CHRISTOPHER NEWPORT UNIVERSITY

November 15, 2015

To: Geoffrey Klein, Vice Provost
From: Michaela D.E. Meyer, QEP Director
CC: QEP Topic Selection Committee
(Gayle Dow, Bill Connell, Jeannine Leger, Alex Turner)

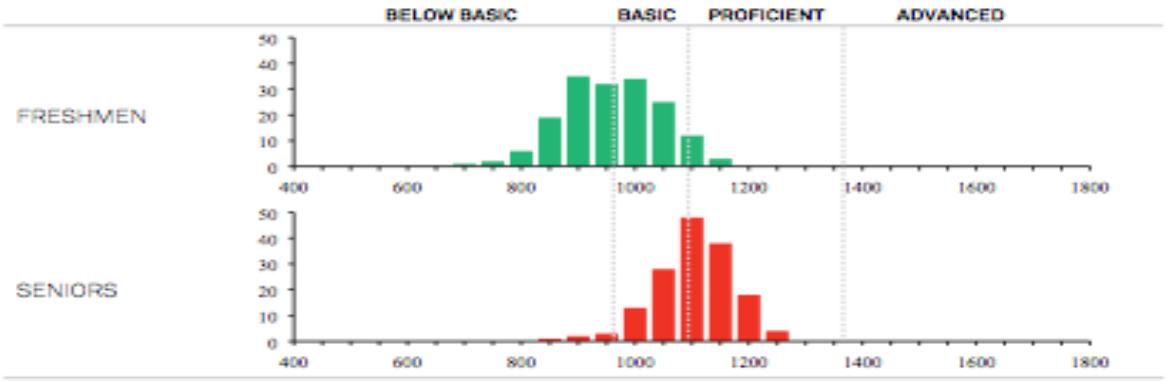
The QEP Topic Selection Committee has completed its 10-month effort to identify a QEP Topic as part of CNU's SACSCOC Reaffirmation of Accreditation. In this memo, we will outline the process we followed to identify key issues emerging from institutional assessment data, our approach to fostering a broad-based involvement of institutional input and support from multiple university constituents, and finally, offer our recommendations for topic selection.

Review of Institutional Data (January 2015 – June 2015)
The topic selection committee originally convened in January of 2015 to begin the process of QEP Topic Selection. Members of the committee asked for any institutional data available that would assist in our topic selection process. At this time, the Provost's Office in conjunction with university assessment provided us with two data sets – the Collegiate Learning Assessment Plus Exam (CLA+) and the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE).

During the 2014-2015 academic year, CNU administered the Collegiate Learning Assessment Plus exam (CLA+) to 223 incoming freshmen and 96 graduating seniors. Compared to all schools participating in the CLA+, our 2015 seniors scored in the 85th percentile on the Overall CLA+ score, a proficient mastery level, representing an increase of 7 percentile points over the previous year. In addition to the Overall CLA+ score, CNU's results also demonstrated a Value-Added Score greater than 85% of the institutions administering the CLA+. The results show that the demonstrated observed scores on all components of the CLA+ were all greater than the expected scores. This tells us that CNU offers a greater contribution to learning than what was expected based on our Entering Academic Ability (EAA) score, demonstrating a higher than expected educational efficacy. The table below illustrates the overall shift from freshman to senior year in terms of mastery level from below basic/basic to proficient/basic:

SECTION D2: DISTRIBUTION OF MASTERY LEVELS ACROSS INSTITUTIONS

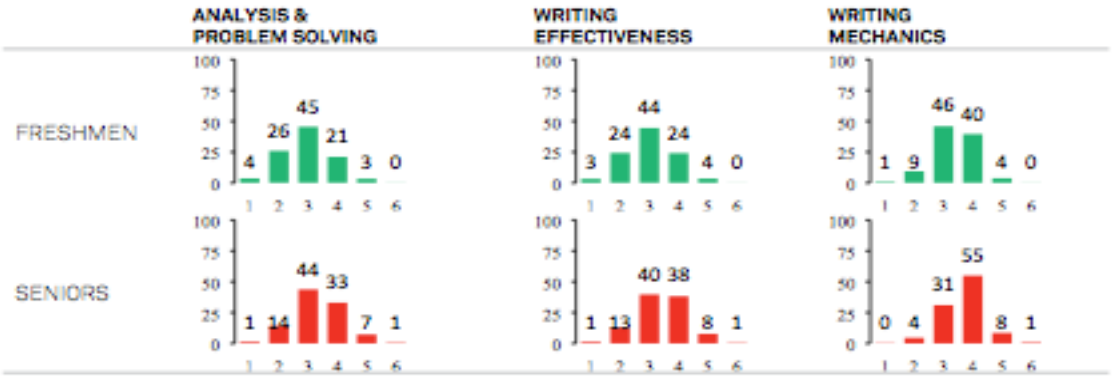
Distribution of Mean CLA+ Scores, by Mastery Level



When examining the subscores for performance tasks, CNU students improved in every area analyzed (analysis & problem solving, writing effectiveness, writing mechanics, scientific & quantitative reasoning, critical reading & evaluation, and critique an argument), illustrating that CNU currently provides a strong value-added education.

