

THE QEP TOPIC TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION TO THE PROVOST

May 2020

Stetson University's Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) is part of the ten-year reaffirmation of accreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). The Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), submitted six weeks in advance of the On-Site Reaffirmation Review Committee, is "(1) a topic identified through ongoing, comprehensive and evaluation processes, (2) has a broad-based support of institutional constituencies, (3) focuses on improving specific student learning outcomes and/or student successes, (4) commits resources to initiate, implement The Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement 9, and complete the QEP, and (5) includes a plan to assess achievement." (<https://sacscoc.org/accrediting-standards/reaffirmation-process/>)

While a detailed and logistically thorough plan will be developed over the coming months, with widespread involvement from all constituents, our task has been to select a general topic on which to begin focusing the plan. We sought ideas that would be supported by the mission of the University, the strategic planning already underway, and the ongoing results of a robust assessment initiative. These expectations are not just recommended by SACS; they are examples of an institution whose plan is constant improvement.

The Task Force began its work in September 2019. Minutes and notes are available [here](#). By February 2020, the Task Force had narrowed down the potentials to four broad groupings:

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|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1. High Impact Practices | 3. Advising, Coaching, and Mentoring |
| 2. Critical and Intellectual Skills | 4. Integrative Learning skills |

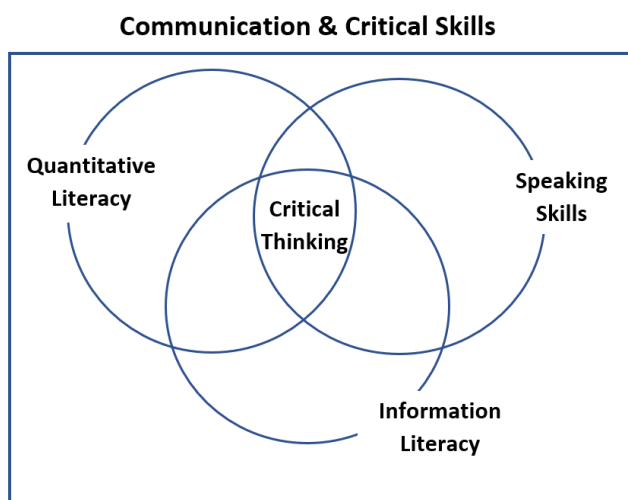
We believe that any one of these broad areas would be a suitable QEP for Stetson University. Seeking more specific and directive input from the community, the Task Force collaborated with members of Faculty Senate Executive Committee to develop a campus-wide survey that asked a number of important questions about preference, estimation of importance, and explanations supporting positions.

Therefore, after extensive research, discussion, and planning, and confirmed by the results of a campus survey, **the QEP Task Force formally recommends that the QEP topic be Communication and Critical Skills, with focus on speaking skills, quantitative literacy, and information literacy.**

Insights

The Task Force developed a number of insights as a result of its work over the course of the year. Not all of those insights can be captured in the formal recommendation of a QEP topic, but sharing those insights with the implementation group may prove useful.

1. The nature of a university whose colleagues are interested in each other's ideas leads to a natural impulse to want the QEP topic to respond to ALL ideas. Again, any one of the four broad topics would be suitable for a QEP. A real risk to the quality of the work will be to allow it to be spread thin in its efforts to meet all needs. We urge the work groups who follow the QEP Topic Selection Task Force to recognize that the power of a QEP is best when focused and directed narrowly.



2. Discussion opportunities at virtually every step of the process highlighted the perceived need for student learning to be improved in the areas of quantitative reasoning, speaking, and information literacy. General Education assessment results in all the critical and intellectual skill areas reveal mediocre levels of achievement, so it is no surprise that survey data indicated a broad preference for “critical thinking,” which we take as a statement about the umbrella need for stronger abilities across the board. (see Figure 1 for assessment data) When the Task Force considered precisely what goes into “critical thinking,” however, we were reminded that critical thinking comprises a collection of vital components, including clear thinking about information and about numeric data. Thus, we take the opportunity to focus specifically where our objective assessment data leads us: quantitative and information literacy. This is not to suggest that other elements of critical skills should be ignored; however, the QEP focuses on the areas of demonstrable need.
3. The Task Force recommendation also focuses on the ability to *communicate* those literacies effectively to others. That focus results from our very clear understanding, which is reinforced by the learning outcomes typical of senior project and capstone courses, that developing a high level of skill with a particular literacy is not enough. The Task Force recommendation, therefore, deliberately opens a long-closed door to fostering and enhancing learning around speaking skills with which to communicate learning—to use the language of our own Speaking general learning outcome, we want students to be able to “speak in an understandable, organized, and audience-appropriate fashion to explain their ideas, express their feelings, or support a conclusion.”

