

**Report on the Progress of 2007-2008 Inquiry/Research-based
Education in the College of Liberal Arts and Request for Continued
Funding for 2008-2009**

Part I. Cover Page

College of Liberal Arts

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Part II. Summary of Activities

During the 2007-2008 academic year, more than 4,000 undergraduate students in approximately 150 sections of Inquiry / Research-based courses (“I-courses”) in the College of Liberal Arts participated in helping four departments measure the success of I-courses in honing students’ critical skills and methodological sophistication. The I-courses ranged from introductory to majors’ courses offered at all levels, from 100- to 400-level courses. Departmental efforts contributed to College outcomes, which aim to increase the quantity and quality of I-courses in the College over a three-year period. The College plans by fall 2010 to require that students have at least one Inquiry-based course in order to graduate.

For 2007-2008, in support of the university QEP Council’s decision to emphasize Inquiry-based education, the College initiated what was planned as a three-year process of quality enhancement focused on Inquiry / Research-based undergraduate education. During each one-year cycle for three years, four departments were to be chosen to develop a QEP. The goal was increased quantity and improved quality of I-courses in all twelve departments by the end of the third year (2009-2010). The four participating departments for the 2007-2008 phase were Communication, English, Political Science, and Sociology. Each department used the existing I-Course Inventory to inform its plan, enlisted faculty support, and took into account the sustainability and consistent improvability of its QEP components. All of the initial four projects that began in 2007-2008 are ongoing.

The 2007-2008 projects are briefly described below.

In the **Department of Communication**, the undergraduate committee designed and administered a survey in order to document the department’s benchmark in Inquiry-based instruction. The 49-item questionnaire was completed by 722 students in a range of communication classes. Nine questions addressed inquiry-based characteristics in courses; four questions from NSSE assessed level of academic challenge; six NSSE questions assessed active and collaborative learning; and four NSSE questions measured enriching educational experiences. One additional NSSE item assessed student-faculty interaction, and the remaining questions addressed specific COMM classes, personality measures, or demographics. The undergraduate committee is in the process of reviewing the data and will make recommendations to the faculty.

The **Department of English**, guided by Dr. Claude Gibson, undertook a far-reaching conversion of two lower-level multisection courses, ENGL 104: Composition and Rhetoric and ENGL 203: Introduction to Literature, to Inquiry-based courses. A total of 3,613 students took these courses in calendar year 2007. As foundation courses for the English major and core curriculum fulfillments, these courses’ shift to Inquiry-based models enhances the critical thinking and research skills of many lower-division students, including not only English majors but others in the university. A committee of thirteen administrators, faculty, and graduate students worked to develop the transition for ENGL 104 and 203 to Inquiry-based courses. Five instructors from each of these two courses have been invited to participate in the assessment that begins in fall 2008. A rubric developed for each course will measure the success of researched writing in an Inquiry-based context.

The **Department of Political Science** undertook a two-fold approach to I-courses aimed at (1) correctly identifying and inventorying I-courses and (2) encouraging I-course instructors to develop procedures for assessing Inquiry-related learning outcomes as an ongoing process. Five instructors whose courses appeared in the initial Inventory developed 2-3 “Inquiry-Rich Learning Outcomes” (IRLOs) and devised course-specific plans for pre- and post-testing students or otherwise measuring student progress toward formulation, testing, and articulation of hypotheses central to research in political science. The measurement instruments that were developed were then used to assess I-course success and, it is anticipated, will be adopted or adapted by others in the department as part of an ongoing assessment process.

The **Department of Sociology** experimented with alternative methods of teaching students how to apply the critical standards of sociological research to interpret the scientific strengths and weaknesses of mass media reports of social scientific research. The department asked itself what types of Inquiry-based learning could equal or surpass the level of learning that could be obtained from direct lecture. One class was designed as a straight lecture course that explicitly spoonfed students on critical assessment of media reports on social scientific research. Another class was designed around general discussion about how to critically assess media research. In the latter course, unlike the lecture section, the instructor would provide no feedback that would direct students to good principles of critical thinking. An evaluation of the two sections was made by an outside investigator during a special night class with representatives from both groups. Students were evaluated on the presence or absence of mastery of the critical thinking learning objectives. The department concluded that single class interventions, even when deliberately designed to teach specific outcomes, do not have a substantive impact on student learning. They will be discussing how to design courses that reinforce I-course objectives for student outcomes in sustained ways.

Part III. Restatement of Outcomes

The Inquiry-based course outcomes for the College of Liberal Arts, as stated in our original 2007-2008 QEP proposal, were as follows:

- Include departments’ meaningful participation in Inquiry / Research-based education in their annual evaluations by the dean;
- Increase the number and quality of Inquiry-rich courses offered in the College during a three-year period from 2007-2010;
- Require that all Liberal Arts students entering under Catalog 133 or later graduate with at least one Inquiry / Research-based course;
- Improve CLLA students’ responses to questions about critical inquiry skills in reports from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), using the 2005 report as a benchmark and comparing “CLA” to “NSSE All” responses. The NSSE questions to be used are: Coursework emphasizes: Memorizing facts, ideas, or methods (2a); Analyzing the basic elements of an idea, experience, or theory (2b); Synthesizing and organizing ideas, information, or experiences (2c); and Making judgments about the value of information, arguments, or methods (2d).

