White Paper on Potential QEP Topic:
Ability to Apply Knowledge and Skills in a Real World Setting

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I. Introduction and Overview

The Southern Associations of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACS COC) core requirement 2.12 mandates the development of a Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) that *includes an institutional process for identifying key issues emerging from institutional assessment and focuses on learning outcomes and/or the environment supporting student learning and accomplishing the mission of the institution.*

Beginning in the summer of 2012, Murray State University began the process of determining the 2014 QEP for the university. This process was led by the QEP Steering Team, which charged three committees of selected faculty and staff members with the task of looking at potential topics. These topics were derived from data available from various surveys including: the National Survey on Student Engagement (NSSE), the MSU Senior Survey and the Faculty Survey on Student Engagement (FSSE), in addition to information from various focus groups conducted by the steering committee. The topic assigned to this committee was: The ability of students to apply knowledge and skills in a real world setting.

The committee began by examining the data mentioned above and reviewing the university's mission statement, the characteristics of a Murray State University graduate and the university's strategic plan. Additionally, the committee met with current MSU faculty members who were already successfully implementing programs that incorporated real-world learning for their students. Committee members were cognizant of the skyrocketing costs associated with completing a college degree and reports in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* indicating that employers want higher education to put more emphasis on real-world learning.

This process resulted in the committee selecting three areas for students to achieve real-world learning, called the Triple E (Engaging Educational Experiences). The Triple E is focused on baccalaureate students and will enhance the undergraduate education by integrating applied learning experiences in (1) undergraduate research, (2) service learning, and (3) practicums, internships, field experiences, co-op experiences and clinical assignments. This QEP will incorporate a set of

measurable student learning outcomes as well as a method to assess the effectiveness of the plan.

II. Summary & Explanation of Institutional Data that Supports the Enhancement of Programs Incorporating Real-World Learning at MSU

From the Office of Institutional Research at Murray State, there are three data sources that the committee believed would support the enhancement of real-world learning through Triple E. Using data from the following three surveys: The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE), and the MSU Senior Survey, the committee has selected specific data from each source that identifies a significant need to incorporate real-world learning experiences for students at Murray State University. The NSSE Survey has been administered every two years at MSU since 2003 and the latest survey results are from 2009. The FSSE Survey has only been conducted once at MSU which was in 2005. The MSU Senior Survey has been distributed every year since 2002.

Focusing on one of the five Benchmarks of Effective Educational Practice from NSSE, the Enriching Educational Experience benchmark addresses the use of a "practicum, internship, field experience, co-op experience, or clinical assignment" and a second question on "culminating senior experience (capstone course, senior project or thesis, comprehensive exam, etc.)." The data from the NSSE Means Comparison Reports show a steady decline regarding the value of practicum, internships, field experiences, co-op experience, or clinical assignment, community service or volunteer work and culminating senior experience (comprehensive exam, capstone course, thesis, project, etc.). In 2003, MSU seniors valued a practicum, internships, field experiences, co-op experience, or clinical assignment the most at 0.70 mean while in 2009 the mean for MSU seniors was 0.58 compared to the NSSE mean for seniors in 2003 at 0.72 (slightly higher than MSU seniors in 2003). However, the value of community service or volunteer work has been slightly inconsistent with MSU senior students ranging from 0.59 in 2003 to 0.64 in 2005 and then decreasing again to 0.45 in 2009. As for a culminating senior experience (comprehensive exam, capstone course, thesis, project, etc.), MSU seniors placed the least amount of value on this area, showing a 0.24 mean in 2009 compared to a 0.59 mean in 2003.

In the FSSE, questions asking the faculty members about undergraduates doing the following: (1) practicum, internship, field experience, co-op experience or clinical assignment, (2) community service or volunteer work and (3) work on research project with a faculty member outside of course or program requirements were focused on. 85% of faculty felt it was very important or important for students to do a practicum, internships, field experiences, co-op experience, or clinical assignment while NSSE results showed that 80% plan to do one and only 6% of students had complete one in 2005. Faculty members placed the lowest value on community service or volunteer work with only 45% of the faculty supporting this activity among undergraduate students. Faculty also supported the value of culminating senior experience (comprehensive exam, capstone course, thesis,

project, etc.) with 82% of faculty members stating it was very important or important for students but NSSE data showed that only 47% of students planned to do one with 1% of student completing one and 34% of students unsure if they would complete on.

With the MSU Senior Survey, the committee felt we should focus on only on two questions that asked students to describe their experience with off-campus co-op/internship and indicate to what extent they were satisfied with the Career Services Office at MSU. When students were asked to best describe their experience with a co-op/internship, in 2002 67% of students indicated they had not done one and has remained above 60% every year since then. In 2008 and 2009, the percentage of students not having done a co-op/internship stayed at 62%. Unfortunately, data from the MSU Senior Survey revealed that many students did not choose to use the services that were provided by the Career Services Office while they were a student at MSU. In 2002, 48% of graduating students stated they did not use the Career Services Office as a MSU student but by 2004 77% of students choose not to use the office. Since 2005, the percentage has remained above 50% of graduating seniors not using this resource available to them at MSU. And in 2010, 57% of students indicated that they did not use the Career Services Office.