We see several ways to enact this new emphasis: increasing tutoring support for speaking, intentional programming for speaking across the curriculum, and identifying areas of faculty expertise and leadership for the oral competency element of the QEP.

4. Survey data indicates a strong faculty, student, and staff interest in high impact practices (HIPs), particularly internships and certain types of capstone experiences. During focus groups, a number of faculty and students pointed to the significance of study abroad experiences in learning cultural competencies, self-confidence, and global awareness. It seems possible that implementing a Communication and Critical Skills QEP could involve some degree of connection to one or more HIPs.
5. Students and staff spoke clearly and consistently about the need for work devoted to enhancing student success through advising/mentoring/coaching. Faculty in survey and discussion data seemed to have contradictory reactions. While some faculty discussion centered on the effectiveness and appropriateness of the faculty advising model at an institution like Stetson, at least one discussion spoke about the need to reconsider the advising model, not just because effective advising is a high impact practice but also because a perception that any single entity “owns” advising seems counterproductive if not divisive. It seems possible, given the QEP topic of “Communication and Critical Skills,” to define the ability to reflect on one’s own learning as a critical skill, which might begin to address some of the valid concerns raised by staff and students. We note here that existing structures to build this out already exist in the Advising Labs administered by Student Success.
6. Finally, the Task Force recognizes the need for an outcome for the QEP. While “increase in student learning of X%” is a clear and measurable goal, we must also ask “to what purpose?” To that end, we suggest championing our graduates’ employability, as well as admittance to graduate programs, as a result of these skills. If the Stetson graduate can communicate effectively about data, numeric and otherwise, the Stetson graduate can claim a number of skills we can be proud. Stetson might set goals in collaboration with Career and Professional Development. A second suggestion is a two or three year engagement, intentionally programmed, with Career, which would provide students with better abilities overall to meet the demands on the job market.

The following explains the process by which we made this decision.

SACS accreditation expectation 7.2 reads as follows:

The institution has a Quality Enhancement Plan that (a) has a topic identified through its ongoing, comprehensive planning and evaluation processes; (b) has broad-based support of institutional constituencies; (c) focuses on improving specific student learning outcomes and/or student success; (d) commits resources to initiate, implement, and complete the QEP; and (e) includes a plan to assess achievement.

In September of 2019, Provost Noel Painter appointed a QEP Task Force charged specifically with identifying a QEP topic that will improve student learning and/or student success. A broad range of leaders from faculty, staff, and students comprised the Task Force members, including representation from Faculty Senate, Campus Life and Student Success, Institutional Research and Effectiveness, the School of Music, the School of Business Administration, the College of Arts and Sciences, Student Government, University General Education Committee, Core Learning Committee, and University Committee on Curriculum and Policy. Task Force members include:

- Jesus Alfonzo (Music)
- Angela Henderson (IRE),
- Stacy Collins (Academic Success),
- Lisa Coulter (CAS),
- Joseph Francis (student rep),
- Daniel J Hendrick (student rep),
- Colin MacFarlane (Campus Life and Student Success),
- Stuart Michelson (SoBA and co-chair),
- Megan O’Neill (CAS and co-chair),
- Harry Price (CAS and Faculty Senate),
- Tom Vogel (CAS)

(a) has a topic identified through its ongoing, comprehensive planning and evaluation processes

The Task Force met every two weeks, beginning in September 2019. The Task Force began by ensuring wide understanding of its task and the parameters by which SACS will evaluate the choice of the topic.