Part IV. Restatement of the Assessment Methods for Each Outcome

Because of the department-centered nature of our QEP project to increase the quantity and quality of Inquiry-based courses in the College of Liberal Arts, some of the departmentally specific measures are included above in the report of the 4 projects. Let me address the outcomes listed in Part III, above, in the same order:

- As of spring 2008, in preparation for departmental budget allocations for FY 2009, we began including departments' meaningful participation in Inquiry / Research-based education in their annual evaluations by the dean.
- As can be seen in the results from departments above, in at least two departments, English and Political Science, we have initiated our plan to increase the number and quality of Inquiry-rich courses offered in the College.
- We continue in our plans to require that all Liberal Arts students entering under Catalog 133 or later graduate with at least one Inquiry / Research-based course. As part of the implementation of this requirement, we have devised a method for designating I-courses on student registration pages so that we can keep an account of these courses.
- To date, we have received only the CLLA student responses to general categories of NSSE questions (Level of Academic Challenge, for example) and not the tables comparing responses to individual questions. Our goal continues to be to improve CLLA students' responses to questions about critical inquiry skills in reports from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), using the 2005 report as a benchmark and comparing "CLA" to "NSSE All" responses. Originally, the NSSE questions to be used were: Coursework emphasizes: Memorizing facts, ideas, or methods (2a); Analyzing the basic elements of an idea, experience, or theory (2b); Synthesizing and organizing ideas, information, or experiences (2c); and Making judgments about the value of information, arguments, or methods (2d). If it proves too difficult to receive the detailed reports, we may have to compare broader categories rather than individual questions.

Part V. Summary of Results

Overall, our department-centered approach to increasing the quantity and quality of Inquiry-based education in the College of Liberal Arts was successful for the 4 departments that initially participated. The number of courses was increased, particularly in the department of English (2 multisection courses with annual enrollments of 3,600 students). In the other three departments—Communication, Political Science, and Sociology—the departments focused their attention more on understanding the best conditions for producing quality I-courses. The Department of Communication now has benchmarking data for inquiry-based learning characteristics in targeted majors and core courses; Political Science has developed instruments for pre- and post-testing students' progress toward Inquiry-based knowledge and methods; and Sociology better understands the conditions in which Inquiry-based learning must be introduced in order to produce widespread improvement in analytical understanding.

For the college-level outcomes listed in Part III above, many of the assessment measures have already been taken. We have 43 Inquiry-based courses in 10 departments and 2 interdisciplinary programs. The addition of the two lower-division multi-section English courses greatly

increased the number of students who are exposed to Inquiry-based education, specifically at the introductory level.

Part VI. Closing the Loop

The College of Liberal Arts will continue to encourage all departments to develop Inquiry-based education and will use departments' efforts as one measure of departmental success at the time of annual reports and budget allocations to departments. Each of the 4 participating departments has further assessment and improvements based on that assessment built into their plans: Communication, English, Political Science, and Sociology have collected baseline measures that, respectively, will help develop pedagogical workshops for I-courses; create rubrics for lower-division writing courses; use pre- and post-test (and other) instruments for improving analytical skills in majors courses; and design I-courses that make use of continued discussion and analysis rather than one-time lectures on important topics and concepts.

Part VII. Budget and Request for Continued Funding for 2008-2009

I request the full funding of \$10,000 for this year's Inquiry-based education initiatives as described below.

Originally, our plan called for selecting four departments each year over a three-year period, for a total of twelve departments. With the second year of funding for Inquiry-courses ending with this fiscal year (FY 09), however, we will modify our process somewhat to encourage as much participation as possible in Inquiry-based course development for this final year. With the funding, the eight remaining departments—Anthropology, Economics, European and Classical Languages and Cultures, Hispanic Studies, History, Performance Studies, Philosophy, and Psychology—would be offered up to \$1250 each (\$10,000 divided by eight) for proposals to develop I-courses in their department offerings. Although the projects will likely not have the scope of the first four (in FY 08), this method of allocating course development funds will accomplish our College goal of ensuring as much participation in Inquiry-based education across all twelve departments as possible.

Examples of possible funding models are:

\$1250 per department for 8 departments = \$10000
 \$1430 per department for 7 departments = \$10000 (rounded)
 \$2000 per department for 5 departments = \$10000

The College has provided and will continue to provide matching funds for course development that includes Inquiry-based education (\$1500 per instructor and \$500 per instructor to the department) as well as some funding (\$500 on average) to support faculty members with individual course development.