**Quality Enhancement Plan** # Annual Progress Report

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**QEP**

# INITIAL QEP DESCRIPTION

The goal of the Vernon College Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), named VConnected, is to increase student learning through improved engagement by fostering an environment of collaboration and connectivity between students, faculty, and support personnel. The College will improve student learning by focusing on engagement through a three-part plan: transform curriculum and instruction, provide innovative professional development opportunities, and create a technology rich environment for instructional and student support services. Faculty and staff will be provided the necessary training for successful QEP implementation. The initial focus of professional development activities will be to create a base of new knowledge about assessment tools such as the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE), engagement techniques, and innovative technologies.

The next emphasis will be placed on providing strategies for incorporating engagement into courses and services which will lead to higher achievement of student learning outcomes.

Vernon College will target student learning outcomes on a project-by-project basis using established competencies from course syllabi. As engagement techniques are integrated into a course or project, specific student learning outcomes will be tracked and assessed to determine if increased learning did occur due to increased engagement techniques. Adjunct faculty, distance learning courses, and online courses will receive the same attention and training as face-to-face courses.

Following approval from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges, formal implementation of the Vernon College QEP begins Fall 2009. Pilot projects have been conducted since the spring 2008 semester as a means of testing the applicability of different engagement strategies and will continue into the implementation phase. As the QEP progresses, collaboration and connectivity will remain the foundation for success in high achievement of student learning outcomes.

# INITIAL GOALS & INTENDED OUTCOMES

**Initial Goals**

The goal is to increase student learning through improved engagement. Engagement will be increased by:

- Transforming curriculum and instruction,
- Training faculty and staff in engagement technique through professional development opportunities, and
- Creating a technology-rich environment for instructional and student support services.

The QEP will be integrated into the infrastructure of the college by incorporating collaboration and connectivity into every aspect of the students' collegiate experience, including instruction and student support services. It is the goal of the project to infuse active learning strategies in all courses and student support services by 2014.

**Intended Outcomes**

Engagement Methodology (Student Support Services) – Offer comprehensive educational programs and student support services with a continued focus on quality improvement.

- Website – Posting video tutorials on how to use a service.
- Virtual Library – Use WIMBA Live Classroom to assist students from a remote location.

Engagement Methodology (Instructional Services) – Add quality to an ever-increasing program of educating students in both traditional and nontraditional settings.

- WIMBA Live Classroom – Allow students to actively participate in class by interacting and collaborating with each other and the instructor.

- Podcasts – Use Wimba Live Classroom or Blackboard to create and post podcasts of lectures as a student resource.
- Blackboard – Implement discussion boards to promote student networking and sharing of ideas.

Professional Development – Reinforce and redirect attention to what matters most, educating students effectively.

- Hire full-time Director of Quality Enhancement Plan and Instructional Designer.
- Provide resources (e.g., computers, Camtasia software, collaboration area).
- Schedule, promote, and teach professional development sessions.

Assessment – Give faculty and staff an opportunity to implement research-based best practices that can make a significant difference in student success and retention.

- Pilot project results - create best practices based on established engagement methods and student learning outcomes.
- Engagement surveys – create a culture of evidence to drive decisions that will affect student learning (e.g., CCSSE, SENSE).
- Course/department/program assessment tools – articulate the relationship between engagement methodology and student learning, and ensure that evidence is collected to document the impact of a change in engagement methodology (e.g., pre and post tests, embedded test questions, departmental surveys).

# SIGNIFICANT CHANGES & REASONS

**Changes**

The focus of the VConnected plan is clear—increase student learning by increasing student engagement. The plan is comprehensive as it addresses instruction, student support services, and use of technology with the intention of bringing about long term change. When first submitted, the cause and effect relationship between student engagement and student learning was not articulated clearly. "Engagement is good, but it is only a means to a more important end—student learning—and not an end in itself." (Response Report 13). For this reason, the QEP was enhanced to put emphasis on: (1) identifying student learning outcomes in each course or student support service area, and (2) implementing assessment tools to determine

the success of each outcome. Beginning the 2009 fall semester, these changes will become a reality as Vernon College transitions from piloting the project in the preparation phase to implementing the project.

