

# QEP Newsletter

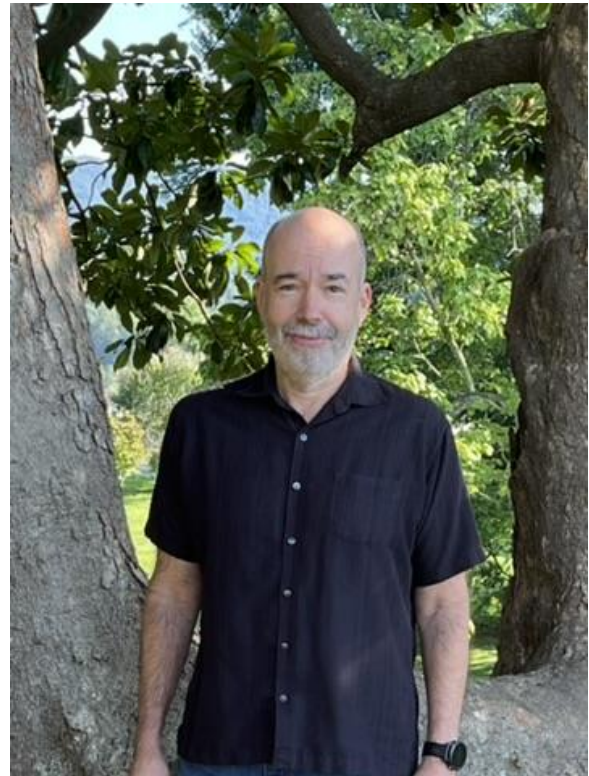
*Transparent Instruction in General Education and Gateway Courses for Student Success*

---

## Dr. Jacques Debrot – “King of the QEP!”

Dr. Jacques Debrot, Associate Professor of English, was awarded first place for the 2023-24 Quality Enhancement Plan Outstanding Teaching Award and received \$1,000. The student that nominated him said that Dr. Debrot, “Always gave detailed descriptions of the purpose with subheadings of what knowledge and skills we will gain from the assignments.” After reviewing his nomination and assignment, one of the reviewers noted, “Dr. Debrot is the King of the QEP!!” In the 2022-23 year, Dr. Debrot was also nominated and received second place.

Dr. Debrot received his bachelor’s degree from the City College of the City University of New York (CUNY) in English. He earned his master’s and doctorate degrees from Harvard University in English and American Literature and Language. He has worked at LMU for 20 years.



**Dr. Jacques Debrot, Assistant Professor of English**

Award recipients were asked to answer the following questions as it related to their experiences with transparent instruction. Here are Dr. Debrot’s responses:

**Q 1:** *What steps did you take to modify your assignments to align with the Transparent Instruction format?*

**A:** My go-to move before the TI format was to rely too much on my intuition when I constructed assignments. I thought I was being creative. Maybe I was. But I tended to skip steps instead of carefully thinking an assignment through. Transparent Instruction forced me to slow down and notice the things I was taking for granted, but that I really shouldn’t have expected my students to know. I think I can say my assignments are less ambiguous now than they used to be.

**Q2:** *What differences are you seeing in the student homework submissions that you are receiving now as opposed to before using the transparent Purpose/Task/Criteria (PTC) format?*

A: Honestly, the TI Criteria has had the greatest effect on my most conscientious students. I have been surprised by how the sophistication of their homework has improved. But I see the change, to a greater or lesser degree, in most of my students' work. Their responses to my assignments are more focused and relevant. In my literature classes, I encounter less plot summary in their writing, fewer generalizations, more interesting ideas.

**Q3:** *What was the biggest challenge in this process?*

A: I struggled a little with composing examples of "good writing"—particularly for the research paper. I was worried I was being too prescriptive. I didn't want to foreclose other approaches my students might take. But I think I was wrong. All writers rely on a kind of mental model, a theory or an idea about what constitutes effective writing. Usually, the models students carry in their heads are pretty vague. The annotated examples instructors provide just make that model explicit. They don't have to lead to cookie-cutter responses.

**Q4:** *What advice or words of wisdom would you give to new faculty that are beginning to incorporate transparency into their assignments?*

A: No words of wisdom except to say that it's a good idea to really lean into the instruction format. There's sometimes a feeling faculty have that initiatives like TI are encroaching on their professional space. But the criteria have enough latitude that this attitude doesn't seem justified.

Congratulations to Dr. Debrot on your faculty teaching award! Recognition by students and faculty is worth celebrating.

---

## RETENTION & GRADUATION DATA

Two of the data points that we examine for our QEP are retention rates and graduation rates. For retention rates, we examine the rates of students that attend school as freshmen and then return the following year as a sophomore. Our target goal for first-time, full-time, degree seeking freshmen to sophomore retention rates is 78 percent. While we did not meet our target goal, we did increase from 69 percent in 2022-23 to 72 percent in 2023-24.

