Converse QEP, and is envisioned as constituting the signature outcome of *Converse Across Boundaries: Learning Through Diverse Experiences*. In the descriptions of the interventions and actions to be implemented under this QEP detailed in §VI and in the assessment plan described in §X below, SLO-3 is given particular emphasis. All three learning outcomes, however, are essential to the QEP and SLO-3 only emerges out of 1-2, insofar as knowledge and the capacity to examine and interpret other perspectives and cultures are prerequisites for being able to compare those perspectives and cultures to one’s own assumptions and background.

See the assessment plan in §X below for more details.
As discussed in §II-III above, and as commented upon favorably during the SACSCOC Vice President Dr. Charles Taylor’s advisory visit, the Converse QEP theme Converse Across Boundaries: Learning Through Diverse Experiences involves a novel combination of diversity and experiential learning initiatives. Numerous SACSCOC institutions have successfully implemented QEPs on each these topics individually, but the integration of them into a single coherent QEP would appear to represent something new. Such an integration also has the potential to mitigate against certain limitations of each QEP theme – (1) diversity and (2) experiential learning – taken in isolation.

“Diversity” as an educational goal and a common QEP theme is an “essentially contested concept” – that is, a concept that is both popularly recognizable but the proper use of which remains in dispute in a way that cannot be satisfactorily settled by stipulation, empirical evidence, or deeper linguistic intuition (Gallie 1956).

The following is a non-exhaustive list of frequent extensions of “diversity” in higher education discourse:

- **Representational Diversity** – focuses on demographics and representation of socially, politically, and historically defined group identities (e.g. gender, race, ethnicity, physical disabilities, sexuality, etc.).
- **Structural Diversity** – focuses on the programs, forces, or mechanisms (official as well as actual) at work within an institution that affect representational diversity efforts.
- **Normative Diversity** – mobilizes notions of representational and structural diversity for the purposes of promoting social-political justice or democratic citizenship (cf. Banks 2004).

Despite being essentially contested in this way, employers persistently stress their desire for college graduates who are proficient in negotiating issues of diversity (Bikson & Law 1994; AAC&U 2008). Each of the above varieties of diversity represents a worthy goal for colleges and universities, but all face limitations as QEP themes. Increasing representational and structural diversities, for instance, have clear correlations with student learning enhancement, but doing so without also looking at the diversity of actual, individual student experiences can have negative effects on learning outcomes, especially for students of color (Chang, et al. 2006). Indeed, efforts to improve structural diversity are best served by grounding them in experiential learning, which personalizes and internalizes encounters with diverse others. As Chang, et al. write, “The educational potential of ‘diversity’ is not reducible simply to the mere presence of underrepresented students; rather, its value appears to depend on whether it leads to great levels of engagement in diversity-related activities” (2006: 431).

What employers truly seem to desire (Bikson & Law 1994), and what the AAC&U (2008) means when it talks about “essential” learning outcomes, is not so much the four forms of diversity listed above, so much as students graduating with what might be called a “pluralistic orientation”

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5 Both “diversity” and experiential learning (in the form specifically of “internships”) are listed by the American Association of Colleges and Universities as recommended “high-impact practices.” See Kuh (2008).
that is, an openness to new experiences and an appreciation of the complexity and legitimacy of different perspectives and backgrounds. Such a pluralistic orientation is best facilitated through the sort of combined curricular and extra-curricular initiatives envisioned by the Converse QEP. As opposed to solely working toward representational or structural diversity, instantiating diversity efforts within specific curricular and co-curricular experiences—such as the Interfaith Studies program, the Convocation Credit events, and the non-European/non-Anglophone General Education Program described above—increases students’ “level of intergroup learning... indirectly enhancing their pluralistic orientation” (Engberg & Hurtado 2001: 436). On the one hand, curricular implementations of diversity efforts are necessary in light of the cognitive mechanisms operative in the reduction of social out-group bias (Dovidio, et al. 2004). In this way, diversity curriculum provides an important structure that can “push students to think more explicitly about their own and others’ multiple social identities and foster increased intergroup learning,” in a way that “merely engaging in a [informal or extra-curricular] diversity experience” may not (Engberg & Hurtado 2011: 437-438). On the other hand, curricular diversity alone may be insufficient to cultivate the personalization and “transformational learning” conducive to a pluralistic orientation (Mayhew, et al. 2016). When explicitly structured by curricular experiences, subsequent out-of-the-classroom encounters with diversity, in the form of friendships and other interpersonal interactions, are much more likely to make a positive impact on learning outcomes and be retained after graduation (Chang, et al. 2006). Instantiating diversity efforts within experiential learning in this way is also a proven way of building partnerships between the realms of academic and student affairs, with are too often separated as distinct campus cultures (LePeau 2015).

Another reason for conjoining diversity initiatives with experiential learning is that the four traditional extensions of “diversity” identified above have decreasing resonance with today’s students. Post-millennial students are much more likely to respond to “diversity” when it encompasses diverse perspectives and experiences, rather than representational diversity focused on social-political group identities (Smith & Turner 2015). Again, this is not a capitulation of the enduring importance of efforts to increase representational and structural diversity; but it is an empirically-driven recognition of what will make reforms to student learning outcomes initially more salient to students themselves. Cultivating a pluralistic orientation via diverse experiences can help pave the way for more successful representational and structural diversity efforts down the road by making students more open to and affirming of new worldviews and cultures (cf. Nagda, et al. 2004; Harper & Yeung 2013).

To summarize, Converse Across Boundaries: Learning Through Diverse Experiences stems from the recognition that diversity efforts are best enabled when they are situated in experiential learning contexts. In this way, the Converse QEP reconceives diversity as itself a mode of learning rather than as solely an object of learning.

The specific actions to be implemented by the Converse QEP are calibrated to this goal and also informed by research into best practices pertaining to both traditional diversity initiatives and experiential learning. For example, one of the most powerful ways of promoting a pluralistic orientation is through interfaith encounters (Rockenbach, et al. 2015), which is one of the central branches within the Converse QEP. Interfaith experiences, both curricular and extra-curricular, are positively associated with transformational learning (Mayhew, et al. 2016) and represent a learning outcome vital to graduates’ success in an interdependent world (Patel 2015). Travel experiences, both domestic and international, such as the study-travel programs supported by

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the Converse QEP, are another important way of enhancing students’ pluralistic orientation (Bennett 1993), especially when such travel is facilitated by faculty and staff who are themselves interculturally sensitive (Olson & Kroeger 2001); hence the provision within the Converse QEP budget to support faculty and staff development of study-travel, interfaith, and general education offerings (see §IX).

For bibliography, see Appendix J below.
VI. Actions to be Implemented

To achieve the outcomes detailed in §IV above, Converse commits itself to programs and initiatives in the classroom, in campus life, and in our relationship with the wider community and world. Certain of these items (A1, B1, C1, and C2 below) leverage elements of certain existing initiatives and programs, by either expanding them or retargeting them to focus more directly on learning through diverse experiences. Other initiatives and programs (A2 and B2) represent entirely new undertakings. All six of the QEP initiatives and programs are part of the overall assessment plan described in §X below. They are organized into three larger categories, although there are several intentional overlaps, as follows:

A. Curricular

1. General Education – the Converse General Education Program (GEP) includes an existing graduation requirement that students pass a course devoted to “non-European or non-Anglophone” content. Designation for such credit is granted through the standing Curricular Programs Committee (CPC) and subject to approval by the full faculty. Courses that satisfy this GEP category, however, tend to be offered with insufficient frequency and disciplinary breadth. Instead, the same small handful of sections are routinely offered by the same faculty members, and it can be difficult for students to conveniently find available seats. Most non-European/non-Anglophone courses are consolidated within Humanities departments and programs, with occasional additions from musicology or art history. There are several non-European/non-Anglophone courses within the Department of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures, but most of these require prerequisite language proficiency, and so are more conducive to majors than for GEP purposes. Similarly, the Politics program lists several non-European/non-Anglophone courses, but the upper-division status of these listings can make them inappropriate for general education students.

For example, in the period between fall 2015 and fall 2016, 28 sections were offered that qualified for the non-European/non-Anglophone GEP category. This represents only 12 distinct offerings, however, once courses with prohibitive prerequisites (such as senior-level Capstone courses are prior language proficiency) are taken into account, and after the cross-listing of different sections of the same course are factored in. Of that 12, moreover, four are at the 300 or 400-level, which general education or lower-division students often shy from or are advised not to take. These core GEP courses are recurrently taught by the same faculty members: two professors are jointly responsible for 54% of all qualifying sections within this time period, and the Humanities division alone (encompassing the Religion, Philosophy, History, and Politics programs) handles 67% of such offerings. This period (fall 2015-fall 2016) is representative of the number, diversity, and staffing of non-European/non-Anglophone course offerings within the last several years.

The QEP will increase the number and diversity of courses available under the non-European/non-Anglophone designation by awarding development stipends for new courses that satisfy this GEP category, and by increasing the publicity of such offerings through student advising and the First-Year Mentors program. The extent to which these GEP offerings successfully target the QEP student learning outcomes is assessed both directly by a rubric administered by the instructor to a representative sample of each students’ work (typically a final exam or term paper) and indirectly in the form of a self-assessment survey administered by students. Assignments will vary with each qualifying
GEP course, but in all cases will be designed so as to include the specific elements of SLO-3. (See §IV above for the description and priority of this SLO; and see Appendices F and G for the survey and rubric.)

2. *Interfaith Studies* – one of the most visceral ways students learn through diverse experiences is by coming into meaningful contact with members of different religious traditions. The Department of Religion and Philosophy has existing strengths in the areas of non-Western religions (especially Indian and Chinese traditions) and the Chaplain’s Office works actively with Student Life and campus faith organizations to promote cross-religious dialogue and understanding.

The QEP will support the further development of the Converse Interfaith Studies (IFS) program, whose initial funding has been provided by a grant from the Arthur Vining Davis Foundation, to include an academic minor housed under the Religion program, a dedicated resource center, and activities that aim at cultivating appreciative knowledge of diverse faiths and worldviews and the way they shape experiences and perspectives in real-world arenas, including health care, counseling, etc. The development of the IFS program builds on Converse’s legacy of commitment to religious diversity, encapsulated in the Founder’s Ideal and Core Values [see §III above] and evident in Converse’s past participation as an affiliate institution in the Harvard Pluralism Project through a now-retired faculty member (http://pluralism.org/about/who-we-are/affiliates/).

New interfaith courses will be designated under a new “IFS” designation, and completion of the minor will involve six courses for a total of 18 credit hours. Two 100-level courses (IFS 101 “Introduction to World Religions” and IFS 102 “Introduction to Interfaith Dialogue”) will be taught as a year-long sequence and are prerequisites for upper-division course work. Upper-division requirements include at least one course from each of the following categories:

- **Theoretical Perspectives**, designed to ground students in the theoretical aspects of religious studies and pluralism;
- **Denominational Perspectives**, focusing on exploration of a specific religious tradition;
- **Interdisciplinary Perspectives**, which recognize the interconnections between religious studies and the way other disciplines (e.g. philosophy, political science, psychology, etc.) inform and inquire into the nature of values, conflicts, and beliefs; and
- **Community Perspectives**, taking the form of an internship with an area hospital, hospice, religious institution, or appropriate community organization.

