

Identification of QEP Topic

The QEP Committee was founded by August 2016 with a broad-based membership of 27 College constituents, including the SACSCOC Leadership Team, full- and part-time faculty representation from academic departments and campus locations, staff from each College unit, students, an alumnus, and a foundation trustee. Because of the emphasis on the improvement of student learning, the need of faculty commitment, and the necessity of a faculty-driven QEP process, a Department of Languages faculty was selected to serve as the QEP Committee Chair. The Committee met for the first time on September 2, 2016, and discussed the purpose of the QEP, institutional data, and feedback collected from the aforementioned topic survey. At this meeting, the Committee concluded that the QEP should incorporate critical thinking and First Year Experience in an effort to improve retention at MSCC. This motion passed unanimously, and the Committee met regularly thereafter to hone the topic and to create a meaningful project, aligned with the College's Mission and Strategic Plan, that is timely, specific, sustainable, measurable, and achievable.

On September 22, 2016, MSCC hosted its Strategic Planning meeting, and the SACSCOC Leadership Team, including the QEP Chair, presented its initial work on the QEP. The Strategic Planning meeting included faculty, curriculum chairs, deans, college-wide department heads, all unit vice presidents, foundation trustees, and a member of the Tennessee Board of Regents, MSCC's governing board. In the presentation, the team introduced the QEP Committee, defined QEP (including Core Requirement 2.12 and Comprehensive Standard 3.3.2), emphasized the college-wide nature of the project, and presented a timeline for Committee work, final topic selection, implementation, and QEP document submission, as well as an opportunity for questions and feedback.

The QEP Committee met for a second time on October 14, 2016; the committee focused on critical thinking and decided that a critical-thinking QEP would be best housed in MSCC's First Year Experience course. The group debated whether First Year Experience should be required for all MSCC first-time freshmen or all first-time freshmen required to take Learning Support (remedial/developmental) coursework. Because approximately 75% of all MSCC first-time freshmen are required to take Learning Support in at least one category (English, reading, and/or mathematics) and because the Learning Support population is defined by the Tennessee Board of Regents as academically underprepared (at risk), the Committee decided to focus on

all Learning Support students. The Committee also began to consider assessments, specifically considering existing measures of critical thinking, and the group identified the ETS Proficiency Profile (required for all MSCC graduates) and the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE), which would allow the College to utilize existing questions and questions specifically designed by the College for the QEP. The ETS specifically measures graduates' critical thinking abilities. Historically, MSCC graduates have scored low on the critical thinking measure of the ETS: 4% of students proficient in critical thinking (2012-2013), 3% of students proficient (2013-2014), 4% of students proficient (2014-2015), 2% of students proficient (2015-2016), and 2% of students proficient (2016-2017).

Table 3.1: ETS Proficiency Profile

ETS Critical Thinking Proficiency Score 2012-2017		
Year	Proficient	Not Proficient
2012-13	4%	76%
2013-14	3%	78%
2014-15	4%	76%
2015-16	2%	77%
2016-17	2%	77%

MSCC students have historically scored below means for medium-sized colleges and MSCC's cohort group on several critical thinking questions on CCSSE (Table 3.2). Means marked with asterisks in the following table are identified by CCSSE as significant differences. These questions, in addition to CCSSE add-on questions, are identified as an external assessment, as well. For "Analyzing the basic elements of an idea, experience, or theory," "Applying theories or concepts to practical problems or in new situations," and "Using information you have read or heard to perform a new skill," MSCC students scored below the means for each of the previous six years. For "Synthesizing and organizing ideas, information, or experiences in new ways," MSCC students scored below the means for five of the previous six years. For "Making

judgments about the value or soundness of information, arguments, or methods,” MSCC students scored below the means for four of the previous six years.