SECTION D4: CLA+ SUBSCORES ACROSS INSTITUTIONS

Performance Task: Mean Distribution of Subscores (in percentages)



NOTE: The Performance Task subscore categories are scored on a scale of 1 through 6.

Selected-Response Questions: Mean Subscores Across Institutions

	SCIENTIFIC & QUANTITATIVE REASONING			CRITICAL READING & EVALUATION			CRITIQUE AN ARGUMENT		
	Mean Score	25th Percentile Score	75th Percentile Score	Mean Score	25th Percentile Score	75th Percentile Score	Mean Score	25th Percentile Score	75th Percentile Score
FRESHMEN	499	473	519	498	476	520	498	471	524
SENIORS	546	524	567	541	522	559	538	520	560

NOTE: The selected-response section subscores are reported on a scale ranging approximately from 200 to 800.

Thus, the CLA+ shows that while we can continue to improve in all of the areas assessed on the exam, we are also currently not deficient in any of the areas assessed.

The NSSE data provided another point of entry for understanding our current institutional effectiveness. The NSSE measure is a self-report reflection on student experience at a particular university. Overall, it focuses on measuring Engagement Indicators (Academic Challenge, Experiences with Faculty, Learning with Peers, Campus Environment) and High Impact Practices (Learning Communities, Service-Learning, Research with Faculty, Internships/Field Experience, Study Abroad, Culminating Senior Experience) that enrich a student's learning experience at a particular institution. Data obtained on the NSSE is then compared to a set of defined peer-aspirant institutions to identify potential areas for improving overall student experience. In 2014, 1,218 students completed the NSSE. Data indicates that CNU is doing well in comparison to our peer aspirant institutions:

Engagement Indicators

Sets of items are grouped into ten Engagement Indicators, organized under four broad themes. At right are summary results for your institution. For details, see your *Engagement Indicators* report.

Key:

▲ **Your students' average** was significantly higher ($p < .05$) with an effect size at least .3 in magnitude.

△ **Your students' average** was significantly higher ($p < .05$) with an effect size less than .3 in magnitude.

-- No significant difference.

▽ **Your students' average** was significantly lower ($p < .05$) with an effect size less than .3 in magnitude.

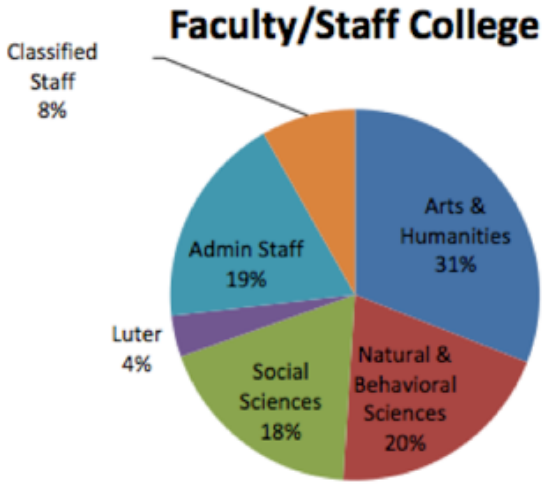
▼ **Your students' average** was significantly lower ($p < .05$) with an effect size at least .3 in magnitude.