The extent to which these IFS offerings successfully target the QEP student learning outcomes is assessed both directly by a rubric administered by the instructor to a representative sample of each students’ work (typically a final exam or term paper) and indirectly in the form of a self-assessment survey administered by students. (See Appendices G and H for the survey and rubric; see Appendix I for IFS student learning outcomes.) Assignments will vary with each IFS course, but in all cases will be designed so as to include the specific elements of SLO-3 (see §IV above for the description and priority of this SLO).
In addition to the minor, IFS students will participate in interfaith and cross-cultural events developed in conjunction with the Chapman Cultural Center (www.chapmanculturalcenter.org), the area’s coordinating organization for the arts; Hub-Bub (www.hub-bub.com), a local non-governmental organization dedicated to artistic development and service in Spartanburg; the Upstate Confucius Institute (located nearby at Presbyterian College); the Spartanburg Interfaith Hospitality Network (spihn.squarespace.com); the Interfaith Youth Corps (a national organization promoting interfaith dialogue); South Carolina Humanities, a statewide nonprofit affiliated with the National Endowment for the Humanities; and other organizations where Converse has existing relationships and collaborations.

Spartanburg is also home to two major hospital systems with which IFS students will have the opportunity to work by participating in service-learning courses to be developed and by participating in existing volunteer work opportunities, in addition to participating in an existing internship relationship with the Spartanburg Regional Hospice (the leading non-profit hospice in the area and the only one with a hospice home).

The QEP will also support the development of an Interfaith Resource Center, consisting of physical and electronic holdings of books, periodicals, video and other electronic resources, and other materials available for research by students, faculty, and visiting scholars. The Resource Center will also develop and manage an interactive webpage. In addition, an ongoing publication series will be inaugurated, with annual projects featuring photojournalism, documentary films, and written contributions devoted to different aspects of interfaith study, e.g. teaching resources, ethnographic explorations, expressions and celebrations of religious diversity in the community, tools for facilitating values discussions, end-of-life counseling, and cultural differences.

B. Co-Curricular

1. Convocation Credit – students are required to participate in a number of elective community events each year, generally referred to as “Convocation Credits.” To support the QEP theme, the Convocation Credit program has been revised to feature a category dedicated to diversity and new events will be added in which students occupy or are exposed to roles or perspectives from different cultures, backgrounds, or methodologies, e.g. visiting speakers from the broader community, guided film screenings, anti-bias workshops, and luncheons devoted to aspects of cross-cultural dialogue and identity. Students log their participation in diversity Convocation Credit activities through a newly-refurbished website portal developed by members of the QEP Implementation Committee. (See Appendix F for a screenshot of this portal.) Approval of diversity status for prospective Convocation Credit is jointly overseen by the Dean of Community Life and members of the Student Government Association, and is informed by the QEP student learning outcomes established by the QEP Implementation Committee. Participants in QEP-related Convocation Credit activities complete the QEP survey (see Appendix G).

2. Speaker Series – in addition to the expansion of the Convocation Credit program described above, the QEP inaugurates a new “Converse Across Boundaries” speaker series featuring invited academic talks from across the curriculum on issues related to diverse cultures, identities, and experiences within the humanities, sciences, and arts. Departments, programs (such as the IFS program detailed in A2 above), or other campus organizations may apply for QEP funding to support such speakers. Funding is
administered by the Faculty Development Committee and informed by the criteria articulated in the QEP student learning outcomes. Participants in events sponsored by the QEP Speaker Series complete the QEP survey (see Appendix G).

C. Experiential

1. **Study-Travel** – a powerful way to learn about another culture, as well as one’s own, is to travel with a specific educational focus. Travel challenges students to embrace cultural, political, economic, and linguistic unfamiliarity in a direct experiential way. The college already supports trips abroad as part of academic courses (called “study-travel” courses), through dedicated scholarships administered by the Director of International Studies and the Directors of the Nisbet Honors Program. The QEP will augment these available funding sources, provide development incentives to faculty to offer more study-travel opportunities, and better promote student participation in such trips through increased campus advertising.

Furthermore, for many of our students, domestic travel is just as foreign to their experience as international travel, and just as important in cultivating appreciative knowledge of differences. To support this dimension of the QEP, Converse will expand the scope of study-travel programs by increasing funding for students to offset the cost of domestic study-travel experiences and by providing development stipends for faculty and staff to create and offer such course trips. The extent to which study-travel experiences successfully target the QEP student learning outcomes is assessed both directly by a rubric administered by the instructor to a representative sample of each students’ work (typically a final exam or other assignment) and indirectly in the form of a self-assessment survey administered by students. Assignments will vary with each study-travel course, but in all cases will be designed so as to include the specific elements of SLO-3. (See §IV above for the description and priority of this SLO; and see Appendices F and G for the survey and rubric.)

2. **Internships** – the college already provides for student engagement with internships and employment opportunities, both on campus and out in the wider community. Working with the Director of Internships and Corporation Relations as well as the Chaplain’s Office, the QEP will increase the number and diversity of internships available. Students will have tuition charges for for-credit summer internships remitted, up to a fixed number of students per summer. This will provide financial support for students otherwise unable to afford to complete a summer internship. Faculty and staff will be given stipends for mentoring internship work. Students will also be reimbursed for internship-related travel and other expenses, allowing them to take advantage of opportunities that might be farther afield. Participants in QEP-related Convocation Credit activities complete the QEP survey. (See Appendix G.)
### VII. Timeline

#### QEP Planning Year

**Spring 2017**

| February       | • Assessment Training Workshop  
|                | • Collection of QEP rubric and survey data from January 2017 study-travel courses and internships  
|                | • QEP budget review for 2017-2018  
| March          | • Submission of Interfaith Studies religion minor to Curricular Programs Committee  
| April          | • Identification of summer/fall 2017 QEP activities, courses, and events  
|                | • Coordination with student organizations and relevant program directors to establish lineup of 2017-2018 Convocation Credit and Speaker Series events (see §VIII)  
| May            | • Collection of QEP rubric and survey data from all qualifying IFS and GEP courses and internships from spring 2017  
|                | • Year-end QEP report to Provost’s Office and Director of Institutional Research, Assessment, and Effectiveness  

#### QEP Implementation Year One

**Academic Year 2017-2018**

| September      | • Assessment Training Workshop  
|                | • Begin QEP budget review for 2018-2019  
| December       | • Collection of QEP rubric and survey data from all qualifying IFS and GEP courses and internships from fall 2017  
| February       | • Collection of QEP rubric and survey data from January 2018 study-travel courses and internships  
| March          | • Assessment Training Workshop  
| April          | • Identification of summer/fall 2018 QEP activities, courses, and events  
|                | • Coordination with student organizations and relevant program directors to establish lineup of 2018-2019 Convocation Credit and Speaker Series events (see §VIII)  
| May            | • Collection of QEP rubric and survey data from all qualifying IFS and GEP courses and internships from spring 2018  
|                | • Collection of data from graduating senior exit survey  
|                | • Year-end QEP report to Provost’s Office and Director of Institutional Research, Assessment, and Effectiveness  

#### QEP Implementation Year Two

**Academic Year 2018-2019**

| September      | • Review previous year’s assessment results and evaluate any needed adjustments  
|                | • Assessment Training Workshop  
|                | • Begin QEP budget review for 2019-2020  

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Tasks</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>• Collection of QEP rubric and survey data from all qualifying IFS and GEP courses and internships from fall 2018</td>
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<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>• Collection of QEP rubric and survey data from January 2019 study-travel courses and internships</td>
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<td>March</td>
<td>• Assessment Training Workshop</td>
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<td>• Identification of summer/fall 2018 QEP activities, courses, and events</td>
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<td>• Coordination with student organizations and relevant program directors to establish lineup of 2019-2020 Convocation Credit and Speaker Series events (see §VIII)</td>
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<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>• Collection of QEP rubric and survey data from all qualifying IFS and GEP courses and internships from spring 2019</td>
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<td>• Collection of data from graduating senior exit survey</td>
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<td>• Year-end QEP report to Provost’s Office and Director of Institutional Research, Assessment, and Effectiveness</td>
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**QEP Implementation Year Three**

*Academic Year 2019-2020*

| September  | • Review previous year’s assessment results and evaluate any needed adjustments               |
|           | • Assessment Training Workshop                                                               |
|           | • Begin QEP budget review for 2020-2021                                                      |
| December  | • Collection of QEP rubric and survey data from all qualifying IFS and GEP courses and internships from fall 2019 |
| February  | • Collection of QEP rubric and survey data from January 2020 study-travel courses and internships |
| March     | • Assessment Training Workshop                                                               |
| April     | • Identification of summer/fall 2019 QEP activities, courses, and events                       |
|           | • Coordination with student organizations and relevant program directors to establish lineup of 2020-2021 Convocation Credit and Speaker Series events (see §VIII) |
| May       | • Collection of QEP rubric and survey data from all qualifying IFS and GEP courses and internships from spring 2020 |
|           | • Collection of data from graduating senior exit survey                                        |
|           | • Year-end QEP report to Provost’s Office and Director of Institutional Research, Assessment, and Effectiveness |

**QEP Implementation Year Four**

*Academic Year 2020-2021*

<p>| September  | • Review previous year’s assessment results and evaluate any needed adjustments               |
|           | • Assessment Training Workshop                                                               |
|           | • Begin QEP budget review for 2021-2022                                                      |
| December  | • Collection of QEP rubric and survey data from all qualifying IFS and GEP courses and internships from fall 2020 |
| February  | • Collection of QEP rubric and survey data from January 2021 study-travel courses and internships |</p>
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<td>• Assessment Training Workshop</td>
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<td>• Identification of summer/fall 2021 QEP activities, courses, and events</td>
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<td>• Coordination with student organizations and relevant program directors to establish lineup of 2021-2022 Convocation Credit and Speaker Series events (see §VIII)</td>
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<td>• Collection of QEP rubric and survey data from all qualifying IFS and GEP courses and internships from spring 2021</td>
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<td>• Collection of data from graduating senior exit survey</td>
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**QEP Implementation Year Five**

**Academic Year 2021-2022**

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<td>• Review previous year’s assessment results and evaluate any needed adjustments</td>
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<td>• Assessment Training Workshop</td>
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<td>• Collection of QEP rubric and survey data from all qualifying IFS and GEP courses and internships from spring 2022</td>
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<td>• Collection of data from graduating senior exit survey</td>
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<td>• Year-end QEP report to Provost’s Office and Director of Institutional Research, Assessment, and Effectiveness</td>
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VIII. Organizational Structure

Following the SACSCOC On-Site visit (March 28-30, 2017), the Chair of the QEP Implementation Committee will be appointed as the QEP Director. The QEP Implementation Committee will continue in an advisory role to the Director. The QEP Director will oversee the subsequent collection and management of QEP assessment data and will evaluate proposals for qualifying QEP items using the QEP student learning outcomes as criteria. The QEP Director will work closely with the persons in the following existing positions to plan and assess yearly courses and activities:

- **Co-Directors of the Interfaith Studies Program** – regarding all IFS course offerings and internships that fit within the curricular and experiential categories of QEP implementation initiatives. The IFS Curricular Director will coordinate the reporting of assessment data (the QEP survey and rubric) from individual IFS instructors to the QEP Director and will notify the QEP Director of upcoming IFS course schedules. The IFS Experiential Director (Chaplain) will coordinate the reporting to the QEP Director of assessment data from the QEP survey from students participating in IFS internships, and will notify the QEP Director of upcoming IFS internship opportunities and descriptions.