The Task Force referred to Stetson’s established priority language around “student learning” and “student success,” relying on this language to help define terms and scope. The Task Force consulted Stetson’s two-year “roll ahead” plan, meant to provide short term guidance in anticipation of the arrival of a new university president, in addition to the Stetson Strategic Plan (2015-2019). These documents offered the Task Force guiding language, for example these selections from the “roll ahead” plan in reference to learning as well as student success:

Learning Excellence: Through annual cycles of curriculum review and overall insight into our instructional programs, develop advanced methods to assure the highest opportunities for student learning. Examples of this include review and revision of FSEMs and Focus Orientation, expansion of student access to meaningful experiential learning

experiences, continued improvement as a result of program review, and more universal implementation of academic and non-academic assessment.

And

Advising and Engagement: Review and revise advising and engagement activities based on best practices for institutions like Stetson. Examples include evaluation of faculty advising, promotion of advisor development, creation of clear pathways for Discovery students and increased awareness of the importance of effective advising.

The Task Force also reviewed recent campus and curriculum movements toward enhancing student success and student learning (for example, an initiative promoting problem-based learning, a pilot group studying integrative learning, and a task force studying student advising).

Finally, the Task Force researched and reviewed the available evidence and existing campus and curricular structures on which the topic might build. Members of the Task Force agreed that any existing structures would be a benefit to any given topic as both **relevant** to institutional capacity to undertake the topic and **integral** to achieving vital focus on student learning and/or student success. This research included, among other things, existing structures such as the high impact practices (HIPs) already built into the Stetson curriculum and the faculty-driven model of student advising. In addition, we reviewed more than a decade's worth of ongoing assessment initiatives and results (including general education and program-level assessments in both skill areas and knowledge areas).

(b) has broad-based support of institutional constituencies

The Task Force identified the primary institutional constituencies to be, in no particular order, students, faculty, and staff. Beginning in January of 2020 and continuing through March 27, Task Force members presented a range of potential topic areas for discussion and input to a wide array of these constituencies at a variety of venues. At each of these meetings, the attendees indicated support of the topics identified by the Task Force, with some topics gaining more traction than others depending on the affiliation of the people in the group.

Beginning in September, 2019, with a lengthy list of potential topics (ranging from a second year experience through undergraduate research to study abroad and other high impact practices), the Task Force considered a number of questions including what assessment and evaluation data were available, what existing structures might already exist to capitalize, what topics could make a substantial difference in student learning and/or student success, and what discussions with faculty, staff, and students have revealed.

By far the most significant influences on our decision-making processes have been the many opportunities for staff, faculty, and students to tell us what they thought. The chart below

indicates the variety of venues in which faculty, staff, students, and administration could hear our progress and make suggestions about future steps. In all these formal and informal venues, members of the Stetson community talked about dreams that all students might be able to have a study abroad experience; fears that students are graduating with poor quantitative reasoning skills; and hopes for an enhanced senior research experience. We heard about the long-held concerns about student advising and we heard about the value of student internships. Finally, we heard a number of suggestions that were admirable in scope and potential benefit but seemed not to need the special emphasis of a QEP.

Venue	Type	Date
Provost's Leadership Meeting	Informational	1-8-2020
University faculty meeting	informational	1-24-2020
A&S Faculty meeting	informational	2-7-2020
Faculty Senate	informational	2-10-2020
Staff Advisory Council	informational	2-18-2020
Council of Undergraduate Associate Deans (CUAD)	informational	2-25-2020
Student Governance Assoc	Informational	Cancelled by SGA
Staff	Formative discussion	3-10-2020
Faculty	Formative discussion	3-10-2020
Students	Formative discussion	3-10-2020
Faculty	Formative discussion	3-11-2020
Faculty	Formative discussion	3-13-2020
Students	Formative discussion	3-13-2020
School of Music faculty meeting	Formative discussion	3-13-2020
Staff	Formative discussion	3-17-2020 (COVID cancellation)
Open session	Formative discussion	3/24/2020 (COVID cancellation)
School of Business faculty meeting	Formative discussion	3/27/2020
Open Session	Formative discussion	3/27/2020
Senate Exec Meeting	Discussion & affirmation of recommendation	4/22/2020
Faculty Senate Meeting	Discussion & affirmation of recommendation	4/27/2020