III: Summary & Explanation of Recent Research and Best Practices

Research abounds noting that real world experience combined with classroom study is a winning approach for students, employers, universities, and communities.

From "Raising The Bar, Employers' Views On College Learning In The Wake Of The Economic Downturn, A Survey Among Employers Conducted On Behalf Of: The Association Of American Colleges And Universities" by Hart Research Associates in 2009, 79% of employers value "Integrative learning: The ability to apply knowledge and skills to real-world settings through internships or other hands-on experiences."

As a result of the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) 2008 Experiential Education Survey, Marilyn Mackes NACE'S Executive Director said, "Employers say they extended job offers to nearly 70 percent of their interns; in 2001, they offered jobs to 57 percent… Survey findings also indicate that interns who become full-time hires are more likely to stick with the organization than their co-workers who didn't go through the program…Internships are no longer thought of as a nice thing to have but have become a necessity for those interested in finding employment in a particular industry or organization."

The authors of The Association of American Colleges and Universities' Greater Expectations: A New Vision for Learning as a Nation Goes to College call for an end to the artificial distinction between liberal and practical education suggesting traditional classroom learning is most effective when it has students apply their developing knowledge skills to concrete problems in the world around them.

Given the importance of instruction through experiential learning, many institutions present a variety of opportunities like the following to their students:

Tarleton State: Involves 80% of their undergraduate population in a variety of programs including research, service learning, leadership, internship/practicum and study abroad/away. E-portfolio presentations of activities result in tiered recognition to students based on number of real learning experiences completed with recognition level (silver, gold or bronze) noted on the diploma and a distinctive pin worn on the gown.

From a Chronicle of Higher Education article, "Why International Internships Are Key to University Global Engagement" by Cindy Chalou and Charles Gliozzo we read: College graduates need an international perspective to be competitive in today's job market. Many will have to negotiate foreign cultures whether they work in the United States or abroad…Even though relatively few American students go on internships abroad, the number increased 133 percent from the 2003-4 to the 2008-9 academic years, according to the latest figures from the Institute of International Education…International internships are increasingly becoming integrated with college service-learning programs. Student interns now work abroad in hospitals, orphanages, clinics, and schools. One Michigan State University student interned with Mumbai Magic Bus, a charity in India that mentors impoverished youth. Her experience assisted her in later working with a similar American nonprofit.

International opportunities, though more glamorous sounding, should not cause us to overlook opportunities close to home. Clemson University is launching a program to create over 400 semester and summer internships in a variety of departments on their own campus over the next four years.

IV. Resources Needed to Implement the Triple E Plan

Undergraduate Research

A review of the website for MSU's Office of Undergraduate Research and Scholarly Activity and their 2011-2012 Annual Report, revealed some impressive achievements. This office has been quite productive given very limited budget and staffing resources. These limited resources also reveal shortcomings:

- Only 4 of 24 proposals for Research Scholar Fellowships could be funded.
- Only 18 URSA grant proposals were submitted. 17 were funded, but the purpose and possibility of these grants should have solicited many more proposals.
- URSA Support Travel Grants budgeted line item is only $1000. That $1000 was divided and allocated to six different entities. This drastically reduces the incentive of a travel grant.

Suggested Resources

1. Fully staffed Office of Undergraduate Research and Scholarly Activity, including Director, two Assistant Directors (one to focus on marketing and recruitment, and one to focus on implementation and reporting), Administrative Assistant, and at least one Graduate Assistant.
2. Greatly increase the budget for at least three specific areas: Research Scholar Fellowships, URSA Grants, and URSA Travel Support Grants.

Service Learning

This component is perhaps situated for the greatest return on investment. For a relative low cost, service learning can be incorporated in a wide array of academic disciplines and settings. Service learning goes beyond community service in that it allows for (1) intentional and thoughtful planning of service to be sure the right needs are being met, and (2) guided reflection of the experience and applying it to the curriculum.

Suggested Resources

1. Preparation courses taught each semester for faculty. These courses would aid the faculty in developing and integrating service learning into the curriculum of their courses.
2. Monitoring and reporting program run through the Office of Service Learning and Civic Engagement. This program would track the number of service learning hours, and assess the students to determine the level of engagement.

Practicums, internships, field experiences, co-op experiences and clinical assignments

Through our process, we learned there are many MSU faculty members already successfully implementing these types of experiences for their students. We also know that one of the benchmarks used by NSSE in determining whether or not an institution offers "enriching educational experiences" is the availability and use of "practicums, internships, field experiences, co-op experiences and clinical assignments." MSU Career Services, among other things, has a focus on cooperative experiences and internship opportunities to heighten the experiential piece of the job search process. The 2010 MSU Senior Survey revealed that 51 percent of graduating students did not use the Career Services Office while they were a student at MSU.