- **Director of International Studies** – regarding all study-travel opportunities, both international and domestic, that fit within the curricular and experiential categories of the QEP implementation initiatives. The Director of International Studies will coordinate the reporting of assessment data (the QEP survey and rubric) from individual instructors leading study-travel sections (or individuals advising longer-term study-abroad experiences) to the QEP Director and will notify the QEP Director of upcoming travel scheduling.

- **Director of Internships and Corporate Relations** – regarding all non-IFS internships that fit within the experiential category of QEP implementation initiatives. The Director of Internships and Corporate Relations will coordinate the reporting to the QEP Director of assessment data from the QEP survey from students participating in non-IFS internships, and will notify the QEP Director of upcoming internship opportunities and descriptions.

- **Student Diversity Initiatives Chair** – will work with the QEP Director to coordinate with representatives from appropriate student organizations regarding the availability of QEP support for possible events and activities each year.

- **Director of Community and Inclusion** – will work with the QEP Director to identify and plan upcoming events and activities for Convocation Credit that fit within the purview of the extra-curricular category of QEP implementation actions. The Director of Community and Inclusion will also coordinate with the sponsors and facilitators of such events to report to the QEP Director any assessment data (the QEP survey) from student participants.

In addition, the QEP Director will work with the Deans of the School of Humanities, Sciences, and Education and the School of the Arts to submit new QEP-relevant course proposals (IFS, GEP, Study-Travel) to the Curricular Programs Committee for approval.

The QEP assessment data collected by the QEP Director will be reported yearly to the Director of Institutional Research, Assessment, and Effectiveness. The QEP Director will provide yearly update reporting on the progression of all QEP initiatives and programs to the Provost’s Office.
And the QEP Director will work with representatives from Campus Technology to keep online QEP materials current and accessible.

The QEP Director will additionally be responsible for conducting yearly training workshops for faculty and staff in the proper administration of the QEP rubric and survey. The QEP Director will also give presentations to faculty, staff, and students each year emphasizing the QEP theme and the opportunities it can support. Student organizations participating in QEP-related activities can apply for QEP funding through the Office of Community and Inclusion. Faculty sponsoring events through the QEP Speaker Series can apply for QEP funding through the Faculty Development Committee.

The chart below summarizes the above organizational structure, with the QEP Director collaborating with the offices along the bottom row regarding activity/course planning and assessment, working with committees in the middle row regarding curricular and funding approval, and reporting to the offices at the top.
IX. Resources

A. Pre-Launch Activities

Converse College is committed to the successful implementation of Converse Across Boundaries: Learning Through Diverse Experiences. As needs were assessed and initiatives were planned in the pre-launch phase of developing the QEP proposal, Converse recognized the centrality of the planned QEP in the enhancement of student success and began to prepare the ground for implementation. Pre-launch activities have included the many steps detailed in Section II.6 above. All of these steps have involved the reorientation of existing resources to align them with the planned QEP initiatives and goals.

Of particular note is the reorientation of an existing, internal grant program to focus on areas related to the QEP. Converse awards competitive internal grants to groups of students, faculty, and staff who propose creative collaborations that enhance the learning environment of the college. Grant proposals are encouraged in those areas that address the themes of diversity or learning through diverse experiences. The grant program was retitled “Creativity, Community, and Cultural Enrichment (C3)” to better reflect this new emphasis.

Concurrently with the development of the QEP topic, Converse developed a proposal for an Interfaith Studies Program and Center to enhance student knowledge and understanding of multiple faith traditions. The pilot proposal was funded by the Arthur Vining Davis Foundation as one of their initial Interfaith Studies grants and the resulting program and its funding have been fully included in the QEP process.

B. Future Resource Commitments

Converse will use a mix of new, reassigned, endowed, and grant funding for the QEP. The QEP expenses are planned as indicated below:

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<thead>
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<th>Converse College Pre-Launch Plus Five-Year QEP Budget: Expenses</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>QEP Expense</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>QEP Director's Stipend</td>
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<td>QEP Administration (communications, etc.)</td>
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<td>General Education Development Stipends</td>
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Converse College

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<th>General Education Adjunct, Overload, Course Reassignment</th>
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<td>$2,000</td>
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<td>Summer Internship Supervisors</td>
<td>$5,000</td>
<td>$6,250</td>
<td>$7,500</td>
<td>$7,500</td>
<td>$7,500</td>
<td>$7,500</td>
<td>$41,250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internship Travel Support</td>
<td>$2,000</td>
<td>$5,000</td>
<td>$6,000</td>
<td>$6,000</td>
<td>$6,000</td>
<td>$6,000</td>
<td>$31,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Study Travel</td>
<td>$45,000</td>
<td>$45,000</td>
<td>$45,000</td>
<td>$45,000</td>
<td>$45,000</td>
<td>$45,000</td>
<td>$270,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic Study Travel Enhancement</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$2,000</td>
<td>$4,000</td>
<td>$4,000</td>
<td>$4,000</td>
<td>$4,000</td>
<td>$18,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Expenses</strong></td>
<td><strong>$101,550</strong></td>
<td><strong>$132,500</strong></td>
<td><strong>$125,330</strong></td>
<td><strong>$126,440</strong></td>
<td><strong>$127,610</strong></td>
<td><strong>$128,780</strong></td>
<td><strong>$742,210</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the $742,210 in planned expenses over the pre-implementation year and the five years of implementation, $107,250 will be reassigned from other areas of the operational budget and constitute new, dedicated QEP expenditures.

Converse has identified the sources for each of the planned expense categories:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Converse College Pre-Launch Plus Five-Year QEP Budget: Sources</th>
<th>Source(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>QEP Director's Stipend</td>
<td>Operational Budget (Provost's Office)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QEP Administration (communications, etc.)</td>
<td>Operational Budget (IR Accreditation Budget)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Education Development Stipends</td>
<td>Operational Budget (Provost's Office; Creativity, Community, and Cultural Enrichment Grants)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Education Adjunct, Overload, Course Reassignment</td>
<td>Operational Budget (Adjunct Budgets)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development of Interfaith Resource Center</td>
<td>Arthur Vining Davis Grant funds; Operational Budget (inc. Creativity, Community, and Cultural Enrichment Grants)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QEP Speaker Series</td>
<td>Existing N.O. Gray Speaker Endowment; Operational Budget (inc. Creativity, Community, and Cultural Enrichment Grants)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer Internship Tuition Waiver</td>
<td>Foregone Revenue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer Internship Supervisors</td>
<td>Operational Budget (Student Development and Success)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internship Travel Support</td>
<td>Operational Budget (Student Development and Success)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Study Travel</td>
<td>Existing Endowment (Chapman Endowment)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic Study Travel Enhancement</td>
<td>Operational Budget</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Resource planning includes expense planning for each of the QEP’s initiatives:

### QEP Budget: Summertime Internship Support

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expense Period</th>
<th>Supervision stipends @ 250 per student supervised</th>
<th>Tuition Waiver @ per-credit hour charge for 3-credit-hour course</th>
<th>Internship Travel Support @ $100 per student in pre-launch and $200 thereafter</th>
<th>Annual Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Summer 2016 (Pre-Launch; 20 students)</td>
<td>$5,000</td>
<td>$23,800</td>
<td>$2,000</td>
<td>$30,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer 2017 (25 students)</td>
<td>$6,250</td>
<td>$30,000</td>
<td>$5,000</td>
<td>$41,250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer 2018 (30 students)</td>
<td>$7,500</td>
<td>$37,080</td>
<td>$6,000</td>
<td>$50,580</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer 2019 (30 students)</td>
<td>$7,500</td>
<td>$38,190</td>
<td>$6,000</td>
<td>$51,690</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer 2020 (30 students)</td>
<td>$7,500</td>
<td>$39,360</td>
<td>$6,000</td>
<td>$52,860</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer 2021 (30 students)</td>
<td>$7,500</td>
<td>$40,530</td>
<td>$6,000</td>
<td>$54,030</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>$41,250</strong></td>
<td><strong>$208,960</strong></td>
<td><strong>$31,000</strong></td>
<td><strong>$281,210</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### QEP Budget: General Education Development Stipends

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Faculty stipends @ $500 per stipend</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2016-2017 (Pre-Launch)</td>
<td>$0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017-2018 (6 stipends)</td>
<td>$3,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018-2019 (10 stipends)</td>
<td>$5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019-2020 (10 stipends)</td>
<td>$5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020-2021 (10 stipends)</td>
<td>$5,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Study Travel Enhancements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expense Period</th>
<th>Faculty Development Stipends @ $250 per stipend</th>
<th>Student Domestic Study Travel Scholarships @ $300/student</th>
<th>Annual Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2016-2017 (Pre-Launch)</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017-2018 (2 faculty stipends; 5 student travel scholarships)</td>
<td>$500</td>
<td>$1,500</td>
<td>$2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018-2019 (4 faculty stipends; 10 student travel scholarships)</td>
<td>$1,000</td>
<td>$3,000</td>
<td>$4,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019-2020 (4 faculty stipends; 10 student travel scholarships)</td>
<td>$1,000</td>
<td>$3,000</td>
<td>$4,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020-2021 (4 faculty stipends; 10 student travel scholarships)</td>
<td>$1,000</td>
<td>$3,000</td>
<td>$4,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2021-2022 (4 faculty stipends; 10 student travel scholarships)</td>
<td>$1,000</td>
<td>$3,000</td>
<td>$4,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>$4,500</strong></td>
<td><strong>$13,500</strong></td>
<td><strong>$18,000</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Converse has planned for a balanced approach to funding the QEP, providing sufficient funding for each of the initiatives from a combination of operational budgets already related to QEP areas, reassignment of operational funds from other areas, endowed funds, and gifts and grants to the College.
X. Assessment

As represented in the table below, the QEP assessment plan involves connecting the three QEP student learning outcomes (detailed in §IV above) with Converse’s institutional priorities to “enhance student development and success” and “empower lives of passion and purpose.” The student learning outcomes are evaluated by three measures, including one direct measure (the QEP Rubric described below) and two indirect (the QEP Survey described below; and a national standardized survey).