**Why Change?**

- "The plan relied too heavily on a single measure of success, the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE). CCSSE measures the extent to which students perceive they are engaged in the classroom and elsewhere in the institution. Although CCSSE provides a wealth of detailed information regarding student per-ceptions of engagement, it is nonetheless an *indirect* measure of student learning. If the overall goal of the project is to improve student learning, then the college had to couple CCSSE with *direct* measures of student learn-ing." (Response Report 13).

- "The plan assumed that an increase in the number of student engagement activities would produce an increase in learning. The college had to articulate how it would evaluate whether or not student learning had improved and thus whether or not the project was suc-cessful." (Response Report 15).

# DIRECT QEP IMPACT ON STUDENT LEARNING

**Instructional Services**

Under the QEP, five pilot project proposals were sub-mitted and approved to continue testing the applica-bility of VConnected. Four of these proposals focused on utilizing Wimba Live Classroom to enhance differ-ent aspects of a course. These pilots were submitted by:

- Greg Fowler – Criminal Justice Instructor, CRIJ 2314 Criminal Investigations (Online)
- Renee Wooten – Spanish Instructor, SPAN 1412 Beginning Spanish (Online)
- Teresa Ramos – Child Development Instructor, TECA 1354 & 1303 Child Growth and Develop-ment (Online)
- Lynn Kalski – Director of LVN Program, LVN Faculty Meetings (Remote Campuses)

The fifth pilot project consisted of student group col-laboration for research and information gathering, presentation of materials, and test preparation and evaluating. This project was piloted by Larry Jordan, Government Instructor, in his GOVT 2301 American Government class. Each VConnected team member researched and developed their projects in the Fall 2008 semester and implemented it in the Spring 2009 semester.

Greg Fowler – Criminal Justice Instructor

In an effort to provide additional engagement oppor-tunities with the intent of increasing test scores and student retention, Greg Fowler introduced Live Class-room into his Criminal Investigations course online. His primary focus was the exam review process. The original project was to have the class meet four times to review for the major exams using Live Classroom. Through his research he found that meeting with the class more than four times would be essential to the success of the project. Therefore, the number of meetings was increased to ten so that each chapter could be reviewed and discussed.

Mr. Fowler solicited student feedback at the conclu-sion of the course. Comments indicated that stu-dents: enjoyed the contact with the instructor and other students, agreed the contact with the instruc-tor allowed them to ask questions, liked that they were able to hear and respond to other students questions, and felt that the Live Classroom was very similar to a traditional classroom. Additionally, on the occasion that they had to miss class, they found it very helpful and convenient that they could either view the video of the class discussion or download it as a pod cast and listen to it anywhere.

Perhaps the best result of the pilot project was the student retention rate. Typically in Mr. Fowler's tra-ditional internet class, the success rate (a grade of "C" or better) is between 50% and 66% with the re-mainder of the students either dropping the class or receiving a grade of "D or F". The pilot class, how-ever, had a success rate of 100%. He cited the suc-cess of one non-traditional student in particular. The student had limited computer skills and scored average in traditional face to face classes. They

attempted internet classes on two prior occasions and made an "F" in each of them. In the pilot class the student attended each meeting, was able to operate the technology, and participated in the Live Classroom discussion. The student indicated to Mr. Fowler that they never could have been successful in an internet class without the use of Live Classroom. Although they continue to be an average student, they were able to be successful for the first time in an online course. For an instructor who teaches solely online, Mr. Fowler stated that the use of Live Classroom allowed him to interact with the students on a level that he had not been able to previously obtain.

Renee Wooten – Spanish Instructor
Renee Wooten used Live Classroom to organize small communicative, tutorial groups of 6-8 students in her Beginning Spanish online course. The goal was to have students utilize technology to actively participate in class activities, to collaborate with fellow students, and to increase communication between classmates and the instructor. The weekly sessions were mandatory (expressed in the Course Outline, resulting in a 10% grade for attendance) and several weekly sessions were offered to accommodate a variety of student schedules.

When compared to the same course taught the previous semester, there was a 23% increase in the total number of students that successfully completed the course. The actual letter grades were slightly improved as well. Furthermore, the class survey showed that the student satisfaction rate improved for the Spring 2009 course. Eighty-seven percent of students cited the online tutorials as helpful in the success of the course. Individual student comments included: "I thought the web sessions were very helpful", "Thank you for being so helpful and involved", "I think I understood more when I was able to hear the professor explain the grammar", and "I really like these [sessions]. Thanks!"