University Faculty Meeting	Open discussion on recommendation	4/30/2020

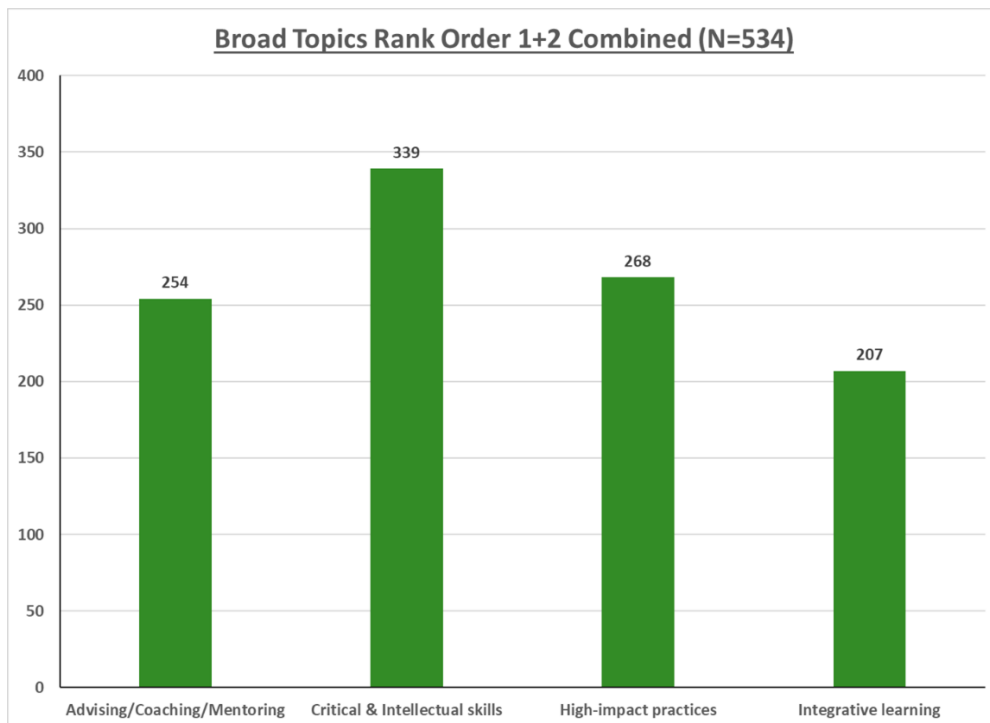
To ensure that all constituents had a chance to be heard and to allow those who could not attend any of the open forums to provide their opinions, members of the Task Force, with the input of members of Faculty Senate Executive Committee, developed a survey. Released on April 6, 2020, the survey asked campus participants to both rank and rate the potentials about which so many discussions and forums had been held.

A summary of the data from the survey supports the QEP Task Force recommendations. The survey totaled 950 responses, with complete data from 685 respondents. Survey participants include: 384 students, 188 faculty, 101 staff, and 12 administrative/other. The most telling results of the survey shows strong support for Critical and Intellectual Skills in the ranking below.