A. QEP Rubric
At the conclusion of any course or activity falling within the purview of QEP initiatives 1A, 1B, and 3A (see §VI above), faculty or whomever is in the appropriate supervisory role for the activity in question will use the rubric below to assess whether a student’s work (e.g. a paper, presentation, project, performance, etc.) demonstrates improvement with respect to the QEP student learning outcomes (see §IV above). (See Appendix H in §XI below for the QEP rubric.)

B. QEP Survey
Upon the completion of any activity falling within the purview of QEP initiatives 2A, 2B, and 3B (see §VI above), students will complete a survey in which they self-assess their level of agreement with a list of statements regarding the extent to which the activity in question helped them learn about diversity or learn in a diverse way. (See Appendix G in §XI below for the QEP survey.) Students may log their survey responses electronically, using a newly-designed portal of their My.Converse webpage.

Achievement targets were set in light of the results of the pre-implementation benchmark assessment and the 2014-2015 BCSSE–NSSE data detailed in §III above.

In the assessment plan below, the final two columns will be used to document both the assessment results and the ways in which these results will be used for continuous improvement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Linkage of Student Learning Outcomes to Institutional Priorities</th>
<th>Student Learning Outcomes</th>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>Achievement Target Level</th>
<th>Results</th>
<th>Use of Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. The Student Experience: Enhancing Student Development and Success; Empowering Lives of Passion and Purpose</td>
<td>1. Students will demonstrate knowledge of the practices and characteristics of diverse cultures and societies.</td>
<td>M 1. QEP rubric (Dimension 1) Description: The instructor administers the QEP rubric on a designated assignment or activity at the conclusion of a course. The rubric has three dimensions. The first dimension is used</td>
<td>At least 70% of the students will achieve at least competent (3 pts) on this dimension of the rubric.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
to assess this learning outcome. There are four levels of performance, ranging from beginning (1 pt) to exemplary (4 pts).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>M 2. QEP Survey (Question 1)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Description: The instructor/adviser/facilitator will have students assess themselves using this survey at the conclusion of a course, internship, or other specified activity. The first question is used to assess this learning outcome. This question concerns students' perceptions about their ability to demonstrate knowledge of the practices and characteristics of diverse cultures and societies. Response options range from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (5).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least 70% of students will rate agree (4) or strongly agree (5) on this question.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>M 3. NSSE (17h)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[NSSE is administered to first-year students and seniors every other year. Therefore, NSSE results will be available for 2017-18, 2019-2020.].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description: How much has your experience at this institution contributed to your knowledge, skills, and personal development in the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On average, seniors will rate quite a bit or above on this question.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Results from 2016 NSSE: The average rating was 2.7, between some and quite a bit.]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Understanding people of other backgrounds (economic, racial/ethnic, political, religious, nationality, etc.). Response options: Very much (4 pts), Quite a bit (3 pts), Some (2 pts), Very little (1 pt).

2. The Student Experience: Enhancing Student Development and Success; Empowering Lives of Passion and Purpose

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2. Students will examine and interpret diverse viewpoints and perspectives.</th>
<th>M 1. QEP rubric (Dimension 2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Description: The instructor administers the QEP rubric on a designated assignment or activity at the conclusion of a course. The rubric has three dimensions. The second dimension is used to assess this learning outcome. There are four levels of performance, ranging from beginning (1 pt) to exemplary (4 pts).</td>
<td>At least 70% of the students will achieve at least competent (3 pts) on this dimension of the rubric.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>M 2. QEP Survey (Question 2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Description: The instructor/adviser/facilitator will have students assess themselves using this survey at the conclusion of a course, internship, or other specified activity. The second question is used to assess this learning outcome. This question concerns students' perceptions about their ability to examine and interpret</td>
<td>At least 70% of students will rate agree (4) or strongly agree (5) or above on this question.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 2. The Student Experience: Enhancing Student Development and Success; Empowering Lives of Passion and Purpose | M 1. QEP rubric (Dimension 3)  
Description: The instructor administers the QEP rubric on a designated assignment or activity at the conclusion of a course. The rubric has three dimensions. The third dimension is used to assess this learning outcome. There are four levels of performance, ranging from beginning (1 pt) to exemplary (4 pts). | At least 70% of the students will achieve at least competent (3 pts) on this dimension of the rubric. |
|---|---|---|
| 3. Students will compare different experiences and perspectives to their own cultures and backgrounds. | M 2. QEP Survey (Question 3)  
Description: The instructor/adviser/facilitator will have students assess themselves using this survey at the conclusion of a course, internship, or other specified activity. The third question is used to assess this learning outcome. This question concerns students' perceptions about their ability to compare different experiences and perspectives to their own cultures and backgrounds. Response options range from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (5). | At least 70% of students will rate agree (4) or strongly agree (5) on this question. |
disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (5).

Strategic Areas:
1. Enrollment & Programs: Strategic Program Review, Revision and Introduction Aligning Mission and Market
2. The Student Experience: Enhancing Student Development and Success; Empowering Lives of Passion and Purpose
3. Assets & Resources: Maximizing for Today and Tomorrow

In addition to the assessment plan detailed above, based on both student self-assessment and faculty rubric-based assessment drawn from courses and internships at a variety of student levels of their achievement with regard to the “signature” SLO-3 (see §III.E for this pre-implementation assessment data; and see §IV of the SLOs and the special significance of SLO-3), our QEP implementation also includes the following goals for SLO-3:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Graduating Class Assessed</th>
<th>Average achievement of “competent” or better on SLO-3 Measures 1 and 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2021</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2022</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The measures used in this assessment will include both indirect student self-assessment and at least one faculty rubric-based assessment based on assignments or activities within a course or internship. Those assignments will vary with each course or internship but in all cases will be designed so as to include the specific elements of SLO-3.
XI. Appendices

A. Development Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dec 2, 2014</td>
<td>QEP Pro Tem Committee meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec 6-9, 2014</td>
<td>QEP Pro Tem Committee Chair and a Committee faculty member, attend SACSCOC Annual Meeting in Atlanta to participate in reaffirmation orientation and QEP sessions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 8, 2015</td>
<td>QEP Development Committee meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept 1, 2015</td>
<td>Staff focus group #1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept 4, 2015</td>
<td>Staff focus group #2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct 1, 2015</td>
<td>Student focus group #1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct 2, 2015</td>
<td>Faculty focus group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct 6, 2015</td>
<td>Student focus group #2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov 13, 2015</td>
<td>Survey opens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec 6, 2015</td>
<td>Survey closes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan 8, 2016</td>
<td>QEP Development Committee meeting; short-list of topics identified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan 15, 2016</td>
<td>QEP Development Committee meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb 2, 2016</td>
<td>QEP Development Committee meeting; final topic selected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb 12, 2016</td>
<td>Presentation to the Converse Board of Trustees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 4, 2016</td>
<td>Campus-wide announcement of new QEP topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 3, 2016</td>
<td>Presentation to the Faculty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 3, 2016</td>
<td>Presentation to the President’s Cabinet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 3-6, 2016</td>
<td>Targeted notices in the Daily Announcements to Students, Faculty, and Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 13, 2016</td>
<td>SACSCOC advisory visit by Dr. Charles Taylor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug 2, 2016</td>
<td>Integration of QEP into new advising plan for first-year Student Success Seminar program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug 22, 2016</td>
<td>Presentation at campus-wide Planning Retreat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug 22, 2016</td>
<td>QEP Implementation Committee meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug 23, 2016</td>
<td>Presentation at Department Chairs meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept 8, 2016</td>
<td>Presentation at Staff Meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept 10, 2016</td>
<td>Assessment meeting with Campus Technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept 14, 2016</td>
<td>Assessment meeting with Office of Institutional Research, Assessment, and Effectiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept 23, 2016</td>
<td>Presentation at Opening Convocation by Kelly Vaneman (<a href="https://youtu.be/7SbUcAvgIWQ">https://youtu.be/7SbUcAvgIWQ</a>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct 1, 2016</td>
<td>Members of QEP Implementation Committee participate in Spartanburg International Festival</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct 31, 2016</td>
<td>QEP Implementation Committee meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov 1, 2016</td>
<td>Presentation at Faculty Meeting (introducing QEP Jingle!)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov 15, 2016</td>
<td>Draft of Literature Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov 21, 2016</td>
<td>New Convocation Credit log-in portal completed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec 1, 2016</td>
<td>Budget projections/requests from QEP constituencies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec 15, 2016</td>
<td>First draft of QEP Report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan 1, 2017</td>
<td>QEP Logo approved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan 10-20, 2017</td>
<td>Edits and revisions to QEP Report by Implementation Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan 25, 2017</td>
<td>Final draft of QEP Report submitted</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
B. 2007 QEP Executive Summary

[Modified from original 2007 statement for readability and to include appropriate context.]

In the 2003-2004 academic year, Converse College began the process of revising its General Education Program (GEP). This process was to be carried out by the Curricular Programs Committee with many steps along the way to full faculty approval of a new approach to general studies requirements for all undergraduate students. The college was also beginning its preparation for its reaffirmation of accreditation by SACS and establishing the Reaffirmation Leadership Team. As part of these converging efforts, Senior Vice President Thomas McDaniel organized a QEP Committee chaired by Pam Clark (Assistant Professor of Marriage and Family Therapy) which solicited potential topics from students, faculty, and staff as part of a year-long process involving meetings, open forums, and student submission competitions.

In collaboration with two consultants, David Gillespie (Vice President for Academic Affairs at Presbyterian College) and Jay Simmons (Provost at LaGrange College), the theme of Communication Fluency was identified as especially relevant to Converse’s emerging General Education Program, which emphasized enhancing student learning through the cultivation across the curriculum of effective writing and presentation skills. [A technology component was originally planned for this QEP, but institutional limitations prohibited its implementation at the time.]

Communication Fluency helped redesign an existing, flagging first-year program on Ideas and Cultures (IDC), resulting in significant reforms and a transition to a new Freshmen core program composed of paired First-Year Seminars (FYS) and Student Success Seminars (SSS). Both of these courses combined with an orientation reading assignment, public speaking opportunities within campus life and student government, and a newly-instituted senior Capstone course within each major degree program as implementation locations for the new QEP.
C. Student Focus-Group Moderator’s Guide

[Designed by students in Amy Cox’s Business and Design 442 course, “Marketing Research.” The students framed the QEP project as a real-world “client”, and below the moderator’s guide below is a mock “project background memo” they generated.]

INTRODUCTION
Name, Major, Year
This is my marketing research project, thanks so much for participating.
<IF ASKED~QEP stands for Quality Enhancement Plan and is essentially a cross-curricular focus. For example, our current QEP focuses on communication skills, both writing and speaking skills>
Process/Purpose
Here to discuss some of your experiences at Converse (educational, extracurricular) and get some feedback on how Converse is preparing you for post-graduate success. Your honest input may be used to help with future curriculum planning on campus.
1 hour, PNG Room
Informal, feel free to participate
Please feel free to express any opinion you may have in a respectful manner. There are no wrong answers, because everyone has a different story/experience to share.
Note takers
We have a few note-takers; they’re here to record your responses so that we can look back upon what we’ve discussed. Review confidentiality and procedure.
Introduction of group members
Go around, say name, major(s) and academic class
Warm Up: What attracted you to Converse?
Favorite thing about Converse?