Ms. Wooten, who at the time of the pilot had taught this online course for three years, felt more closely connected to her students after attending the tutorial sessions. Many of the online students made time to visit Ms. Wooten's office to chat and ask questions. She stated that this type of interaction almost never happens between the instructor and online students. She believes that because she was a face, an actual speaking person and not a computer screen, the students felt more comfortable engaging with her. It seemed like

the students were in a "normal" classroom setting, and they were displaying behaviors consistent with those that the "live" students display when subject to the group process.

Teresa Ramos – Child Development Instructor
Teresa Ramos created small learning communities in her Child Growth and Development and Families, School, and Community courses. The class was divided into six groups consisting of four students each. Each group was given a question to discuss using the discussion boards in Blackboard. They were also given the opportunity to post and share their answers in the larger class discussion board. The goal was to allow students to have more reflective and insightful group discussions. In addition, Ms. Ramos archived audio lectures using Wimba Live Classroom. She posted the lectures for students to view prior to group discussions.

The student's feedback was positive. They enjoyed the small group interaction which provided networking opportunities and felt it was a good way to share different points of view. Most of Ms. Ramos's students plan to be teachers and this project allowed them to communicate with each other about future classes, lesson plans, and ideas on what grade is best to teach. This was an unexpected occurrence that proved to be a positive outcome of the project.

The retention rate for Ms. Ramos's internet class was around 95% and 83% of the class scored an "A" or "B". The instructor observed the students had more interaction on a weekly basis with each other and with the instructor than previous online courses.

Lynn Kalski – Director of LVN Program
Live Classroom is a tool Lynn Kalski utilized to enhance collaboration with LVN faculty and administrative staff. An additional student learning outcome that he hoped to accomplish was to increase the effectiveness of the LVN program's learning activities and success of vocational nursing students. By scheduling meetings through Live Classroom, Mr. Kalski hoped to increase the number and effectiveness of meetings, decrease the amount of travel, decrease the number of errors/conflicts in adminis-

trative tasks (e.g., schedules), and increase consistency and continuity.

In order to assess the success of conducting meetings using Live Classroom, the frequency and number of interactions after the introduction of the new technology was compared with the same type of interactions in previous years. There was an increase in the number of meetings, but technical difficulties and faculty implementation of the WIMBA system cast doubt on the effectiveness of the interactions. Due to these difficulties, the project will be reassessed at the end of the Fall 2009 semester to determine whether his student learning outcomes were achieved as a result of implementing Live Classroom.

<u>Larry Jordan – American Government Instructor</u>
Larry Jordan designed his course around three primary areas of study: analysis of the material, reading comprehension, and critical thinking. Students were divided into three groups. The Research and Information Group was responsible for reading the text and collating the material. Utilizing this material, the Presentation Group designed and implemented a method of presenting the information. Finally, the Testing and Evaluation Group created, designed, administered and graded the tests based on the information provided by the first two groups.

Three different exams were designed to assess how well the information and the presentation of such were communicated to the class. The first exam consisted of two tests—one being created and administered by the Testing Group, the other being prepared by the instructor— using the student information gathered and presented. When compared to the instructor's questions, the students' questions were broader in scope and dealt with more common knowledge. Mr. Jordan noted that the comparison of the grades on the tests were not unexpected. The class scored higher on the test created by the Testing Group, the average being about 12 points. The second exam was designed exclusively by the Testing Group. The scores on this test again indicated that students score better on their own tests, with the grades ranging from 80 to 92. The third exam was a comprehensive final of the instructor's questions. Since each score was passing, this exam demonstrated that the students understood and retained the content provided by the groups during the semester.

Overall, this pilot class confirmed that having the students analyze the text and material increased student engagement. The students also learned to collaborate and communicate with one another once they realized the dependence of each group on the other. Mr. Jordan stated that the engagement increased in two ways: *more* students were engaged and the *level* of engagement rose. As demonstrated by the student scores on the final comprehensive exam, his student learning outcomes were achieved using this method.

<u>Marian Grona – Director of Library Services</u>
Marian Grona continued her pilot project involving virtual library assistance using Wimba Live Classroom. In year two, she reported ongoing technical and electrical problems at STC that may have contributed to a lack of participation and usage of the service. Ms. Grona solicited the assistance of a student focus group to determine what was causing the lack of student involvement. The library learned that several items need to be addressed in the areas of assessment, participation, and technology. In response to student recommendations, the library will: (1) improve the instructions for accessing library assistance, (2) promote an awareness of virtual services, (3) improve virtual library procedure, and (4) assess student learning outcomes with a point of contact survey.