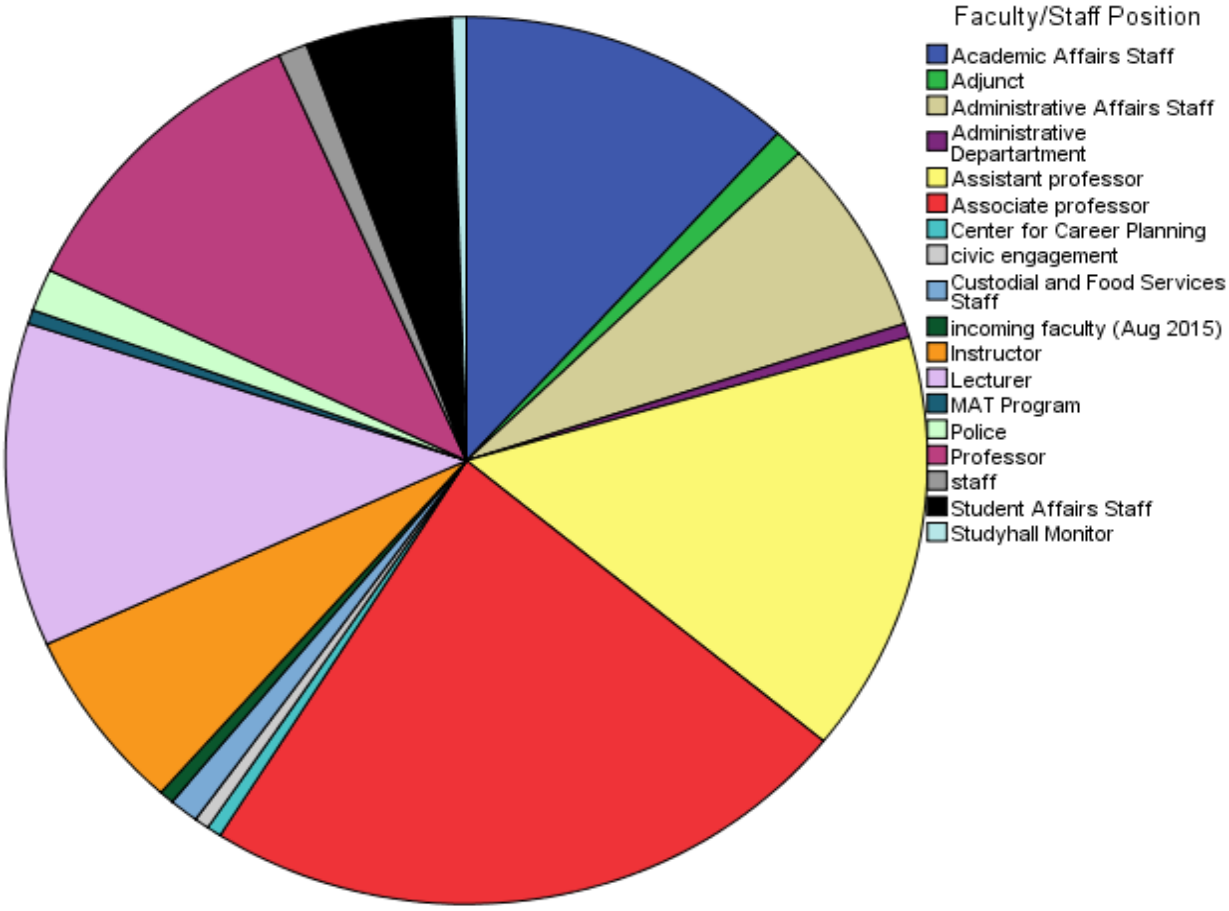
		Your students compared with Aspirant Peers	
Theme	*Engagement Indicator*	*First-year*	*Senior*
Academic Challenge	**Higher-Order Learning**	--	--
	Reflective & Integrative Learning	--	--
	Learning Strategies	--	--
	Quantitative Reasoning	--	--
Learning with Peers	**Collaborative Learning**	△	△
	Discussions with Diverse Others	--	--
Experiences with Faculty	**Student-Faculty Interaction**	--	△
	Effective Teaching Practices	--	△
Campus Environment	**Quality of Interactions**	△	△
	Supportive Environment	△	△

In no category did CNU score lower than peer aspirant institutions, but we did not score significantly higher in five areas: the four related to academic challenge and the one related to diversity. We also noted in the NSSE report that our students report lower involvement in study abroad and university research that we originally anticipated given university curriculum initiatives in these areas.

After reviewing both of these institutional pieces of data, the committee discovered that we did not currently have institutional data from faculty or staff that could be compared to these student measures. Thus, based on an evaluation of our university mission, current initiatives, and the array of potential areas for improvement, the committee composed a survey that was distributed to all faculty, staff and students. This survey was approved by the university IRB and was distributed in April of 2015. By targeting the above areas for potential improvement, we asked faculty, staff and students to specifically report and rank their interest, perception and experience with the various topics.

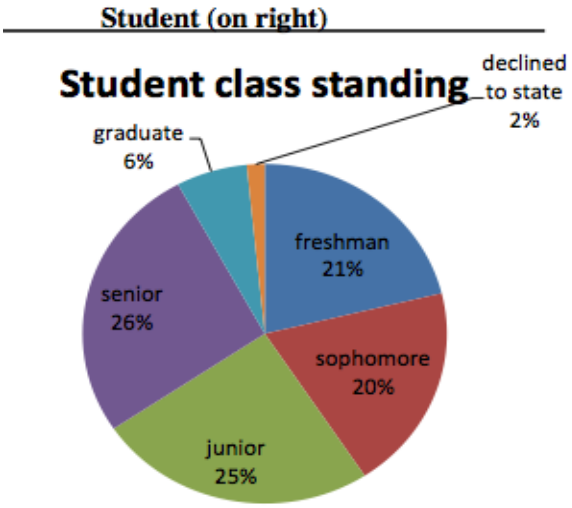
Our internal survey received responses from 201 Faculty (61%) and Staff (39%) including respondents from the College of Arts & Humanities, the College of Natural and Behavioral Sciences, the College of Social Sciences, the Luter School of Business, Administrative Staff, and Classified Staff. Respondents spanned a wide array of positions at the university, indicated below:

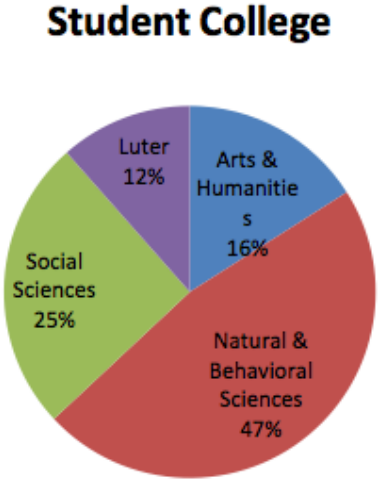




The five largest populations responding to the survey included 1) Associate Professors (23%), 2) Assistant Professors (15%), 3) Academic Affairs Staff (12%) and Lecturers (12%) tied, 4) Professors (11%) and 5) Instructors (7%) and Administrative Staff (7%) tied. At current, CNU employs 275 full-time faculty comprised of 36 Instructors, 55 Lecturers, 62 Assistant Professors, 84 Associate Professors, 35 Professors, and 3 Distinguished Professors. Thus, our sample was quite representative of our faculty population and included a significant staff response as well.

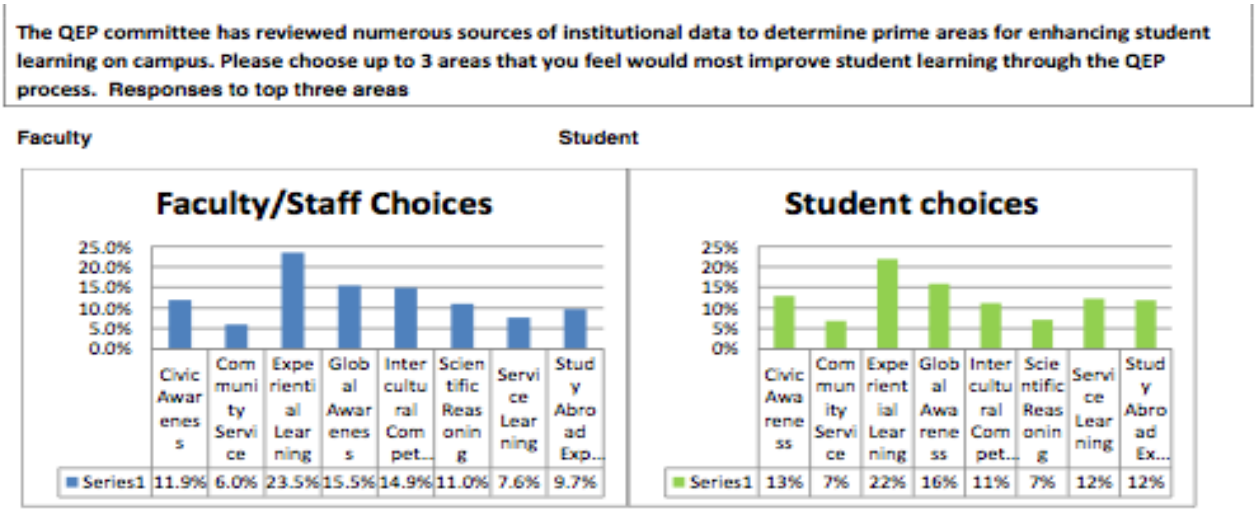
We also received 622 Student responses (~12% of the student population) spanning all levels of class standing and represented majors in all four different colleges at the university (NBS 47%, SS 25%, A&H 16%, Luter 12%).





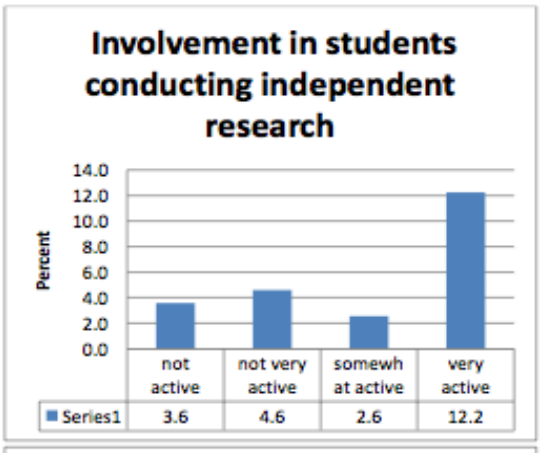
Respondents to the survey offered their insight on eight specific areas of university effectiveness: 1) Civic Awareness, 2) Community Service, 3) Experiential Learning, 4) Global Awareness, 5) Intercultural Competence, 6) Scientific Reasoning, 7) Service Learning, and 8) Study Abroad. These items on the survey were selected as a result of the review of the CLA+ and NSSE data, particularly the NSSE data indicating that we have room for measurable, assessable improvement of student learning in diversity initiatives and the four areas assessed for academic challenge.