POST-GRAD SUCCESS
What does it mean to you?
   What would you like to be doing in life post-graduation?

CONVERSE & POST-GRAD SUCCESS
   How is Converse helping you to achieve your definition of post-grad success?
   How is Converse preparing you for life after college?
      • CSDS? Social connections?
      • Internships?

<Be prepared for spontaneous discussion of where Converse is not helping. If it does not emerge naturally, continue…>
In what areas could Converse improve in terms of preparing you for success?
   Academic? Social? Job connections and professional development?
What makes/Why do you think Converse is unique?
   Extracurricular activities that you enjoy most/will remember most? (SGA events, Spartanburg events, sporting events?)

SUMMARY OF CONVERSATION
THANK YOU, GOOD EVENING
Accreditation and the Role of the QEP

Converse, like most schools with which you are familiar, is accredited by a regional accrediting agency, in this case Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC). Accreditation is important for a variety of reasons, including donations and funding, ability to attract students and faculty, accreditation by other organizations (such as major/program specific agencies like the National Association of Schools of Music (NASM) or the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE)), availability of financial aid for students and grants for the organization, etc.

According to SACSCOC,

Accreditation by the Commission on Colleges signifies that an institution has a purpose appropriate to higher education and has resources, programs, and services sufficient to accomplish and sustain that purpose. Accreditation indicates that an institution maintains clearly specified educational objectives that are consistent with its mission and appropriate to the degrees it offers, and that it is successful in achieving its stated objectives. Self-regulation through accreditation embodies a traditional U.S. philosophy (p. 3)

SACSCOC renews or reaffirms accreditation every ten years for each university; the process takes approximately two years and involves a self-evaluation of whether the school has met SACSCOC requirements, and evaluation by an off-site team composed of evaluators from various areas such as finance and student services as well as evaluators for educational programs. There is then an on-campus visit at which point the Quality Enhancement Program (QEP) is evaluated and any problems identified in the off-campus review are addressed by the school. A critical part of the accreditation reaffirmation process involves the documentation of student learning and improvement, embodied in the QEP.

Again, according to SACSCOC:

The Commission on Colleges expects institutions to dedicate themselves to enhancing the quality of their programs and services within the context of their missions, resources, and capacities, and to create an environment in which teaching, public service, research, and learning occur. The concept of quality enhancement is at the heart of the Commission’s philosophy of accreditation; this presumes each member institution to be engaged in an ongoing program of improvement and able to demonstrate how well it fulfills its stated mission. Although evaluation of an institution’s educational quality and its effectiveness in achieving its mission is a difficult task requiring careful analysis and professional judgment, an institution is expected to document quality and effectiveness in all its major aspects. (p. 5)

The Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), submitted six weeks in advance of the on-site review by the Commission, describes a carefully designed and focused course of action that addresses a well-defined issue or issues directly related to improving student learning. The development of the QEP involves significant participation by the institution’s academic community. The plan should be focused and succinct (no more than seventy-five pages of narrative text and no more than twenty-five pages of support documentation or charts, graphs, and tables). (p. 9)

Each school determines the focus of its QEP, based on its resources, mission, and traditional strengths. While each school’s QEP may be different, all must document continuous improvement in the learning outcomes related to the QEP they have chosen in order to maintain accreditation. For example, one school might have a quantitative skills focus in their QEP. They
Converse College

might administer a math test to all freshmen, and require three core math classes for graduation. They might then administer the same math test to graduating seniors, with the expectation that seniors would have higher scores on the test than freshmen.

**Converse and its CURRENT QEP**

Converse’s QEP is focused on communication skills, as described below:

The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACS COC) requires accredited members to design and develop a special project called “The Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP).” Converse College has developed its QEP to promote the integration of writing and speaking across the curriculum over the undergraduate student’s four-year experience in order to enhance this important aspect of student learning. Our objective is to improve a student’s ability to communicate effectively, both in writing and through oral presentations, by way of a variety of experiences in the academic and co-curricular programs of the college.

**IMPLEMENTING THE QEP**

College faculty and staff have developed rubrics to be used in the evaluation of writing and speaking. These rubrics have become part of the formal assessment activities of the college with a special emphasis on evaluating these two communication fluencies in the freshman and senior years. This allows us to assess improvements over the four-year undergraduate experience in a pre and post context. But in addition to formal assessments in the freshman and senior years, the college has implemented a wide variety of writing and speaking activities across the entire curriculum and by way of co-curricular activities. Selected activities include the following:

- Assignments in English 101
- A required writing intensive course as a graduation requirement
- Writing and speaking activities in the Freshman Student Success Seminar (rubric)
- Writing and speaking activities in Freshmen Seminars
- Writing and speaking activities in the senior capstone course (assessed by rubric)
- Public speaking activities relating to campus life
- Campus organization elections
- Required writing in the Daniel Leadership Program
- Service learning experiences by way of reflection journals
- Assessment of resumes developed through Center for Student Development and Success
- Promotion of writing competencies through the Writing Center
- Increased writing and speaking requirements in a wide variety of academic courses
- Faculty forums to advance writing and speaking instructional techniques

By emphasizing and integrating communication fluencies through both the academic and co-curricular activities of the four-year undergraduate degree programs, Converse is advancing two of the most important competencies in the educational experience of our students. We know that such competencies will enhance student learning, no matter what major the student is pursuing nor what career the student eventually chooses. The college is committed not only to implementing but continually improving the QEP. Converse, as other colleges, must demonstrate its implementation and measurement of the QEP. In addition to the rubrics mentioned above, used on the summer reading paper for freshmen and in senior seminar (for writing) and in the SSS and senior seminar classes (for presentations), the wide variety of other listed activities must be documented in some way.

*Prior Research*
In order to manage this process, a committee of faculty and staff was appointed, originally chaired by Dr. Pam Clark, then Associate Professor of Education Director of Marriage & Family Therapy Program. Dr. Clark oversaw the process by which the rubric scores are entered into the appropriate computer system by the responsible faculty. Dr. Clark and the committee also felt it necessary to determine other ways of assessing and demonstrating student engagement and learning with the QEP. The committee consulted Dr. Cox for advice about drafting a questionnaire to survey students about their writing and speaking experiences at Converse. Dr. Cox suggested starting with focus groups, in order to gather exploratory data which would be useful in drafting the questionnaire. Five focus groups were held. In the spring of 2010, two separate focus groups, one of freshmen and one of seniors, were held. In the spring of 2011, two separate focus groups, one of Converse II students and one of seniors, were held (report forthcoming). In the fall of 2011, a third focus group was held, of sophomores, in conjunction with the class of BAD 442 Marketing Research Fall 2011. This research focused on the current QEP, communication fluency, and students’ experiences with and reactions to the activities listed above.

New QEP needed
As part of SACSCOC’s requirements, schools must adopt new QEPs (which may or may not be related to past QEPs) on a regular schedule. Converse is now due to identify its new QEP, and develop a system to develop student capabilities related to the new QEP and measure it, as was done with communication fluency above. As noted above, documentation of community involvement in the selection and development of the QEP is important to SACSCOC. As part of this process, the QEP committee is gathering information from various college constituencies, including students, to aid in identifying and articulating the new QEP. Dr. DeLapp will be conducting focus groups with faculty to discuss some of the same issues the marketing research class will be discovering with students. Yongmei Li, the Director of Institutional Research for Converse, will also be conducting focus groups with staff. Some of Dr. DeLapp’s thoughts on questions/areas to cover:

1. What are some things that you think Converse already does well in terms of promoting student success and preparing graduates for life and work after college?
2. For the last several years, Converse has committed itself to trying to strengthen student writing and speaking. Do you think Converse does enough to challenge students to improve their ability to communicate effectively?
3. What are some things that you think correlate with "success" after graduation, either personally or professionally? Does Converse do anything to promote or develop these skills? If not, or if more could/needs to be done, how and where might devote more effort
4. Converse takes pride in several defining initiatives and strengths, including creativity and the arts, service and leadership opportunities, travel experiences, our esteemed honor tradition, collaborative projects between students and faculty... and of course being a historic women's institution! Are there any ways in which these things help students succeed after graduation? Are there any other programs or aspects of Converse which might impact student success?
5. Converse's core values include excellence, integrity, exploration, diversity, respect, community, and progress. Is there one of these which strikes you as most distinctive of the Converse experience? Can you think of ways in which any of these values relate to student success after graduation?
D. Focus-Group Minutes

[The following appendix contains the minutes from five focus groups, including one with faculty (facilitated by Kevin DeLapp), two with staff (co-facilitated by Kevin DeLapp and Yongmei Li), and two with students (co-facilitated by students Darra Letteer and Aubrey Andersen-Bakker. Audio recordings of the two staff groups are available upon request.]

Focus Group: Staff #1 (Sept 1, 2015)

Participating: Kevin DeLapp (philosophy, QEP coordinator), Yongmei Li (institutional research), Leah Anderson (communications), Jason Loscuito (chaplain), Wade Woodford (librarian), Carrie Coleman (institutional advancement)

Minutes:
1. What are some things that you think Converse already does well in terms of promoting student success and preparing graduates for life and work after college?

Responses focused the availability of internships, the importance of research experience alongside faculty mentors, professional preparation such as resume development, and “soft skills” such as building confidence, leadership, and interpersonal support systems. The potential for making better use of alumnae connections as well as enhanced fluency in social media were also singled out as areas for further improvement.

2. Converse has committed itself to trying to strengthen student writing and speaking. Do you think Converse does enough to challenge students to improve their ability to communicate effectively? Has student writing and speaking improved at Converse since you’ve been here?

Since many of the participants in this particular discussion were non-instructional staff who did not work as directly with students in the classroom, they weren’t sure whether student writing and speaking has improved or not. A few specific indirect examples were offered, however, including the use of the campus-wide speaking rubric for Student Success Seminars (SSS), the student letters that are written to donors as part of “Operation Thank You,” and the essay competitions that had been a part of the Sophomore Ring tradition. For many of these instances, the general consensus was that student writing and speaking was fairly unimpressive.

3. What are some things (skills, abilities, etc.) that you think correlate with “success” after graduation, either personally or professionally? Does Converse do anything to promote or develop these skills? If not, or if more could/needs to be done, how and where might devote more effort?

Much of the feedback focused on the importance of personal presentation, e.g. better use of LinkedIn, awareness of dress and attitude appropriate to professional contexts, etc. Other important skills that were identified included appreciation of global community, and more active participation in campus and community activities. In particular, respondents wanted to see more effective use of our existing study-travel programs and diversity initiatives.