<u>Paula Whitman – Mathematics Instructor</u>
Paula Whitman has continued to have students use clickers in her classroom. In the second year, she extended the classroom engagement questions to online classes. After students watched the classroom lecture video, they were required to complete and submit an online quiz indicating their answers to the engagement questions. In the future, Mrs. Whitman will continue to use clickers and engagement questions in her courses. She also plans to redesign her lectures to more closely align questions with homework assignments.

**Student Support Services**
In order to determine an initial benchmark for student support services, a report was requested from each department. The report included details of current student engagement projects as well as instances of student interaction and future projects in which student learning outcomes could be applied and assessed.

Gene Gooch – Dean of Administrative Services
Gene Gooch reported there were no current student engagement projects as their student interaction is limited to payments and receipt of financial aid. Currently the student ID card program has the most interaction with the students. They are in the process of developing a marketing plan to increase participation in this program.

John Hardin III – Dean of Student Services/Athletics Director
Under the direction of John Hardin III, this department had intentions of making the New Student Group Advising sessions available online. However, once feedback was received from the students, it was determined that an in-person delivery method was preferred. The process is again under review and in the future supplemental materials may be made available as an online reference. Additionally, beginning in the 2009 fall semester, multimedia message boards displaying electronic messages will be used to communicate activities and services available to students.

Joe Hite – Dean of Admissions, Financial Aid, and the Registrar
According to Joe Hite, applying for services online is

their primary method of student interaction. On-site registration, however, involves face-to-face interaction with students and staff from all offices. His department is researching ways to provide online registration through Campus Connect on this day in an effort to streamline the process. As a potential project, Dean Hite is researching the feasibility of utilizing student email accounts as the primary means of communication.

**Office of the President**
Dr. Dusty Johnston – President, Vernon College
As an engagement effort through the Office of the President, Coordinator of Marketing and Alumni Relations, Christie Lehman, created and maintains Vernon College social networking pages using Facebook and Twitter. With the support of Dr. Johnston, Mrs. Lehman uses these sites to push college announcements, events, activities, and photos to the community, our students, faculty, and staff. The project was implemented in the summer and will be evaluated at the end of the academic year to determine the effectiveness and feasibility of continuing to communicate via these methods.

# QEP SUMMARY

- The goals of the QEP will continue to be integrated into the planning and effectiveness process of the college. As a result, each component of the college will address attaining the goals of the QEP on their annual action plans. Through this method, the QEP will be incorporated into the infrastructure of the college.

- The Director of Quality Enhancement Plan and Instructional Designer positions were filled this year.

- Several engagement methodologies have been tried and assessed both in and out of the classroom. The results have been positive and suggestions for improvement have been noted. We will continue to build on these efforts as we expand the QEP program throughout the college.

- The QEP Implementation Committee has been structured to assess and evaluate the progress of the QEP and to ensure completion of each initiative.

**This QEP Annual Progress Report was reviewed and approved by the QEP Implementation Committee on this 7th day of October, 2009.**

Committee Members:

- Criquett Lehman, Committee Chair/Director of Quality Enhancement Plan

- Greg Fowler, Division Chair: Behavioral & Social Sciences and 08-09 Pilot Participant

- Joe Johnston,  Division Chair: Communications

- Karen Gragg, Division Chair: Math & Science

- Mark Holcomb, Division Chair:  Information & Technology and 09-10 Pilot Participant

- Shana Munson, Division Chair: Allied Health & Human Services

- Roxie Hill, Instructional Designer

- Mike McCoy, Director of Distance Learning

- Stacy Lallmann, Student Billing Accountant

- Melissa Elliott, Director of Financial Aid and 09-10 Pilot Participant

- Kristin Harris, Associate Dean of Student Services/Director of Counseling

- Larry Jordan, 08-09 Pilot Participant

- Lynn Kalski,  08-09 Pilot Participant

- Renee Wooten, 08-09 Pilot Participant

- Teresa Ramos,  08-09 Pilot Participant

- Chad Mueller, 09-10 Pilot Participant

- Cindy Coufal, 09-10 Pilot Participant

- Dina Neal, 09-10 Pilot Participant

2008-2009 Pilots