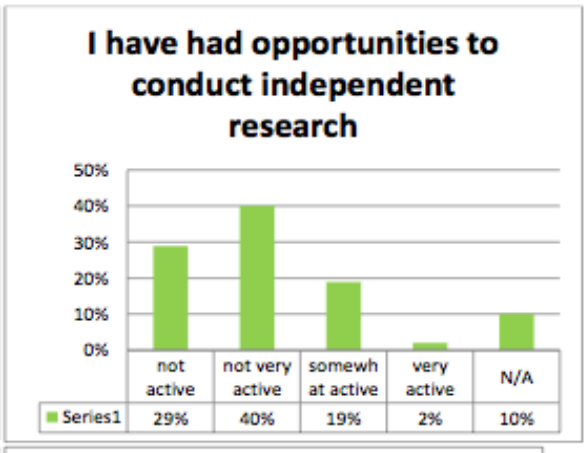
Respondents were asked to choose the top three areas they felt needed enhancement at CNU in order to improve student learning. Faculty & Staff reported 1) Experiential Learning (23.5%), 2) Global Awareness (15.5%), and 3) Intercultural Competence (14.9%) as their top three choices. Students reported 1) Experiential Learning (22%), 2) Global Awareness (16%), and 3) Civic Awareness (13%) as their top three choices. Thus, there was strong synergy from all university constituencies that Experiential Learning and Global Awareness were key topics for consideration.

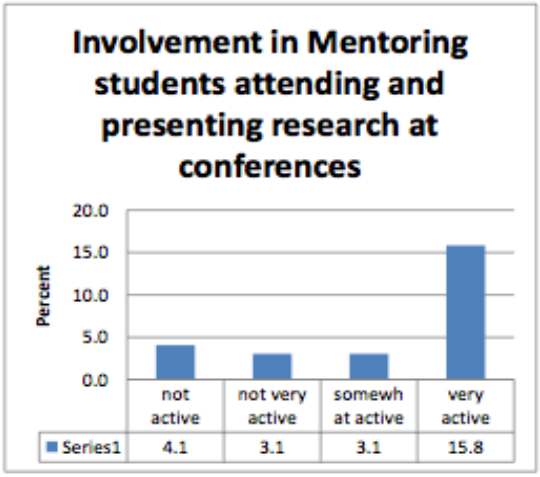


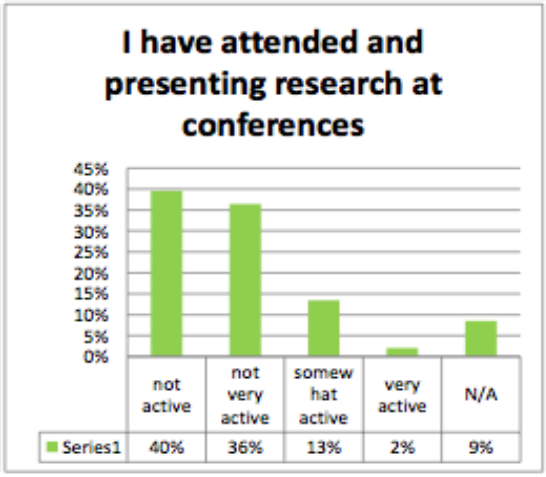
Respondents were then asked to rank their perception of university effectiveness on a variety of university initiatives related to these eight potential areas for improvement. Faculty and Staff reported that the three most ineffective aspects of current university initatitives included 1) Promoting Student Appreciation for Diversity (59.2%), 2) Developing Knowledge of National/Local Events (37.8%), and 3) Providing Valuable Real-World Experience Through Internships (19.9%). Student respondents indicated that they felt the top three most ineffective were 1) Developing Knowledge of National/Local Events (50%), 2) Promoting Student Appreciation for Diversity (41%) and 3) Providing Valuable Real-World Experience Through Internships (30%). Again, there was strong synergy across constituencies in these responses.

Two other interesting anomalies appeared in the survey data. First, faculty, staff and students report that CNU is effective/very effective at contributing to the welfare of the community. Yet when asked to assess student competence about community issues, both contingents overwhelmingly reported CNU students are below average (38.2% / 20% respectively) in their knowledge of local issues and events. Second, faculty and staff report that CNU is effective/very effective in providing students with independent research opportunities, and report high levels of involvement with student research. However, 69% of students report they are not (or not very) active in independent research. This correlates with the NSSE data indicating that only 5% of first year students and only 34% of seniors indicated that they worked on research projects with faculty members. The following charts capture this anomaly with the blue charts being reported by faculty and staff and the green charts being reported by students.









Overall, the review of institutional data indicated strong synergy among faculty, staff and students, indicating that as a university, we understand and have some agreement on where best to focus our institutional improvement efforts.