4. Converse takes pride in several defining initiatives and strengths, including creativity and the arts, service and leadership opportunities, travel experiences, our esteemed honor tradition, collaborative projects between students and faculty... and of course being a historic women’s
Participants all noted that two common denominators across all of Converse’s special programs have to do with promoting student “leadership” and “courage”. Converse as a transformational experience was emphasized, in terms of expanding students’ expectations of themselves, their sense of personal possibilities, and their confidence to assert themselves in the world. Additional specific programs that were singled out included the Bonner Leaders program and the new “Creativity Works” initiative within the School of the Arts. There was general agreement also that being a women’s college plays a definitive role in fostering leadership and courage.

5. Converse’s core values include excellence, integrity, exploration, diversity, respect, community, and progress. Is there one of these which strikes you as most distinctive of the Converse experience? Can you think of ways in which any of these values relate to student success after graduation?

Since some of the participants were alumnae themselves, or else had multi-generational perspectives on the college, it was noted that what is “distinctive” about Converse has evolved over the years, and that students are better retained and integrated into the community now in part due to more holistic admissions strategies. Of the seven core values, community and diversity were singled out as most significant to post-graduate success. However, it was also pointed out that much of the development of community and diversity at Converse happens incidentally, and that it would be more effective instead to promote these values in more intentional and deliberate ways. The value of exploration was also noted as essential to student success, along with the concomitant abilities to be confident in taking risks, building networks of trust, and following curiosity. There was general agreement that being an all women’s college provides a unique environment to cultivate community and confidence.

Focus Group: Staff #2 (Sept 4, 2015)

Participating: Kevin DeLapp (philosophy, QEP coordinator), Yongmei Li (institutional research), Rhonda Mingo (student affairs), Lydia Anthony (web content), Tania McDuffie (academic accommodations), Tammy Stokes (post-traditional students), Betsy Fleming (president)

Minutes:
1. What are some things that you think Converse already does well in terms of promoting student success and preparing graduates for life and work after college?

There was general praise for the Liberal Arts tradition promoted at Converse as fostering creative (inter-disciplinary) thinking and the ability to articulate oneself effectively. Several participants commented upon the tight-knit community of Converse, in terms of alumnae networks, legacy students, and graduates who return as employees. The leadership opportunities Converse offers were also seen as being especially important as preparation for post-graduate success, and there was general consensus that being both a tight-knit community and a women’s institution were important conditions for making such leadership possible. More specifically, participants noted the ways in which many of our first-generation and more sheltered students are transformed at Converse by being challenged to appreciate diverse viewpoints and having their horizon of prospects broadened.
2. Converse has committed itself to trying to strengthen student writing and speaking. Do you think Converse does enough to challenge students to improve their ability to communicate effectively? Has student writing and speaking improved at Converse since you've been here?

As mainly non-instructional staff, there wasn’t as much direct experience with student writing and speaking. The growth of student support services, however, was noted as an example of more intentional commitment to improving student writing and speaking. On the other hand, experiences with poor student writing within the honor tradition and the Student Success Seminars were cited as evidence of the improvement that still needs to be done.

3. What are some things (skills, abilities, etc.) that you think correlate with “success” after graduation, either personally or professionally? Does Converse do anything to promote or develop these skills? If not, or if more could/needs to be done, how and where might devote more effort?

Two primary types of skills were stressed as essential for post-graduate success: (1) personal, introspective skills involving self-regulation, self-management (money, time, etc.), and perseverance; and (2) the ability to communicate in multi-media and contextually sensitive ways. It was thought that the former was something Converse has already committed itself to with our Student Success Seminars and leadership opportunities. The latter, however, was identified as something that has been largely neglected; although specific examples of cultivating communication fluency in a more holistic sense were provided, viz. professional portfolios for art students, the digital storytelling curriculum in computer science, interactive use of platforms such as Facebook as instructional mediums, etc. As opposed to thinking of “communication” merely in the traditional (outmoded?) terms of writing and speaking, Converse needs to do more to train students to express themselves and wield information in a world saturated in blogs, memes, videos, graphics, designs, and statistics.

4. Converse takes pride in several defining initiatives and strengths, including creativity and the arts, service and leadership opportunities, travel experiences, our esteemed honor tradition, collaborative projects between students and faculty... and of course being a historic women’s institution! Are there any ways in which these things help students succeed after graduation? Are there any other programs or aspects of Converse which might impact student success?

There was general agreement that being a women’s college was an important node for many of the other initiatives and programs that Converse uses to try to promote student success – especially vis-à-vis leadership, confidence, and finding and expressing one’s unique voice. The honor code was also emphasized as something that will benefit graduates in their personal and professional lives, by making questions of ethics and integrity explicit and communal. While cross-cultural and global literacy was also emphasized as an important post-graduation skill, it was thought that Converse does an insufficient job in cultivating this in students (specifically in terms of the small number of students who actually take advantage of our foreign language or study-travel programs).

5. Converse’s core values include excellence, integrity, exploration, diversity, respect, community, and progress. Is there one of these which strikes you as most distinctive of the Converse experience? Can you think of ways in which any of these values relate to student success after graduation?

Rather than emphasizing any single value, there was consensus that post-graduate success requires all of them and that each value is necessarily interconnected (conceptually as well as in...
practice) to all of the others. Leadership emerged as a category that unifies all the core values, where “leadership” is understood not as dominance, but as collaboration and empowerment committed to social progress. In this respect, “leadership” was differentiated from “service”, with the former being viewed as more active and change-oriented. Being a women’s college was also thought to put Converse in a unique position to reflect on what “leadership” looks like (or ought to look like) with respect to gender and diversity. It was thought that Converse already cultivates leadership in many ways (as evidenced by the large numbers of graduates who go become leaders in their communities at different levels), but that more attention needs to be devoted to making leadership an explicit bridge between the different core values, as well as more centrally tied to student development and success.

Focus Group: Faculty (Oct 2, 2015)

Participating: Kevin DeLapp (philosophy, QEP coordinator), Ansley Boggs (education), Melissa Walker (history), Boone Hopkins (theatre), Meg Tominaga (theatre), Melissa Owens (theatre), Amy Cox (marketing), Ann Pletcher (accounting), Brant Bynum (Spanish), Monica McCoy (psychology), Kyle Keefer (religion), Erin Templeton (English), Kelly Vaneman (music), Susanne Gunter (art education)

Minutes:
1. What are some things that you think Converse already does well in terms of promoting student success and preparing graduates for life and work after college?

The existing Capstone projects for degree programs were identified as an example of promoting student success and preparing our graduates, since such experiences require independent research, individual initiative, and public presentation. Capstone projects in the arts additionally prepare our graduates in virtue of helping to model professional-level exhibitions, publicity, and performance. In a similar way, the interdisciplinarity and integration of our Model League programs and other leadership opportunities were singled out for the preparation they provide our students.

In addition, participants believed that Converse supports confidence and personal empowerment through peer modeling, more intimate classroom sizes, and close-knit academic programs where instructors can get to know their students on a one-on-one basis. Words such as “transformative” were frequently used and many noted the way that Converse helps students “raise their own expectations” about what they’re capable of.

2. Converse has committed itself to trying to strengthen student writing and speaking. Do you think Converse does enough to challenge students to improve their ability to communicate effectively? Has student writing and speaking improved at Converse since you’ve been here?

Faculty were generally unimpressed with the degree to which student writing and speaking have improved, something which participants attributed partially to the way in which “writing” and “speaking” can too often be taught or assessed in a way that ignores real-world contexts and applications. For example, “communication fluency” ought to be broadened from merely traditional writing and speaking to instead encompass digital and informational literacy (i.e. writing in different mediums or to different audiences, learning how to use one’s voice online, etc.).
3. What are some things (skills, abilities, etc.) that you think correlate with “success” after graduation, either personally or professionally? Does Converse do anything to promote or develop these skills? If not, or if more could/needs to be done, how and where might devote more effort?

Informational literacy was identified as an important skill for post-graduate success—namely, being able to evaluate the quality of sources, arguments, and perspectives, and to digest and integrate information for a specific product or goal. Informational literacy was also discussed in terms of not merely receiving information passively, but also actively contributing to the production of new quality information. Participants were worried about students misunderstanding social media presentations of others, and the anxiety and comparativeness this can generate. Related to information, there was also interest in better cultivating student technological awareness. The recently launched “Bring your device” initiative might help address this, but participants were also eager to know in a more exact way what kind of tech our students actually have and use.

A separate skill that participants cited was emotional stability and “resilience”, although much of the specifics pertaining to this topic involved many of the themes discussed earlier in response to Question 2 (namely, confidence, empowerment, etc.).

4. Converse takes pride in several defining initiatives and strengths, including creativity and the arts, service and leadership opportunities, travel experiences, our esteemed honor tradition, collaborative projects between students and faculty... and of course being a historic women's institution! Are there any ways in which these things help students succeed after graduation? Are there any other programs or aspects of Converse which might impact student success?

Participants noted that one of the things we already do at the faculty level at Converse is cross-disciplinary collaborations, e.g. cross-listed or team-taught courses. This might also be a good thing to build in at the student level, e.g. more rigorous and more pervasive requirements for the existing “non-western” GEP category, Capstone projects that must also touch on another field/question, etc. The Big Sis/Little Sis structure was also offered as an example of an existing institutions that might be better leveraged academically, e.g. Little Sis’s academically shadowing their Big Sis’s at Partner Day, Capstone presentations, etc.

Faculty also reflected on the many interrelationships between the examples listed in the question—conceiving of study-travel, service learning, interfaith dialogue, independent research, and internships as all part of the larger category of “experiential learning.

5. Converse’s core values include excellence, integrity, exploration, diversity, respect, community, and progress. Is there one of these which strikes you as most distinctive of the Converse experience? Can you think of ways in which any of these values relate to student success after graduation?

The core values of “exploration” and “diversity” were singled out as particularly important for student success, and each was connected to experiential learning (although the diversity of the faculty roster itself was criticized as lacking.) Diversity in particular was unpacked as requiring “active listening” and by “learning to be uncomfortable.” As above, there was interest in strengthening or expanding the GEP “non-western” category as well as offering more incentives to coordinate college-wide events and series (which could dovetail with a ramping-up of the Convocation Credit program). Also related to diversity, there was much enthusiasm for the
Converse College Student QEP Focus Groups  
By: Aubrey Andersen-Bakker & Darra Letteer

Introduction
In the fall term of 2015, the Quality Enhancement Program (QEP) committee, chaired by Dr. Kevin DeLapp, set out to examine student educational and personal development experiences at Converse College as they related to personal definitions of post-graduate success. In particular, the study was conducted to collect and examine qualitative data from both residential and nonresidential (Converse II and commuter) students with junior and senior standing to understand their educational and developmental experiences while attending Converse College. The findings would help the QEP committee to obtain a sampling of student insight on how a Converse education would help students to achieve—or to not achieve—their individual definitions of post-graduate success. The following questions were to be asked:

- What does post-graduate success mean to students?
- How is Converse helping/not helping them to achieve their definitions of post-graduate success?
- In what areas could Converse improve in terms of preparing them for post-graduate success?
- What makes Converse unique?