Table 3.2: Relevant CCSSE Scores

CCSSE Critical Thinking Means			
Item/Year	Motlow Mean	Medium College Mean	Cohort Mean
Item 5: During the current school year, how much has your coursework at this college emphasized the following mental activities?			
1 = Very little, 2 = Some, 3 = Quite a bit, 4 = Very much			
5b. Analyzing the basic elements of an idea, experience, or theory.			
2012	2.80	2.90	2.90
2013	2.84	2.90	2.91
2014	2.81	2.91	2.92
2015	2.82	2.92	2.93
2016	2.80	2.93	2.94
2017	2.84	2.90	2.91
5c. Synthesizing and organizing ideas, information, or experiences in new ways.			
2012	2.80	2.77	2.78
2013	2.69	2.77	2.78
2014	2.73	2.78	2.79
2015	2.66	2.80	2.80
2016	2.71	2.81	2.81
2017	2.76	2.87	2.88
5d. Making judgements about the value or soundness of information, arguments, or methods.			
2012	2.56	2.57	2.61
2013	2.61	2.60	2.61
2014	2.62	2.62	2.62
2015	2.56	2.63	2.64
2016	2.60	2.64	2.65
2017	2.63	2.64	2.66
5e. Applying theories or concepts to practical problems or in new situations.			
2012	2.61	2.70	2.71
2013	2.57	2.71	2.72
2014	2.66	2.72	2.73
2015	2.59	2.74	2.74
2016	2.55	2.74*	2.75*
2017	2.59	2.74	2.76
5f. Using information you have read or heard to perform a new skill.			
2012	2.68	2.83	2.83
2013	2.65	2.83	2.84
2014	2.77	2.86	2.86
2015	2.62	2.87*	2.87*
2016	2.69	2.87	2.87
2017	2.64	2.85*	2.86*

On December 9, 2016, the QEP Committee crafted a definition of critical thinking to guide the committee's work. After review of various ways to define critical thought, the Committee selected the definition fostered by Critical Thinking Community, a website sponsored by the Foundation for Critical Thinking:

Critical thinking is the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action. In its exemplary form, it is based on universal intellectual values that transcend subject matter divisions: clarity, accuracy, precision, consistency, relevance, sound evidence, good reasons, depth, breadth, and fairness.

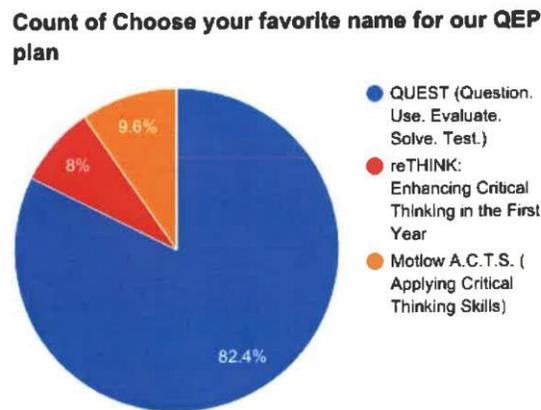
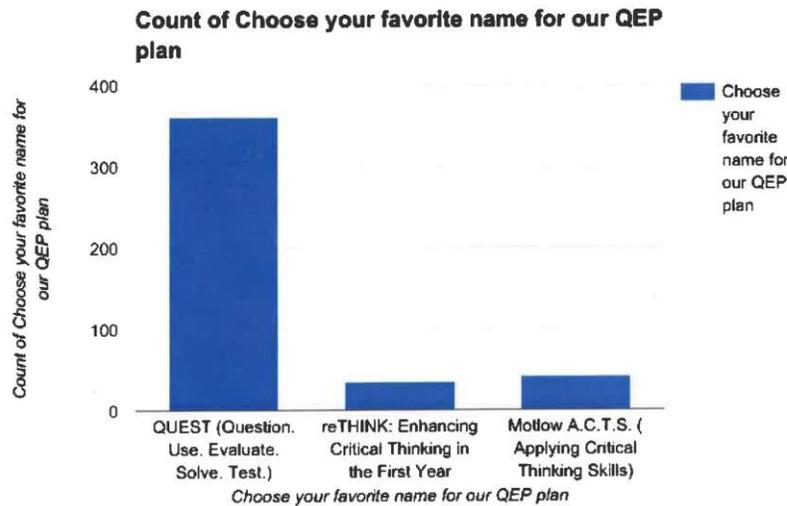
In addition, the Committee created six subcommittees: Literature Review, Internal Assessment, External Assessment, Faculty Professional Development, Marketing, and Student Affairs. The chair tasked each subcommittee to work on its focal area during January and report work and findings to the QEP Committee during the February meeting.