Broken down even further, we look at the retention rates of first generation students with a target goal of 75 percent. First generation students are students where their parents did not complete a college degree. While we did not make our target goal, we did increase from 65 percent in 2022-23 to 70 percent in 2023-24.

For graduation rates, we examine both four-year graduation rates and five-year graduation rates. The QEP is only over a five year period, so we only have two data sets for the 4-year rate and one for the 5-year rate – starting with the 2019-2020 cohort. We have never tracked first generation graduation rates before, so there is no baseline data to compare to prior to the QEP. Our target goal for the 4-year graduation rate for first generation students it to be at 45% or higher. For the 2019-20 cohort was 23 percent and for the 2020-21 cohort it was 38 percent – a 15 percent higher rate. For first-generation students 5-year graduation rate, our target goal was 50 percent or higher. For the 2019-20 cohort we scored a 33 percent.

For first-time, full-time graduation rates, our target goal for the 4-year graduation rates was 50 percent. The 2019-20 cohort graduated at 37 percent and the 2020-21 4-year graduation rate was 41 percent. The 5-year graduation rate target goal was 55 percent and our 2019-20 cohort had a graduation rate at 45 percent.

We recognize that we have room for improvement, and we would certainly like to meet and exceed our target goals for graduation rates. Putting these statistics in context, however, we experienced the Covid pandemic during our first year, second semester of our QEP plan. With a four-year view, there is no time to recover from the loss of those initial students.

---

## 28 Nominations for Dr. Thomas Shell

Dr. Thomas Shell, Associate Professor of Chemistry, was awarded second place for the 2023-24 Quality Enhancement Plan Outstanding Teaching Award and received \$750. This is the second time that Dr. Shell was nominated and the second time that he received the second place award. Dr. Shell was nominated by 12 students this year from four different classes and last year he was nominated by 16 different students/faculty from four different classes. He is described in his nominations as “truly an amazing professor”, and “genuine and versatile.” Another student said, “I bawled my eyes out in his office, and I didn’t feel judged.”



**Dr. Thomas Shell, Associate Professor of Chemistry**

Dr. Shell has been at LMU since fall 2021. He received bachelor’s degrees in chemistry and biology from the University of Richmond and his doctorate degree in Organic Chemistry from Emory University.

Award recipients were asked to answer the following questions as it related to their experiences with transparent instruction. Here are Dr. Shell’s responses:

***Q 1: As a repeat award winner, what do you think you did that inspired others to nominate you for awards?***

A: I believe it was because students know that I care about their success in my course as well as their professional success beyond my class. The transparent instructional resources that I provide students demonstrate that I am invested in their learning of the material in my course. In addition, I strive to be empathetic with students showing that I care about them and their success outside of my class.

***Q2: What would you say is your secret to success as it relates to transparency in your classes?***

A: I provide students with a few versions of practice quizzes and answer keys to help students prepare for the regular in-class quizzes of my courses. The practice quizzes with answer keys are pedagogical tools that help students learn the material in the course. Since students know that the in-class quiz will be

similar to the practice quizzes, they study the concepts covered by the quizzes and learn them. I allow students that are unsatisfied with the outcome of their quiz to retake a different version of the quiz, which relieves student anxiety for the quizzes and encourages students that did not understand the material for the quiz to learn that material. By having frequent in-class quizzes, the students are learning class content in manageable segments of information. I provide students with practice exams and answer keys to help them learn the material before they take a test. The practice exams make my expectations for the in-class tests transparent. In addition, I host review sessions before each test to answer any questions that my practice exams produce. I frequently remind students that people learn and improve by practice; therefore, my expectation is that they utilize the practice materials provided to aid in their learning of the course material.

**Q3: *What benefits do you see to students for transparent assignments?***

A: When you are straightforward with students about assessment, they will strive to learn the material. Transparent instruction results in students feeling that their time spent studying for the class is not in vain. Students have busy schedules; therefore, they are sensitive to unproductive study time. When you provide transparent instructional materials, students see a connection between the time they invest in studying and their success in the course. This results in students that are motivated to devote time to studying because they see a positive outcome for their time investment, which leads to improved student learning outcomes. In addition, this results in increased student confidence and satisfaction.

**Q4: *How does transparency benefit you as an instructor?***

A: Transparent instruction improves the professional satisfaction of the instructor. Instructors care about our students learning the course material and about our students being satisfied with the educational experience. Transparent instruction improves the willingness of students to spend time to learn the material because the assessment goals have been elucidated. This results in enhanced educational outcomes for the students, which leads to improved student satisfaction with the course.

**Q5: *What advice do you have for faculty that are new to incorporating transparency into their assignments?***

A: For students the hardest part of our courses is being able to predict what we think is important for our students to learn. We have identified what we want our students to understand after completing our courses. If we want the students to achieve our course goals, then we should not make our expectations secret. I often tell students that learning the concepts of organic chemistry was not the challenging part for me when I took the class. The hardest aspect of the course for me was predicting the expectations of my organic chemistry professor. Therefore, I try hard to be transparent with my instruction. If you provide students with transparent instructional materials, they will be better able to meet your learning outcomes. That will result in improved student satisfaction as well as enhanced instructor satisfaction.

