QEP SC Notes for February 26, 2010

Present: Andy Baker, Rosalie Carpenter, Claudia Gatewood, Carolyn Nicholson (note taker), Brigid Noonan, Alex Sanchez, Greg Sapp (chair), John Tichener

The meeting began at 3:00 pm.

Announcements
We began with some announcements. Most importantly, we have decided that those representing the College of Law do not need to meet with those from the DeLand and Celebration campuses since we are beginning to focus on initiatives for our students. Initiatives will be different for the different populations, so the chair will be in contact with the representatives from the College of Law separately. We will come together again for our meeting in Celebration.

We have not yet decided on the date for the meeting in Celebration, though it will most likely be either March 27 or April 10. March 13 is approaching too quickly for the Celebration meeting to be productive. We hope to finalize our initiatives at that meeting. The chair has heard from most, but not all members of the steering committee and will try to set the date for the Celebration meeting before our next, regularly-scheduled QEP SC meeting.

Subgroups and Initiatives
At the close of our previous meeting (February 12), we divided ourselves into five or six groups based on themes or areas (see previous meeting minutes). After that meeting, the chair had discussions with a couple of the members of the QEP SC and decided it would be better to divide ourselves into three subgroups: one for the College of Law and its possible initiative; one focused on undergraduate students as they transition into Stetson and through their first year; and one for undergraduate students as they transition through their time at Stetson to graduation. The chair suggested that the previous divisions may still be maintained but that each subgroup should work as a whole to develop initiatives appropriate to the focus of the subgroup. The subgroups are composed as follows:

Summer transition into first-year success
Mentoring – Brigid Noonan, Alex Sanchez, Claudia Gatewood
Small group learning – Sasha Schmid, Rosalie Carpenter

First-year success through graduation
Advising – Carolyn Nicholson, John Pearson
Student Services Center/Strategies – Abbie Heisner, Jeannie Kiriwas
Co-Curricular learning – Diane Everett, Andy Baker

College of Law Transitions
College of Law Transitions—Linda Anderson, Christa Queen-Sutherland

Each subgroup will begin to work independently toward presenting two or three initiatives for consideration by the QEP SC. The chair noted that there will be some overlap and that individual members of subgroups should feel free to work with members of another subgroup.
The chair urged the groups to come up with two or three initiatives for presentation to the entire QEP SC that we would discuss and select as a group. For the initiatives, groups must present research indicating how the initiative worked at another school or why it would work at Stetson given our situation. The groups should think about human resources, financial resources, the mission of the University, and how we will assess the effect of the initiative.

Retention Issues and Possible Solutions
Much of our QEP impetus is the University’s problematic retention rate. Our retention rate of 77% has remained relatively stable (around 80%) in recent years, but previous efforts have not had much positive impact. While some of the retention problem results from students’ financial difficulties, there is widespread acknowledgement from various stakeholders that the first year experience here is less than ideal. The group agreed that the first year experience is critical and that students need to get engaged with groups (both in class and with student organizations). These forms of engagement have consistently proven successful – the more involved students are, the more likely they are to return. The chair reinforced that retention rate will not be the sole measurement for our initiatives’ success (although it will be one of them). Our group will need to review/develop other measures available for assessing first-year engagement on campus.

As an example of a group of students who seem to be making the transition into Stetson successfully, the chair explained the introduction of Bonner students to the campus community. The Bonner students arrive on campus 2-3 days earlier than other first-year students for training and community building. They are involved early in community engagement off-campus and interact with the upperclassmen Bonner students very early. Since the inception of the Bonner program in the fall of 2005, Bonner students have a 92.2% retention rate. While the chair noted that the percentage of first-generation college students among the Bonners is higher than the University average (about 50% of incoming Bonners are first-generation college students), we have to be careful about drawing conclusions about what makes the Bonners retain so well. They do develop a close community before classes begin, they have a strong support group with each other and from faculty and staff, and they are engaged in the community. They also have very good financial aid packages.

It was noted that the Music School also has first-year students on campus early, auditioning and interacting with faculty and students. The Music School retention rate is higher than the University as a whole.

It seems clear, based on just a few examples, that the early engagement of students (in academics as well as social life on campus) is critical to long-term retention. It should be noted, however, that both Bonner and Music successes are tied to the academic side of the college experience, with the clear indication of mentors that expectations are high for these students. The Steering Committee will be reviewing the Southwestern University model for entering students, where first-year students come in a full week early for classes, resources, and bonding. Rosalie Carpenter will call Southwestern and get additional information for our group.

Rethinking First-Year Seminars and Advising
With the undergraduate schools moving toward first-year seminars for all incoming first-year students, one key area of engagement will be these courses where the students develop a cohort. We discussed
the possibility of having the FSEM instructors also serve as the students’ first-year academic advisors. A great advantage of this would be that the advisors should know their students well enough to advise them academically and also to mentor them as they develop. This will, however, necessitate significant faculty development so that each advisor knows the general education curriculums of all three undergraduate schools well enough to advise her or his students well and also the contacts across the University for different majors and programs in which advisees may be interested. Contact among the FSEM instructors and their students can begin before classes begin to help students transition into Stetson better. It was noted that the University has never done much for commuter or transfer students to increase engagement. This issue was particularly noted for future review and inclusion.

We again discussed the possibility of involving staff across the University in first-year seminars to help students be more aware of resources that are available to them. We would need as many staff persons committed FSEMs as faculty. While there was some question about our being able to get the number of staff persons to commit, the staff members of the QEP all said there was a lot of interest among the staff at Stetson to be more involved with students on a regular basis.

**Faculty Development**

The chair urged both undergraduate subgroups to look at faculty development issues related to their areas of focus. As noted above, if we change the structure of advising, we will need to make sure faculty who are involved either as first-year advisors or as major or program advisors know their programs well. There will also be a need for all advisors to have a strong, general awareness of programs and majors across the University to be the most effective advisors. John Pearson noted in a previous meeting that he is already involved in this kind of advising with the General Studies Program students and that it works well.

Should we choose to require a common text for our students, we will need significant faculty development to help faculty integrate the text into their courses seamlessly. Seminars should be held on teaching the text and leading discussions based on the text to maximize the student experience with the text.

We talked about the need to incentivize the FSEM program to get the best faculty teaching in it, not that the best faculty would not be willing to do it for “free,” but because faculty believe they are asked to do more and more without any pay increase. Incentivizing the program will reinforce its value and should keep good faculty teaching in it longer.

**Remaining Timeline**

**End of March/Early April:** Subcommittees’ proposed initiatives (with supporting research) are identified. Basic structure and resource needs of initiatives should be identified.

**April:** Specific initiatives are selected; Steering Committee refines QEP in terms of implementation, budget, human resource needs, facilities needs

**May 1:** Steering Committee reports to Provost.

**Summer:** Provost Paul, Chair Sapp, and SACS coordinator Tichenor refine QEP document, identify resource capability, and outline a specific budget.

Our next meeting will be on March 12, 2010, in the DeLand Hall Boardroom.
Many thanks to Carolyn Nicholson for providing good notes for our minutes!

The meeting adjourned at 4:30 pm.