Topic Generation and Institutional Support (June 2015 – October 2015)
Based on the review of university data, the topic selection committee began drafting preliminary ideas for QEP topics in the summer. In July, the QEP director and one other member of the topic selection committee attended the SACSCOC Summer Institute and attended sessions related to Topic Selection. From these sessions, we were able to cull ideas from other institutions about how best to make the topic selection process work at our institution. We decided to pitch three broad preliminary topics to the entire university for feedback: *Captains Explore Diversity*, *Captains Learning Research Literacy*, and *Captains in the Know*.

Topic #1 – *Captains Explore Diversity* asked constituents to consider how we would define a diversity initiative in order to address diversity concerns reported in the institutional data. It offered three areas for consideration/discussion – Intellectual Diversity (in terms of a liberal arts education and respect for diverse beliefs/civil discourse), Campus/Cultural Diversity (in terms of student diversity and diversity programming), and Global Diversity (in terms of our focus on globalization in the curriculum and our study abroad initiatives). This topic was created to speak to the concerns about diversity raised in the internal survey, as well as to address some of our lowest indicators compared to peer aspirant institutions on the CLA+ and the NSSE (such as study abroad).

Topic #2 – *Captains Learning Research Literacy* asked constituents to consider how we see ourselves as contributing to student achievement in finding, assessing and utilizing information. It offered three areas for consideration/discussion – Learning the Research Alphabet (in terms of teaching research skills to students and ultimately translating that language between university and "real world" contexts), Learning Research Grammar (in terms of the foundations within specific disciplines related to research), and Learning Research Synthesis (in terms of applying research knowledge to independent efforts such as independent research, internships, or service learning experiences). This topic was created in response to the reported desire across constituencies to move into more experiential learning initiatives that students could connect to real world possibilities.

Topic #3 – *Captains in the Know* asked constituents to consider how we engage students with knowledge of their local and national environment. It offered three areas for consideration/discussion – Knowledge of National Events (in terms of making national events more central to campus discussions and offering opportunities for "real time" engagement with current national and international issues), Knowledge of Local Events (in terms of increasing student exploration and commitment to our local community), and Knowledge of Meaningful Community Living (in terms of increasing awareness of community connectedness and community welfare). This topic was created in response to the reported desire across constituencies for students to "know more" about the world around them.

When we returned to campus in August, our first course of action was to make university constituents aware of the three potential topics and the QEP process. In addition to the three topics broadly proposed, we decided to allow university constituents to propose additional topics to the selection committee. We decided to approach this with a two-tiered strategy targeting Faculty/Staff and Students separately.

Faculty and Staff: We held a series of Town Hall Information Sessions where the QEP Director and the Topic Selection Committee discussed our review of institutional data assessment and made data from our internal survey available to faculty and staff at the university, with 40 Staff Members and 49 Faculty Members attending. We also made the slides from the session available to those who were unable to attend the sessions on the Reaffirmation of Accreditation section of CNU's website. Following the Town Hall Information Sessions, the QEP Director organized and led 12 focus groups with faculty and staff to discuss each of the proposed topics, with 42 Staff Members and 42 Faculty Members attending. Participants at both events were encouraged to propose topics outside of the three broad ideas, but no new topics were proposed to the committee.

Students: The student member of our Topic Selection Committee coordinated with the University Fellows on campus to design a social media campaign to raise awareness about the QEP topic selection process. This began in September and culminated with six days of tabling in the David Student Union Breezeway (a high traffic area for students).

Tables consisted of information about the QEP topic, and allowed students to "vote" for which topic they preferred as well as allowed room for commentary and proposal of alternate topics. A total of 71 students participated in this process, with 35 students indicating support for Topic #3 (49%), 20 students indicating support for Topic #1 (28%), and 14 students indicating support for Topic #2 (20%). Although this was a lower turnout than anticipated, the committee notes that 319 students participated in the CLA+ assessment, 1,128 participated in the NSSE assessment, and 622 responded to our internal survey. Thus, in total over 2,200 students (over 40% of the student body) participated in some part of the process.

Additionally, there were two alternate topics proposed for consideration: Environmental Awareness and Sustainability and Building a Pool at the University.

In sum, the Topic Selection Committee spent three months consulting a variety of university constituents on potential QEP topics. These efforts produced additional qualitative data to pair with our institutional survey assessments.

Data Assessment and Topic Recommendations (November 2015)
Based on the qualitative responses received in focus groups and tabling, the Topic Selection Committee met and assessed each of our three topics for viability, interest, and sustainability. The committee discarded the two write in topics as Environmental Awareness and Sustainability was not fully developed or piloted, and building a pool is not connected to student learning. Responses to each topic and important commentary from the focus groups is articulated in this section.