At the February 24, 2017, meeting, each subcommittee presented its findings. First, the Internal Assessment Subcommittee recommended an ePortfolio internal assessment as part of the First Year Experience course and suggested an existing critical thinking rubric for assessment. Second, the External Assessment Subcommittee recommended the ETS Proficiency Profile and the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) with college-specific add-on questions as external assessments. Next, the Faculty Professional Development subcommittee suggested the creation of an online shell through the College's course management system (Desire2Learn) to facilitate faculty training opportunities and recommended Dr. John Eigenhauer, Critical Thinking professor at Taft College in California, to present to MSCC faculty. The Marketing Subcommittee suggested a campus-wide contest to name the QEP and the creation of videos, t-shirts, signage, and a website. The Student Affairs Subcommittee discussed how co-curricular events, mentoring, tutoring, and advising could support QEP efforts (See Appendix).

At the Committee's March 17, 2017, meeting, the Committee created catalog revisions, approved by Academic Affairs Committee (curriculum committee) at its May 2017 meeting (See Appendix), to reflect First Year Experience as a requirement

for all incoming freshmen with Learning Support requirements. The Committee also made plans for the “Brand the Plan” campaign, which solicited electronic suggestions for a name for a critical-thinking QEP. The electronic link accepted submissions from students, faculty, and staff between March 27, 2017, and March 31, 2017; to garner interest and excitement, the QEP Committee offered gift cards for finalists and an iPad for the contest winner (See Appendix). The SACSCOC Leadership Team reviewed all submissions and voted to select three finalists: QUEST (Questions, Use, Evaluate, Solve, and Test), reTHINK, and Motlow ACTS (Applying Critical Thinking Skills). A second link opened through April 12, 2017, that allowed the campus community to select the QEP title, and QUEST was the clear choice, garnering in excess of 82% of the vote. In addition, the QEP Chair presented the Committee’s work, including budget estimates, on March 30, 2017, to the President’s Cabinet. The Cabinet commended the work of the Committee and concurred with the Committee’s recommendation for a Fall 2017 QEP implementation. As the work of the QEP Committee transitioned from steering to implementation, the Committee Chair became the QEP Director for MSCC.

Table 3.3: Brand the Plan Contest



The Committee met again on April 21, 2017. While the Chair/Director announced the official name of the QEP as QUEST and provided updates to the Committee about the naming contest, revisions for the catalog, and marketing, the Chair/Director discussed curricular changes for the First Year Experience course to incorporate the emphasis on critical thinking. For example, argument mapping and a common novel were added to the course and are part of the summative assessment that assesses students’ critical thinking skills within the course.

QEP Committee work continued through summer 2017, but because of the distance among MSCC's campuses and the nature of faculty contracts, the Committee worked electronically during summer 2017. On June 1, 2017, the QEP Chair/Director started an electronic (email) meeting to vote on an alumni-designed logo for the QEP. The logo was adopted without opposition. The Chair/Director held a second electronic meeting, commencing July 10, 2017, to update the Committee regarding faculty training, First Year Experience curricular revisions, and QEP marketing materials. To train First Year Experience faculty regarding critical thinking curricular changes, the QEP Chair/Director held six-hour training sessions on June 22, 2017; August 11, 2017; and August 14, 2017. The QEP Chair/Director, Director of Institutional Effectiveness and Assessment, and SACSCOC Accreditation Liaison met with consultant Dr. Kevin Krahenbuhl, a First Year Experience and educational assessment expert at Middle Tennessee State University who currently serves as Program Director for the Doctor of Education in Assessment, Learning, and School Improvement, to assist with the development of critical thinking Student Learning Outcomes and assessments on July 13, 2017.