Methodology
Two focus groups were held, both of which included a mixture of students from different academic major paths: residential and commuter juniors and seniors and Converse II students. The first focus group was moderated by Darra Letteer, class of 2017 (Business Administration/Spanish double major). The second focus group was moderated by Aubrey Andersen-Bakker, class of 2016 (Business Administration/Spanish double major). Both moderators followed the moderator’s guide, which they composed in consultation with Drs. Amy Cox and Kevin DeLapp. [See Appendix C for a copy of the moderator’s guide.]

The first focus group was held on Thursday, October 1, 2015, in the Piedmont Natural Gas (PNG) Room in Montgomery Student Center and had 12 participants. The second focus group was held on Tuesday, October 6, 2015, in the same room, and had 7 participants. Each discussion group lasted roughly one hour. Participants were recruited from the Converse campus, either by Converse educators and staff or the moderators themselves. As an incentive to participate, attendants were served light snacks and bottled water.

In addition, volunteer note-takers were present to observe and document responses from the participants. Converse faculty members and recording devices were not present, as both moderators agreed that such factors might hinder open and honest discussion. The moderators, Aubrey Andersen-Bakker and Darra Letteer, then compiled the responses into this report.

Key Insights
Post-graduate Success—Focus Group 1

Among the participants, there was no singular definition of post-graduate success. The responses were divided into three categories: continue their education, get a job, and do other things.

For those that mentioned a desire to continue their education by enrolling in graduate school, there was not a specific school mentioned. There was, however, a reference to a specific master’s program in which one participant hoped to enroll.
For those who desired a job promptly after graduation, the main theme seemed to be obtaining a job in their field(s) of interest, even if it meant working their way up from the bottom. In addition, they wanted to successfully pay off student loans and pay their living expenses.

Traveling, participating in missionary work, and investigating how music could help the world were plans that were brought up by those who did not plan to immediately continue their education or obtain a job upon graduation.

Post-graduate Success—Focus Group 2

The definitions of post-graduate success varied among participants. Some students were hoping to find full-time employment positions in their particular field(s) of study and become more independent, while others explicitly wanted to attend graduate school.

Those that wanted to find employment after graduation had previous internship experience in their fields of choice. With the help and availability of Converse faculty, students were able to outperform other interns within their internship sites.

Living on their own, but still close to home while learning to be financially independent of their parents, was the primary goal for a few students. Financial independence would be obtained through full-time employment.

Those seeking graduate school opportunities felt adequately prepared. Though none of the students commented on where they would like to attend graduate school, they noted the help of their professors to help them apply for the right program. One student hoped to obtain a PhD in psychology or philosophy, and eventually teach and work in research.

Converse & Post-graduate Success—Focus Group 1

In terms of preparation for post-graduate success, an emphasis placed on required internships, clinicals, research requirements and more throughout the departments was a central theme brought up in conversation. Mentions of numerous guest speakers, performers, and professionals in various fields were also described as being helpful.

Many students were complimentary of the incredible support provided by the faculty and staff at Converse. Others agreed that the availability of their professors was very helpful in comparison to that of professors at larger universities.

The liberal arts aspect of Converse was also mentioned several times. A liberal arts education allowed students to explore subjects different from their chosen major paths. One participant believed that their cross-curricular focus would provide greater job security.

Converse & Post-graduate Success—Focus Group 2

All participating students felt competent, confident, and prepared to obtain both internship positions and full-time jobs upon graduation. One student was surprised that Converse taught her exactly what she did not want to do with her life, while others appreciated Converse’s liberal arts approach to education, which allows them to take diverse classes and broaden their horizons.

Converse faculty and educators helped their students to excel in and out of the classroom; one double major student felt that she would not have succeeded as much as she has without help and guidance from professors in both of her fields. Small class sizes allowed for more one-on-one interactions, which were more beneficial and distinct from other colleges.

By attending a liberal arts institution like Converse, students were able to be more flexible with their education and sign up for classes that they normally would not take. This not only promoted interest in other fields, but encouraged some students to minor in areas entirely different from their major(s).

Opportunities—Focus Group 1

Participants discussed multiple ways in which Converse could improve in terms of preparing them for post-graduate success. Topics of conversation included: study travel, the Converse II program, internship opportunities, and campus diversity.
Several participants expressed a desire for more money to be allocated towards study abroad trips, while one student was concerned about the accessibility of information regarding the trips. Additionally, one participant discussed the possibility of including more academic departments in JanTerm trips. There was general consensus that study travel is an important part of students’ education because of the exposure to other cultures and the ability to broaden their knowledge.

Another opportunity for Converse that was acknowledged was the lack of interaction with the Converse II program. In general, Converse II students did not feel included or involved on campus. Transfer students also felt isolated. Possible solutions discussed included an orientation day for Converse II students, as well as participation in the college’s traditions such as Big Sis/Lil Sis.

All participants agreed that internships and networking were essential to post-graduate success. Moreover, some students thought it would be more beneficial to require students to find intern positions at an earlier age. More opportunities for networking would help in addition to the internship requirements enforced by the academic departments. Students also discussed the importance of guidance for out-of-state students who might be unaware of local internships.

The diversity of the Converse community, or rather the lack thereof, was also briefly considered. Participants noted that the Converse student body was diverse due to the variety of student backgrounds, sexual orientations, and ethnicities. However, in comparison to surrounding colleges, Converse did not have as diverse a student body. Participants noted that Converse was lacking in religious diversity, as well as racial diversity. Hindu and Jewish associations at other colleges were mentioned as examples of how Converse might improve religious diversity.

Opportunities—Focus Group 2

Students discussed multiple ways in which Converse could better prepare them for their definition of post-graduate success. Topics that directly related to education included: public speaking courses, basic “life skills” courses, and increased online course offerings.

Most participating students agreed that public speaking is an important skill, and some thought that Converse should require all undergraduates to complete a public speaking course, or integrate the subject in the First Year Seminar or Student Success Seminar courses. This would better prepare students and build their confidence in front of crowds.

Another suggestion was the addition of a basic life skills course. The class would cover topics such as: personal money management, filling out employment papers, and other skills and information that are necessary for people to function in post-graduate life. Converse II students could also be used as an additional resource in this aspect for traditional undergraduate students.

Online course offerings are wonderful for student-athletes and for those who work part-time or have families to support. Some students thought that Converse should offer more online courses to cater to everyone’s busy schedules and eliminate stress from clashing course times.

Parking availability and financial aid issues, along with concerns regarding the Converse II program were brought up, but did not directly relate to students’ education. Converse II students felt isolated and uninvolved on campus—especially with younger traditional students.

Uniquely Converse—Focus Group 1

Participants listed several unique aspects about Converse. Students admired the fact that Converse was a successful and thriving women’s college in the 21st century. It was felt that traditions, faculty support, along with strong academic offerings, set Converse apart from other women’s colleges nationwide.

More importantly, students commented on Converse’s continued success and expansion over the years. Students especially appreciated the preservation of the long-standing traditions, such as Big Sis/Lil Sis.
Faculty and staff were praised as well. Participants commented on the passion and dedication of their professors. Students also noted that they felt reassured that their professors would constantly and consistently be available, should they have questions or concerns. Students were concerned that if they had attended a larger school, they might not have been given the same level of attention and support from their professors.

*Uniquely Converse—Focus Group 2*

Students commented on the fact that Converse is a women’s college in the 21st century and its respectable reputation. Other unique characteristics of Converse are the traditions, the sisterhood, the reputable professors, and the Converse II program.

A women’s college growing and expanding in today’s society is rare. Students noted that many people in the nation, let alone in South Carolina, have never heard of Converse College. On the other hand, those who know of Converse think highly of the institution and understand the significance of a Converse degree.

Some students also mentioned deep-rooted Converse traditions, like Big Sis/Lil Sis. Sisterhood was the most popular word to describe Converse. Students felt “at home” and loved the sense of community on campus.

Students also praised staff members and educators. In comparison to larger, state-sponsored universities, Converse has done an excellent job in selecting its professors. Students felt comfortable around their professors, and enjoyed the fact that some lectures and study groups were held at professors’ homes. Students were able to bond with their professors and felt like their professors would always make a point to support them.

There are many challenges that come with being an older college student. Many students admired the fact that Converse offers a program (Converse II) specifically suited for those who sought to finish their undergraduate degree later in life.

*Summary of Responses*

Below are the most insightful and interesting student responses. Please note that the responses have been edited to remove specific names or identifying details for confidentiality purposes.

**Warmup Question: What attracted you to Converse?**

*Focus Group 1:*

"It's the only art therapy school in the state."

“The admissions counselors went out of their way to send me letters when I was living in Germany.”

<In agreement with above remark> "I loved the text messages and handwritten notes from my admissions counselor.”

“I only visited Converse because my dream school wasn’t working out, but it took all of ten minutes on campus for me to fill out an application form.”

*Focus Group 2:*

“The admissions team and faculty knew my name before I even came here.”

One student noted that, “the atmosphere felt homier than Winthrop and other surrounding colleges,” while another student reported that “Converse felt right.”

“They had a specific program for adult students, so that was a plus. I also have some friends who attended Converse and they spoke highly of it.”

**Question 1: What does post-graduate success mean to you?**

*Focus Group 1:*

"I don't want to get a job right away, but instead go to graduate school."
One student mentioned that she wanted to continue her education in the Master's program at
Converse because "Converse has really good job placement, especially in <a specific
department>.
"I want to pay off my loans and not rack up debt. I want to enjoy what I'm doing, even if it's
earning pennies."
"I don't particularly want a job right after college and I don't want to go to grad school right
away." <Supported by many other participants>
"I want to try new things and investigate how music can help the world."

Focus Group 2:
“I want full-time employment in the field that I’ve chosen to study here at Converse, and I’ve
already got potential positions lined up.”
A couple of students set goals to attend graduate school. More specifically, one student said,
“for me, it’s grad school. I want to get my doctorate and eventually move on to teaching and
conduct research.”
“I had an internship this past summer in California with <a certain company> and I totally
outshined other interns! Thanks to my professors’ help, I plan to go back and continue with <a
certain field of study>.”
One student mentioned that she wants “to be employed close to family and home, but still be
living on my own.”

Question 2: How is Converse helping you to achieve your definition of post-graduate
success?

Focus Group 1:
"[Internship requirements] force us into the field and allows us to get our foot in the door."
"Internships provide real-life experience and help prepare you."
"It's nice to hear about how they [guest speakers] went about their career and got to where they
are."
"My professor is on sabbatical right now and he's in Germany, and even still he is talking to me
about my research! It's so cool!"
"My extracurricular activities and experiences as a member of res life and other clubs almost
means more to me than my Bachelor’s degree”
"Student development success staff are some of my best friends, we have a close bond and
they have helped me so much in getting internships and professional development advice in my
field of choice.”
"Attending a liberal arts school allows you to be involved in a bunch of different areas, which
gives more job security to help you get a job. You can express your interest in a bunch of
different fields freely.”
"Our professor encourages us to sign up for opportunities to get our names out there.”