Topic #1 – *Captains Explore Diversity*
In general, faculty and staff were supportive of Diversity as a topic for the QEP. In particular, faculty from the College of Arts & Humanities and the College of Social Science tended to favor launching a diversity topic. Focus groups achieved some consensus on how diversity currently operates on our campus including, but not limited to:

1. A perception that the administration is not interested in diversity: Numerous participants cited speeches from administrators identifying CNU as "ok" on diversity compared to our peers. Historically, CNU served more first-generation and minority students, but as we shifted to a residential liberal arts model the diversity on campus has also shifted. Respondents frequently cited that we have adopted a recruitment pattern that brings us a very monolithic student body that is overwhelmingly White, upper-middle-class, and conservative Christian. During this time period, the university has also increased its selectivity in student recruitment. This limits recruiters seeking qualified candidates for entry based on university requirements, particularly from lower-performing schools and lower-socioeconomic classes.
2. Our campus lacks the appropriate infrastructure to address diversity: We currently have one person on campus in charge of diversity initiatives. This position is housed in Student Affairs, and is a beginning, entry-level position for someone with a Master's degree in Higher education. As a result, we have had a revolving door of Diversity directors over the past several years. A number of participants articulated that in order to launch a diversity effort on campus, we would need to fundamentally commit to supporting and staffing a stand-alone Office of Diversity. It was also expressed that the person in charge of this effort may need to be on the academic side of the university instead of the student affairs side to help reduce turnover and provide a consistent advocate for diversity issues on campus.
3. Defining what we mean by diversity is key and potentially problematic: In a sense, all focus groups were torn with how to define and articulate "diversity." Some groups expressed concern that a focus on intellectual diversity (while aligned strongly with a liberal arts education) would too closely mirror our previous topic on critical thinking, potentially at the expense of dealing with diverse identities.

Many groups noted that this moves beyond race and ethnicity, citing that CNU has little diversity in other identity categories such as religion and sexuality. If we focus our efforts on campus and cultural diversity, we potentially fall into a "body count" mentality where accumulating individuals representing these identity categories becomes disconnected from student learning outcomes. Moreover, several constituents expressed that diversity across the curriculum is more suited to some disciplines (Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences) than others (Natural and Behavior Sciences and Business).

4. For the cost of the QEP budget, our outcomes would be small: All focus groups were informed that the average budget for the QEP process at an institution of our size is between $650-$800K, with $1M being a reasonable high-limit. Multiple participants expressed concern that funding a diversity project would take more monetary resources than the average QEP budget for an institution of our size. In addition, many expressed concerns about assessing diversity, particularly in how we would develop measurable student learning outcomes associated with diversity.

In sum, our CNU community seems to agree that we have problems with diversity on campus and a focused effort through the QEP would ultimately enhance student learning on our campus. Several productive and generative ideas related to study abroad, diversity programming on campus, and knowledge of our global environment appeared in the process. Thus, should we wish to launch a diversity initiative, there would be strong support for its adoption.

Topic #2 – *Captains Learning Research Literacy*

In general, faculty and staff were supportive of Research Literacy as a topic for the QEP. In particular, faculty from the College of Natural & Behavioral Sciences and the Luter School of Business tended to favor launching a research literacy topic. Focus groups achieved some consensus on how research initiatives on our campus currently operate, including:

1. A disconnect between research as an initiative and our definition of research: Several focus group members observed that administratively, we have stronger support for research. However, our definition of research across the university needs attention. There is a perception that research means traditional, academic research. Many focus group participants expressed concern that traditional academic research for all is not a model we should adopt, and several were excited about the possibility of expanding applied research initiatives (service learning, internships, etc.). If we could pull together several of the programs we have going on that include both traditional and applied approaches to research, we would greatly enhance the student learning experience at CNU.
2. Our campus lacks the infrastructure to support research initiatives: Similar to the first topic, many participants referenced our lack of infrastructure related to research. On more than one occasion, participants noted that we used to have a position of Director for Undergraduate Research, but that it was problematic in how "research" was defined and administrated. Faculty members cited numerous challenges for undergraduate research (IRB approval, travel funding, faculty remuneration/evaluation credit for research) that could be solved by reinstating the position of Director for Undergraduate Research. In doing so, they offered suggestions for modeling the position to the current Center for Effective Teaching

whereby the director consults a Board of representative faculty across the university. The person selected as Director would need to be able to coordinate and respond to a wide array of community needs regarding research – in both traditional and applied contexts.

3. Research literacy is already central to the university mission: Several participants commented on how undergraduate research experiences are already central to the university mission through our former 3 Sails and our current 4 Pillars approach. Moreover, by expanding a definition of research into applied contexts, work being done by staff in the Center for Community Engagement, in Arts programs, as well as the numerous internship programs available through the university could all be included in a more holistic vision of research literacy.
4. For the cost of the QEP budget, our outcomes would be greater: Given the disconnect in the institutional data between what faculty members report in terms of time spent with students on research and what students report in terms of their own research, it appears that working to "brand" research across the university in meaningful ways would shore up our assessment data. Less funding would be needed for infrastructure since there are current programs going on that could be tied into the QEP process (i.e., internships, study abroad, Summer Scholars).