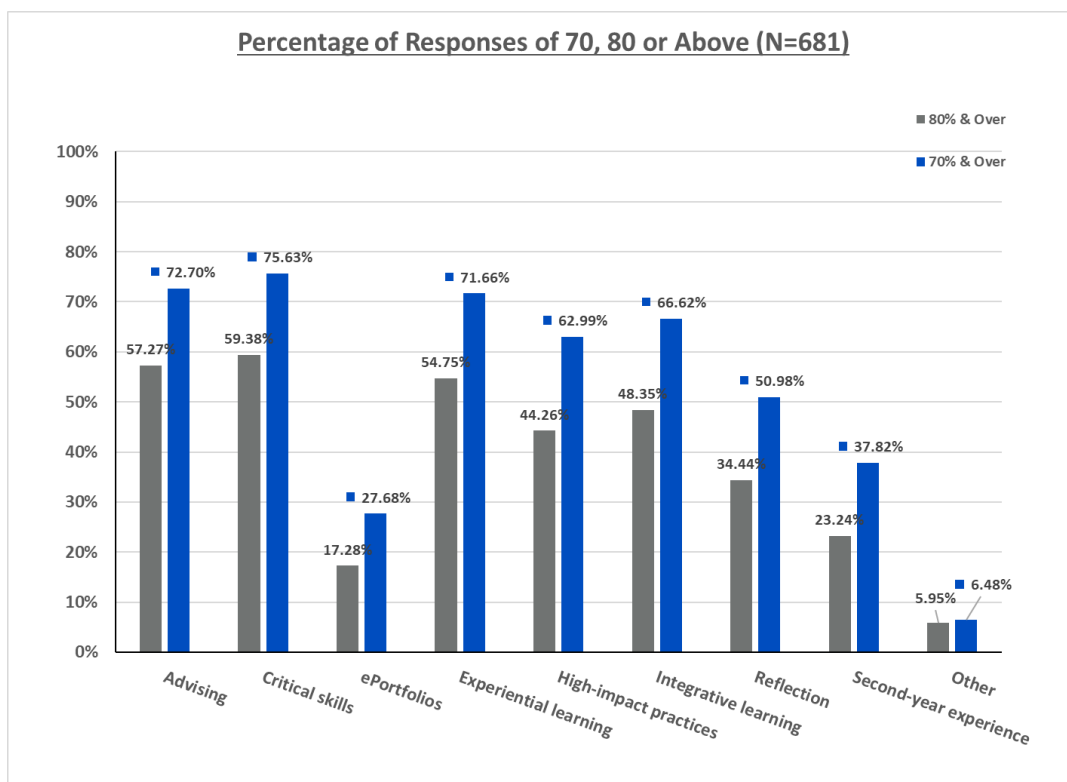
	Advising/Coaching/ Mentoring	Critical & Intellectual skills	High-impact practices	Integrative learning
1	159 (29.78%)	179 (33.52%)	133 (24.91%)	63 (11.80%)
2	95 (17.79%)	160 (29.96%)	135 (25.28%)	144 (26.97%)
3	108 (20.22%)	117 (21.91%)	140 (26.22%)	169 (31.65%)
4	172 (32.21%)	78 (14.61%)	126 (23.60%)	158 (29.59%)
1 + 2	254 (47.57%)	339 (63.48%)	268 (50.19%)	207 (38.76%)

The data segmented by respondent group also strongly supports Critical Thinking.

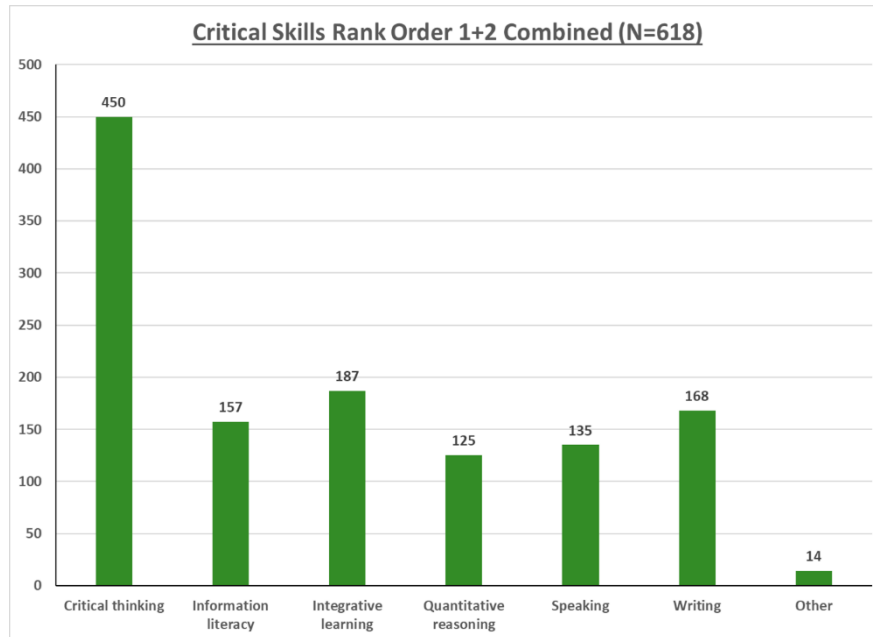
	Advising/Coaching/ Mentoring	Critical & Intellectual skills	High-impact practices	Integrative learning
Student	150 (55.15%)	150 (55.15%)	127 (46.69%)	117 (43.01%)
Faculty	46 (26.74%)	143 (83.14%)	96 (55.81%)	59 (34.30%)
Staff	54 (67.50%)	40 (50.00%)	39 (48.75%)	27 (33.75%)
Administration	3 (37.50%)	6 (75.00%)	4 (50.00%)	3 (37.50%)