The QEP Chair/Director has coordinated with the Vice President for Marketing and Campus Activities to develop a comprehensive advertising campaign to ensure that students, faculty, administrators, staff, and vested community constituents know MSCC's QEP. The Chair/Director purchased marketing materials to disseminate to MSCC faculty, staff, and students. On August 24, 2017, a presentation detailing the implementation of the QEP occurred during fall convocation, which included all staff, faculty, and administrators, and the Vice President for Marketing and Campus Activities and the QEP Chair/Director worked together to provide gift bags with QEP informational cards, QEP lip balm, and QEP bottles at the event.

Table 3.4: QEP Marketing Allocation for Fall 2017

Item	Quantity	Cost
QEP Shirts for Students, Faculty, and Staff	570	\$3,100
iPAD for winner of QEP naming contest	1	\$900
QEP bracelets for Students, Faculty, and Staff	6000	\$3,340
QEP Bottles for Faculty and Staff	274	\$1,780
QEP Mascot Knight Costumes	5	\$530
"Brand the Plan" flyers	125	\$30
Featured Spot on MSCC Website	1	\$0
QEP Informational Cards	1,000	\$87
QEP Lip Balm	400	\$50 (labels only, lip balm provided)
Social Media	Multi	\$0

The culmination of twelve months of data-informed, broad-based discussions (including reviews of the MSCC Mission, the 2015-2025 MSCC Strategic Plan, CCSSE results, and ETS Proficiency Profile scores) effected a sustainable QEP that aligns with the MSCC Mission and the 2015-2025 Strategic Plan and promotes improved Student Learning Outcomes. The Student Learning Outcomes, along with the overall design of this QEP, promote and support the QEP Goal to improve MSCC students' critical thinking skills.

Key Terms and Definitions

Critical Thinking

"Critical thinking is the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or

communication, as a guide to belief and action. In its exemplary form, it is based on universal intellectual values that transcend subject matter divisions: clarity, accuracy, precision, consistency, relevance, sound evidence, good reasons, depth, breadth, and fairness” (Critical Thinking Community).

Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE)

According to the Center for Community College Student Engagement, the CCSSE is “a product and service of the Center for Community College Student Engagement [. . .] is a well-established tool that helps institutions focus on good educational practice and identify areas in which they can improve their programs and services for students. Administered during the spring to mostly returning students, CCSSE asks about institutional practices and student behaviors that are highly correlated with student learning and retention.”

ETS Proficiency Profile

The ETS Proficiency Profile is used by Motlow College as the general education assessment of graduating sophomores. The ETS Proficiency Profile is a test based on college-level skills in reading, writing, critical thinking, and mathematics, designed to measure the academic skills developed through general education courses. It is recommended that students complete the test during the last semester prior to graduation, and the test is available on each of MSCC’s four campuses.

ePortfolio

Each student taking the MSCC FYE course is required to compose an electronic portfolio. Eynon and Gambino (2017) define ePortfolio as, “the platform that provides a mechanism to gather, save, and use artifacts of student work (p.129).

First Year Experience Course

This course is a class “designed to empower students with the essential skill set necessary to reach their educational and career goals.

Students will become familiar with college resources, policies, and procedures, while also improving their time management, study, research, and technology skills.

Collaborative learning opportunities are designed to improve critical thinking, problem solving, and reading comprehension skills and abilities” (MSCC Catalog).

Learning Support

The Tennessee Board of Regents defines Learning Support (remedial/developmental education) “as academic support needed by a student to be successful in college level general education courses and/or to meet minimum reading, writing, and mathematic competencies as required by faculty in programs that do not require general education courses in reading, writing and/or mathematics. The purpose is to enhance academic success in college level courses and increase the likelihood of program completion that will prepare students for career success in their chosen field of study.”

For further information on Motlow State’s Quality Enhancement Plan, please contact: Meagan McManus, QEP Committee Chair, mmcmanus@mscc.edu or Dr. Scott Cook, Vice President of Quality Assurance and Performance Funding, scook@mscc.edu