Thus, there was strong support for research as a university-wide QEP topic. While there were some concerns about mandating "research for all," when paired with appeals for more applied research initiatives on campus, a broad reaching plan emphasizing research literacy is congruent with our liberal arts mission and focus. Thus, should we launch a research literacy topic, there would be strong support for its articulation.

Topic #3 – *Captains In the Know*

Faculty and Staff were largely unsupportive of Topic #3. Students, however, consistently expressed a preference for Topic #3. This split is perhaps explained by an observation made in several of the focus groups identifying Topic #3 as a number of learning outcomes that could be part of Topic #1 or Topic #2. Focus groups cited numerous challenges to the In the Know initiative on our campus including, but not limited to:

1. Of the three topics proposed, this would be the most difficult to assess: There was healthy debate about the viability of the topic, with many participants indicating that the tenets of the topic were too vague to assess appropriately. Others indicated that they would be easily assessable measures for how they were currently structured. This tended to cluster in the focus groups with participants seeing Topic #3 as a series of learning outcomes not connected to a broader topic. Most were supportive of trying to integrate pieces of Topic #3 into Topic #1 or Topic #2.
2. The appeal of Topic #3 lies in the integration of knowledge through a liberal arts education: Several participants indicated that the liberal arts mission is strongly connected to knowledge about one's local, national and international communities. Students also strongly responded to wanting to be more involved and connected to these ideas.

In general, the enthusiasm for Topic #3 was somewhat lackluster from faculty and staff, but students overwhelmingly wanted to see more applied learning opportunities in their education. Folding this aspect of Topic #3 into Topic #1 or Topic #2 would be fruitful.

Recommendation

Based on the initial review of institutional data, data collected through the internal survey process, and data collected through the qualitative focus groups and student tabling efforts, the QEP Topic Selection Committee recommends adopting some version of Topic #2 – Research Literacy as our QEP topic. We do so for a number of reasons:

1. It is the most strongly connected to our current university mission and objectives – One foundation of a strong liberal arts education is learning research literacy. Many small undergraduate institutions of our type and character across the country integrate meaningful research activities into student experiences on campus. At current, it is the only one of the three topics that is consistently and expressively articulated as central to CNU's mission and liberal arts philosophy.
2. It offers us the opportunity to formalize and centralize our efforts – One of the most consistently articulated frustrations across focus groups is that our university faculty and student populations have grown faster than our infrastructure. This topic would allow us to pull together a number of initiatives across campus in a way that highlights our uniqueness as an institution. Thinking holistically about research literacy in both traditional and applied contexts will augment the unique liberal arts learning environment at CNU.
3. It has the strongest potential to produce measurable results over the scope of the plan – Given that we need to implement the plan and provide meaningful assessment data by the year five interim report to SACSCOC, and that we already have a number of initiatives for research on campus moving in this direction, we are the most likely to be able to produce strong, measurable outcomes with this topic. We could centralize, expand and assess to lay the groundwork for stronger student learning outcomes.
4. It provides students with creative and innovative ways to apply their education – Designing a research initiative focused on literacy rather than just research alone allows us to connect to the fundamentals of a liberal arts education. Doing so will help students build the lives of significance we frequently talk to them about.

Although the Topic Selection Committee believes Topic #2 is our strongest QEP Topic proposal, we wish to note that there was strong, substantial support for Topic #1 – Diversity. The challenges to implementing it would be greater, and the assessment outcomes would most likely be smaller over time, but there are still meaningful ways in which a Diversity initiative could be adopted and run successfully. Should the administration wish to move in that direction, we could also craft a topic of significance. Ultimately, pieces of Topic #3 can be explored as SLOs for either Topic #1 or Topic #2.

Moving forward, the following potential learning outcomes emerged in the focus group sessions as possibilities for assessing student achievement in research literacy. Upon graduating from CNU, students should be able to:

1. Differentiate between scholarly and popular literature, primary and secondary research, and current vs. historical research.
2. Analyze information in order to determine if it is an appropriate source for their current information need.

3. Evaluate information in order to determine its reliability, validity, accuracy, authority, timeliness, point of view or bias.
4. Select the most appropriate investigative methods or resources (interviews, fieldwork, lab experiments, library catalog, databases, Internet, etc.) in order to retrieve relevant information.
5. Summarize what one learned about a particular topic for a lay audience.
6. Participate in applied research initiatives appropriate for the student's field of study and post-college career plans.
7. Design and conduct an independent research effort appropriate to the student's field of study and post-college career plans.

These potential learning outcomes are a starting point for the QEP Strategic Planning Team to begin its work on researching and writing our proposal. Should you require additional information from the Topic Selection Committee, please contact the QEP Director. With the submission of this formal recommendation, the charge of the Topic Selection Committee is officially completed.