The survey asked respondents to rate from 0% to 100% their preference for the primary categories discussed during the open forums. Using these ratings, the graph below provides results of those that rated categories at 70% and 80% or higher. These results provide further support for Critical Skills.



As we drill down further into the survey results, we find (on the graph below) further support, both in total and segmented by respondent group, for Critical Thinking, Information Literacy, Integrative Learning, Quantitative Reason, Speaking, and Writing.

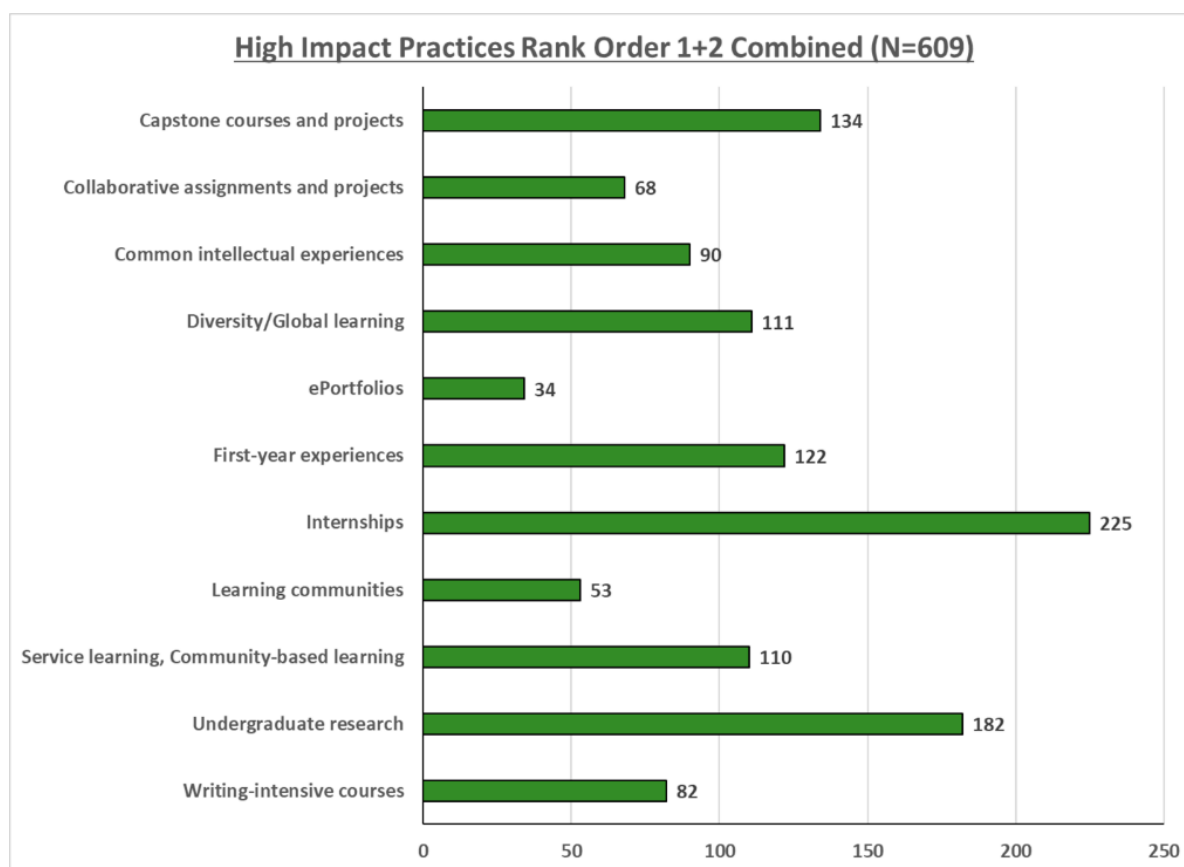


	Critical thinking	Information literacy	Integrative learning	Quantitative reasoning	Speaking	Writing	Other
Student	245 (72.70%)	83 (24.63%)	123 (36.50%)	58 (17.21%)	82 (24.33%)	76 (22.55%)	7 (2.08%)
Faculty	138 (75.82%)	50 (27.47%)	40 (21.98%)	50 (27.47%)	24 (13.19%)	58 (31.87%)	4 (2.20%)
Staff	59 (66.29%)	22 (24.72%)	24 (26.97%)	14 (15.73%)	27 (30.34%)	29 (32.58%)	3 (3.37%)
Administration	7 (87.50%)	1 (12.50%)	0 (0%)	2 (25.00%)	1 (12.50%)	5 (62.50%)	0 (0%)

The table below provides ranking results for faculty. Summing the top two ranks provides further support for Critical Thinking, Information Literacy, Quantitative Reason, and Writing.

	Critical thinking	Information literacy	Integrative learning	Quantitative reasoning	Speaking	Writing	Other
1	94 (51.65%)	15 (8.24%)	27 (14.84%)	19 (10.44%)	8 (4.40%)	16 (8.79%)	3 (1.65%)
2	44 (24.18%)	35 (19.23%)	13 (7.14%)	31 (17.03%)	16 (8.79%)	42 (23.08%)	1 (0.55%)
3	27 (14.84%)	32 (17.58%)	25 (13.74%)	22 (12.09%)	30 (16.48%)	45 (24.73%)	1 (0.55%)
4	10 (5.49%)	37 (20.33%)	19 (10.44%)	34 (18.68%)	41 (22.53%)	39 (21.43%)	2 (1.10%)