Suggested Resources

1. The Career Services Office would add a Career Counselor to for each college/school. They would spend outreach hours each week in their respective college/school. These additions would serve the following purposes:
    a. These Counselors would become subject-matter, career-related experts and resources for students and faculty.

   b. They will offer help in constructing and reviewing resume/vitae; graduate school preparation; interview preparation, practice, and feedback.
   c. They would develop relationships between each college/school and the Career Services Office, with the purpose of better equipping our students to enter the work force or continue their education prepared.
2. Where one does not already exist, a person would be designated/hired in each college/school to coordinate the marketing, selection/placement, and assessment of practicums, internships, field experiences, co-op experiences, and clinical assignments.

V. **Potential Offices & Departments to Recruit to Our Initiative**

When implementing Triple E, the committee would like to recruit the Office of Undergraduate Research and Scholarly Activity, Office of the Provost and interested faculty to assist us with the undergraduate research component. As for the service learning experience, we would like to have the support of the Office of Service Learning, the Center for Teaching, Learning, and Technology (CTLT), the Office of Community Service, the Office of the Provost, the Office of Student Affairs and interested faculty. And for the third area – practicums, internships, field experiences, co-op experiences and clinical assignments, participation would be requested from the Career Services Office, deans from each college/school at MSU, the Office of the Provost and the Office of Students Affairs.

Scope of the Triple E

The committee believes that the scope of this project would be quite large. Opportunities for undergraduate research, service learning, and practicum experiences et al, could conceivably involve more than 90% of MSU undergraduates. Some will be students interested in these experiences, and some will participate because of course requirements.

VI. Outcomes and Assessment

Primary Outcome

The committee is optimistic about Triple E increasing student participation in the various real world learning experiences that will be available to students in 2014. Participation data could be maintained by faculty in the academic departments and reported regularly to the Career Services office.

Supporting Outcomes

The following supporting outcomes are intended to help accomplish the primary goals of Triple E:

Supporting Outcome 1 – Seeks to improve communication between academic departments, Career Services, and other departments and programs within Student Affairs. This outcome would be accomplished by establishing a point of contact in each academic department that is responsible for tracking student participation in real world learning experiences and maintaining contact with other relevant faculty members on issues related to real world learning experiences for students. Communication is a difficult thing to measure directly, so some minimal form of communication (beyond data collection) could be mandated in order to allow more desirable communications to evolve organically.

Supporting Outcome 2 – Gain university faculty members who will become empowered to help students find and make the most of real world learning

experiences. Faculty members would receive training in finding opportunities, supporting students, and opportunities for collaboration with career services and academic departments. Training could culminate with an online quiz requirement, and the number of faculty members who have passed the quiz can be tracked throughout the QEP term as a measure of implementation.

Supporting Outcome 3 – Help students who will become empowered to work with faculty members to find and make the most of real world learning experiences. Freshmen would receive program specific information about benefits of participating in the various real world learning experiences and basic information on how to take advantage of these opportunities. A curriculum amendment in the 099 courses currently offered could be used to measure implementation, and a short essay about plans to participate in such an opportunity could be used to gauge the short-term effectiveness of this intervention on students.

The final outcome is separate from the Primary Outcome, but is important to ensure students get the most from the opportunities we are helping them to find. With this in mind, an additional outcome is sought.
Additional Outcome 1 – Is to establish consistent minimum requirements for university credit in Real World Learning Experiences. The benefit for students is an improved experience via a reasonable opportunity to reflect on their experience and make connections to their coursework.

The primary outcome will be fairly easy to measure with the most difficult part being the actual collection and organization of the data in the early stages of the QEP's implementation. The remaining outcomes have measureable components; however their effect on the primary outcome would only really be seen in the data for the primary outcome. Some flexibility would need to be built into the timeline in order to accommodate the use of the data for the primary outcome as an indication of the effectiveness of the supporting outcomes.

VII**. Conclusion**

Murray State University is in the process of developing its QEP for 2014. The QEP Steering Team selected three potential topics for examination. The focus of this committee was to determine if the following topic was the most relevant to the university, its mission and student learning: The ability of students to apply knowledge and skills in a real-world setting.

Committee members examined data from various surveys, interviewed faculty members who were successfully implementing this topic into their curriculum and reviewed additional research. Keeping in mind the university's mission statement and strategic plan, the committee has proposed the following new initiative called the Triple E (Engaging Educational Experiences). The Triple E will focus on providing real-world experiences for baccalaureate students in three areas: (1)

undergraduate research, (2) service learning and (3) practicums, internships, field experiences, co-op experiences and clinical assignments.

Based on the topic's relevancy to the university's mission, we believe that this real-world learning has the potential for a truly transformational addition to the students' traditional college learning experience and will set our students apart from their peers at other institutions of higher education.