Focus Group 2:
Interestingly, one student discovered that Converse taught her exactly what she did not want to
do with her life after saying, “I sat in one <specific major> course and was like “heck no!” So it’s
good that they also teach you what you don’t want to do.”
“Converse gets the right people in here to help you.”
“After having mock interviews with other colleges for <a specific major>, I was so scared. I was thinking, “How am I going to stand up compared to these other students? They’re so good!” But when I was successful in my California experience, I knew I was well-prepared.”
“People I interned with over the summer made a note that I went to Converse.”
“Converse has helped me by hiring amazing faculty in both of my fields. I was originally going to declare <a certain field of study> as a minor, but <a certain professor> talked me into being a major in that field, and I ended up presenting at a major conference.”

**Question 3: In what areas could Converse improve in terms of preparing you for success?**

**Focus Group 1:**
"[Study travel] is an incredible personal experience, but this is especially critical for those who can’t afford it because it’s not just for fun, and I want those who can’t afford it to be able to experience it."

<In response to above remark> "I think Converse needs to advertise the Chapman scholarship better because nobody knows about it, and more people would be apt to sign up if they knew."
"They don’t connect us [Converse II students] to anything; I mean, where’s Gee? I had no clue where anything was and I felt like I was thrown in without any knowledge."
"I’ve talked to other transfer students and honestly, they feel like outsiders. I’m sad that they graduate feeling like they have no connection to Converse, because they are “transfers”."
"Why is there the feeling of separation between traditional and non-traditional students?"
"Every department should implement an internship before graduation."
"I would love if my department had something to shine about and all departments should strive to be on top and stand out so we can bring in more students; I feel like I am going to get a generic education in my department and that’s sad, but true."
"I don’t want to feel like I am the sole representative of my race; I would really like to see more diversity. In my 4 years here, I’ve really felt like I have been the token item on campus because I was not born or raised here."
"Converse isn’t super diverse, but the world is super diverse."

**Focus Group 2:**
“Converse II is an afterthought. In Senate, they skipped over us for attendance every single time and I had to go up afterwards and talk to them. They were shocked that I was there even though it was my third year being the representative.”

<In response to above remark> “Same for commuters. Our hangout spot is a window-less room with no fire escape.”
“I was amazed that public speaking isn’t required! I feel it’s important.”

<In agreement with above remark> “I agree. It’s important to know how to speak properly in front of a crowd. I find myself counting all the “umm’s” during student presentations.”
“Why isn’t there a basic life necessities class?? Like learning how to write a check, taxes, and filling out W-2 forms…”

<In response to above remark> “Yeah, Converse II students are like unused resources for traditional, younger students. We’ve been there, done that and I’ve helped many of my friends fill out those kinds of forms.”
“Some classes count for credit in two different academic areas, but no one tells you unless you have the right advisor. Like getting credit for internships… I had no idea until I overheard some people talking.”

**Question 4: What makes/Why do you think Converse is unique?**

*Focus Group 1:*

"When you need something, you always have your advisor or professor to go to. If I were at a larger school, I don’t feel like I would have that."

"My professor encourages me to text anytime if I need help!"

"[We have] certain traditions that emphasize that we are a single gender college, but compared to other women’s institutions I’ve been to, we don’t let our traditions affect our strong academic offerings. We embrace being a women’s college and its symbolism, but it doesn’t affect the meaning of our degree."

<In agreement with above remark> "Honestly, I forget that it’s a women’s college all the time; I don’t feel like I’m missing out on anything."

"All of my professors LOVE what they are doing; they love to teach and they love the industry they work in, and that makes me more excited to learn."

*Focus Group 2:*

“The fact that we’re a women’s college that still exists in the 21st century, and we’re still growing.”

“Not many people know of Converse, but the people who know it think very highly of it!”

“We have more interaction with each other on campus because we attend a residential school, and I think that’s lost at bigger schools. We’re a family here.”

“The traditions that are still going like Big Sis/Lil Sis.”

“The availability of our professors. We went to our PROFESSOR’S HOUSE to have study groups. My sister goes to Clemson and she’s shocked when I tell her stuff like that.”

<In response to above remark> “It’s almost like we’re TOO close to our professors… in a good way.”

“I think sisterhood is such a cheesy word, but it really does describe Converse.”
E. Topic Development Survey

[Distributed via Survey Monkey to all students, faculty, and staff and open from November-December 2015. The original survey contained an optional second page for respondents to be entered into a drawing for gift cards to downtown establishments.]

In compliance with our regional accreditors, Converse College is working to identify a topic for a new “quality enhancement plan” aimed at promoting student success following graduation. Such a topic should be something that can be implemented and assessed in academic as well as co-curricular ways. To help us narrow our list of potential topics, please answer the following questions. The entire survey should take under 10 minutes, and your responses will remain anonymous. Thank you!

[Answers will be given with a five-item Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” The survey will be administered to all current students, staff, and faculty as well as alumnae.]

1. To be successful after college, it is important to understand current and emerging technologies.
2. To be successful after college, it is important to be able to navigate social media and the internet.
3. All college graduates should be capable of performing independent research.
4. The Converse community is a diverse place.
5. Everyone should strive to be a leader in their own way.
6. Converse offers adequate opportunities for leadership.
7. The Converse experience helps empower students.
8. Every college graduate should have the opportunity to have an internship.
9. Travel experiences are the best way to learn about a different society.
10. Converse welcomes people of different backgrounds and beliefs.
11. Converse helps students understand and appreciate different backgrounds and beliefs.
12. Converse trains students to act professionally in the world.
13. I am satisfied with the way that Converse encourages leadership.
14. I am satisfied with the way that Converse encourages global awareness and diversity.
15. I am satisfied with the way that Converse encourages research skills.
16. I am satisfied with the way that Converse encourages the use and understanding of technology.
17. Converse should do more to encourage global awareness and diversity.
18. Converse should do more to encourage research skills.
19. Converse should do more to encourage leadership.
20. Converse should do more to encourage technology fluency.
F. Convocation Credit Portal

[The following is a screenshot of the webpage through which students will log QEP-related “diversity” Convocation Credit participation, as described in §VI.]

### Convocation Pledge Form

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Convocation Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>diversity - TED Talk and Discussion - Nov 14 2016 7:00PM</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- I confirm attendance to this event.

- **Category**
  - diversity

- As part of the QEP we are asking for your help. For Diversity event, please complete the survey below.
  - This is optional for all other types of events.

**Regards,**

QEP Committee

- This experience made me more knowledgeable about the practices, beliefs, or characteristics of a different culture or a different aspect of society.
  - Strongly Disagree  □  Disagree  □  Neutral  □  Agree  □  Strongly Agree

- This experience offered me the opportunity to examine and interpret different perspectives.
  - Strongly Disagree  □  Disagree  □  Neutral  □  Agree  □  Strongly Agree

- This experience caused me to reflect on my own background, culture, or beliefs.
  - Strongly Disagree  □  Disagree  □  Neutral  □  Agree  □  Strongly Agree

Submit
G. QEP Assessment Survey

Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) Survey

**Converse Across Boundaries:**
**Learning Through Diverse Experiences**

Please take the time to respond honestly and reflectively to the following statements regarding the course, trip, internship, or campus activity in which you recently participated. Your specific responses are not connected to your grade or to any other aspect of your performance or participation in the activity in question. Indicate your answer by circling, highlighting, or otherwise indicating one (and only one) response per question.

Name of activity (course number and title, etc.): ________________________________

Instructor/Advisor/Facilitator: ________________________

Semester and Date: ________________________

1. This experience made me more knowledgeable about the practices, beliefs, or characteristics of a different culture or a different aspect of society.

   Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Neutral Agree  Strongly Agree

2. This experience offered me the opportunity to examine and interpret different perspectives.

   Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Neutral Agree  Strongly Agree

3. This experience caused me to reflect on my own background, culture, or beliefs.

   Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Neutral Agree  Strongly Agree

   Thank you!
### H. QEP Assessment Rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Beginning (1 pt)</th>
<th>Developing (2 pts)</th>
<th>Competent (3 pts)</th>
<th>Exemplary (4 pts)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrate knowledge of the practices and characteristics of diverse cultures and societies. [SLO 1]</td>
<td>There is no or very little evidence of understanding even the basic tenets or features of the subject.</td>
<td>Basic tenets and features are accurate, but are decontextualized, superficial, or one dimensional.</td>
<td>There is awareness of how underlining principles and generalizations connect with specific, but the subject is presented in a dogmatic or monolithic form.</td>
<td>There is an appreciation for the internal diversity and ambiguities within the subject.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Score:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examine and interpret diverse viewpoints and perspectives. [SLO 2]</td>
<td>There is no or very little attention to more than one society, culture, perspective, or methodology.</td>
<td>There is attention to similarities and differences, but they are presented in empty parallelism and without drawing out implications or offering explanations.</td>
<td>Similarities and differences are organized in discerning and explanatory ways, although not always with charity or nuance.</td>
<td>Subjects are juxtaposed in creative, charitable, and non-obvious ways, and such that each can help clarify, strengthen, or challenge the other.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Score:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compare different experiences and perspectives to one’s own culture and background. [SLO 3]</td>
<td>There is no or very little evidence of personal connection with the subject.</td>
<td>There is some evidence of personal connection with the subject, but discussion is one-sided, superficial, or merely descriptive.</td>
<td>There is evidence of sustained personal connection to the subject; attempt is made to apply the subject to experiences or examples.</td>
<td>There is evidence of sustained and insightful connection to the subject; specific and creative applications of the subject are made to concrete and relevant personal experiences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Score:</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Student ___________________________  QEP Activity ___________________________

Evaluator ______________________  Date ________  Total Points ________
I. Interfaith Studies Student Learning Outcomes

1. [IFS-SLO-1] Students will develop basic appreciative knowledge of multiple religious, spiritual, or humanistic traditions.

2. [IFS-SLO-2] Students will develop knowledge of theologies or ethics of interfaith cooperation or issues in negotiating cultural interactions and conflicts.

3. [IFS-SLO-3] Students will demonstrate effective communication and facilitate dialogue by juxtaposing perspectives and holding conflicting beliefs in tension.

4. [IFS-SLO-4] Students will demonstrate adept skills in interfaith dialogue among diverse participants, including the ability to navigate differences among participants to foster pluralism.

5. [IFS-SLO-5] Students will recognize and explain the ways in which religious traditions and interreligious encounters are embedded within cultural, political, educational, therapeutic, gendered, or economic systems.

The IFS student learning outcomes are correlated with the QEP student learning outcomes indirectly, in that courses designed to meet the IFS-SLOs will also be separately assessed with the QEP rubric which targets the QEP-SLOs.
J. Bibliography


http://www.aacu.org/leap/hips (accessed 31 December 2016)