5	1 (0.55%)	34 (18.68%)	38 (20.88%)	32 (17.58%)	53 (29.12%)	23 (12.64%)	1 (0.55%)
6	5 (2.75%)	27 (14.84%)	58 (31.87%)	43 (23.63%)	32 (17.58%)	15 (8.24%)	2 (1.10%)
7	1 (0.55%)	2 (1.10%)	2 (1.10%)	1 (0.55%)	2 (1.10%)	2 (1.10%)	172 (94.51%)
1 + 2	138 (75.82%)	50 (27.47%)	40 (21.98%)	50 (27.47%)	24 (13.19%)	58 (31.87%)	4 (2.20%)

While High Impact Practices is recommended as a possible supporting topic, not a primary topic, the graph below provides data on the higher preferred HIP areas.



(c) focuses on improving specific student learning outcomes and/or student success;

Figure 1 Gen Ed Critical Skill Assessment Results

Skill assessed	Year Assessed	Methods	Results
Critical Thinking	2008	CLA*	80% percentile
Writing	2009	Embedded, authentic FSEM samples	82% proficiency FY 76% proficiency SR
Speaking	2010	Embedded, authentic samples	66% proficiency
Integrative Learning	2012	Embedded, authentic JSEM samples	60% proficiency
Information Literacy	2013	SAILS (all FY students)	15% proficiency
Speaking	2013		50% proficiency
Writing	2014	Embedded, authentic samples	82% proficiency FY 95% proficiency JR
Critical Thinking	2014		86% percentile
Quantitative Reasoning	2015	Embedded, authentic exam	56% proficiency
Information Literacy	2016-19	Embedded, growth from FSEM to JSEM	44% proficiency (many samples unscorable)
Writing	2018	Embedded, authentic samples	45% proficiency Awaiting internal confirmation of AAC&U results
Quantitative	2019	embedded	pending
Critical Thinking	2019	Embedded, authentic	pending
Speaking	2019	Embedded, authentic	pending
Integrative learning	2020	Indirect assessment; embedded writing samples	Baseline assessment: continue faculty development

