Cardinal Community: Research, Writing, and Community Engagement

The purpose of this project is for students with a shared interest to work in a research- and writing-based experiential learning community centered on a broad theme, strengthening their ties with each other, faculty, and the local community. As part of the LC students will be mentored by faculty and trained in academic research and writing, while completing core courses and applying academic skills to real-world problems. This process will occur during the freshman and sophomore years when students struggle to conduct research and write at the college level and to find real-world relevance in their academic studies, particularly in the core. It is aimed at all incoming freshman students.

In the freshman year (fall or spring) students will take a combination of either LMAR 1101 or LIBR 1101 (with common research outcomes) and either College Readiness Writing, Composition I, or Speech. In this LC they are introduced to academic research, writing, problem solving, and community engagement. In the sophomore year (either fall or spring) students will enroll in a cluster of either two or three courses, consisting of one or two disciplinary courses and one writing course (either Composition II or Technical Communications). Each Sophomore LC will conduct research and write in pursuit of a community engagement project on a topic chosen by the faculty team. These projects can address either the local community or the global community (with the option of planning a service-oriented study abroad trip); faculty leaders will coordinate their courses around their LC project. The research and writing associated with this project will be addressed in the writing course (including an embedded librarian), freeing up the disciplinary courses to cover disciplinary material and outcomes dictated by the department and core requirements. Each LC (freshman and sophomore) will be assigned two compensated peer mentors/tutors. Faculty would be compensated for designing, implementing, and assessing LC clusters.

The community engagement project will require students to conduct research and to cooperatively determine a plan of action based on that research. Writing activities may include: summaries or annotated bibliographies, persuasive position papers, reflective writing, technical/business communications, marketing materials, etc.; students will present their research for their peers and engage in debates about approaches to the problem. They will apply their research and writing skills to solve a real-world problem, building valuable and transferrable skills for the work force while improving the local area. This model allows for integrative transfer and scaffolded instruction of research and writing skills, and utilization of these skills in a community project relevant to students’ majors. These projects constitute undergraduate research and prepare students to conduct more advanced undergraduate research projects.

**Student Learning Outcomes**

- Students engage in teamwork and demonstrate critical thinking skills, empirical skills, social responsibility, and personal responsibility. (THECB Core Curriculum Outcomes)

**Information Literacy Outcomes** (Knowledge Practices from 2015 Framework for Information Literacy)

- Students determine the appropriate scope of investigation
- Students utilize divergent and convergent thinking appropriately when searching
- Students refine and adjust needs and search strategies during the process, as needed and apply results to new searches; and will employ critical skills to evaluate information
- Students evaluate and make connections between different sources and ideas; and will synthesize ideas gathered from multiple sources
- Students give credit to the original ideas of others through proper attribution and citation

**Writing Outcomes**

- Students demonstrate understanding that writing conventions vary depending on context, audience, purpose, and genre.
• Students compose in multiple genres to articulate and synthesize classroom learning, research learning, and service learning.
• Students demonstrate interrelationships among concepts through writing that synthesizes their ideas with the ideas of peers, teachers, courses, and scholars.

Evidence of Institutional Fit and Universal Academic Relevance

This proposal addresses seven High-Impact Educational Practices. 
   First-year Seminar, Common Intellectual Experiences, Learning Communities, Writing Intensive Courses, Collaborative Assignments & Projects, Undergraduate Research, Service (Experiential) Learning.

This proposal addresses eight of the “areas of knowledge or skill” indicated as important in a 2013 survey of employers. 
   Problem solving in diverse settings (91%); Ethical issues/public debates important in their field (87%); Civic knowledge, skills, and judgment essential for contributing to their community and to our democratic society (82%); Direct experiences with community problem solving (86%); Critical thinking and analytic reasoning (82%); Complex problem solving (81%); Written and oral communication (80%); Applied knowledge in real-world settings (78%)

Lamar University Strategic Plan

This proposed QEP will engage and empower students with the skills and knowledge to thrive in their chosen fields of endeavor by providing them with broad practical skills that allow them to have an immediate impact in the workplace. It will empower them with the advanced educational capacity to make choices and become leaders within their respective fields of endeavor and in the communities in which they live. It increases accessibility for students by increasing student-faculty interaction and making it easier for students to approach faculty. It is an example of our innovative curriculum, while demonstrating our dedication to transforming not only the lives of our students but the communities of Southeast Texas. iii This QEP addresses three strategic goals and actions: 1B, 1C, 2B, and 3C.

Bibliography

Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/ilframework
Immersive Learning http://cms.bsu.edu/academics/undergraduatestudy/immersivelearning

i We envision a three semester program: one semester of training and course design, two semesters of implementation including revision after the initial semester and assessment after one year of implementation. 
ii Examples of potential community engagement projects include archiving and display of local history, working with a local school, archiving cold cases for the local police force, creating promotional materials for a local nonprofit, etc. See Ball State’s Immersive Learning program for more examples.
iii Red italicized font indicates quotations from the Mission Statement; black italicized font indicates quotations from “How We Live Our Mission.”