Congratulations to Dr. Shell on your second faculty teaching award! Nominations from so many students highlights that he is making a difference in their lives.

---

**PURPOSE ~ TASKS ~ CRITERIA**

---



# Dr. Kevin Cooper Makes Physics “Fun”

Assistant Professor of Physics, Dr. Kevin Cooper, was awarded third place for the 2023-24 Quality Enhancement Plan Outstanding Teaching Award and received \$500. Dr. Cooper was nominated by three students from two different classes. One student said, “he makes learning a hard concept fun” and further stated, “He is a very kind professor who has a passion for teaching!!” Another student said, “When he teaches, he shows how much he loves physics.”

Dr. Cooper has worked at LMU for eleven years. He received his bachelor’s degree in physics from Morehead State University and then his master’s degree and doctorate degree from Ohio University in Physics.



**Dr. Kevin Cooper, Assistant Professor of Physics**

Award recipients were asked to answer the following questions as it related to their experiences with transparent instruction. Here are Dr. Cooper’s responses:

**Q1:** *As a repeat award winner, (awarded first place the prior year) what do you think you did that inspired others to nominate you for awards?*

A: I’m really not sure. I’m just appreciative that I received nominations.

**Q2:** *What would you say is your secret to success as it relates to transparency in your classes?*

A: There is no real secret. Trying to keep the best interests of the students as priority, and then attempting to be as clear as possible regarding standards of learning and associated class work is the goal.

**Q3:** *What benefits do you see to students for transparent assignments?*

A: I can see where transparent assignments benefit students in two different ways. First, it reduces the anxiety of an assignment by clearly letting them know the associated Purpose, Task, and Criteria. They do not need to guess as to what the assignment is about, or how the instructor is going to assign scores or mark their papers. Second, transparency reduces the cognitive load for the assignment, allowing them to focus on the actual instructional intent for the exercise versus trying to figure out what the instructor wants.

**Q4:** *How does transparency benefit you as an instructor?*

A: As an instructor the largest benefit is that the students have a better educational experience. They should feel more comfortable with assignments due to the reduction of uncertainties in what is expected. This

allows for a greater focus on the subject content, and hopefully increased student success in the course. At the end of the day, what we want is to see our students succeed and that is one of the joys in teaching.

**Q5:** *What advice do you have for faculty that are new to incorporating transparency into their assignments?*

**A:** Seek guidance from the resources you have available. The University provides training, and there are a number of folks that have experience with the process.

Take time to think through each of the aspects that will make an assignment transparent. What do you want the students to learn? What is an appropriate learning experience to facilitate the process, and how should it be structured? What evidence will you look for to know when the students have grasped the material or process to an appropriate level? How and what feedback will you provide students to aid in their learning?

Going through this thought process will help in your decisions of what to teach, how to teach it, and then how to assess student performance. Keep in mind that teaching can often be an iterative process. We always want to do better the next time, and reflecting on our teaching and student performance is a large part of that process.

Congratulations to Dr. Cooper on your faculty teaching award! For more information about transparent instruction, contact Dr. Molly Duggan at [Molly.Duggan@LMU.net](mailto:Molly.Duggan@LMU.net).

---

## Student Survey Numbers Increased

At the beginning and end of each semester, undergraduate students receive a short 10-question survey to evaluate the level of transparency with their general education and gateway classes. At the beginning of the fall 2023 semester, we received 1,585 surveys. This was an increase from the past six deployments of surveys.

Consistently, the statement with the highest score was, “Assignments are connected to course goals.” On a five-point Likert scale, the response was 4.463 toward “strongly agree.” This has been the highest statement consistently for all eighteen consecutive survey deployments.

The statement with the lowest score for the past seventeen survey deployments has been, “This class is incorporating my interests.” For this statement to be the lowest, it seemed reasonable because we recognize some students are taking classes that are part of the general education program or are a prerequisite for another class, and that they would not normally choose to take some of these classes on their own. For the first time, the lowest score statement was, “This class will prepare me to work in the global environment” with a response score of 3.941 toward “a great deal.” The “interest” question response was just slightly higher with 3.945. It seems that students rate the global benefits lower – although, still higher than a “3” for “neutral.”

## Transparent Instruction Awards Overview

Now that the QEP is wrapping up, we thought it would be nice to look back at all the award winners over the past five years. Making changes to existing documents and paradigms can be challenging, be these people excelled at the task. Reviewers looked at both what the nominators said about the faculty members and their pedagogy, as well as the instructor's assignments. Here are our throwback award recipients:

<b>Academic Year</b>	<b>First Place - \$1,000</b>	<b>Second Place - \$750</b>	<b>Third Place - \$500</b>
<b>2019-20</b>	Dr. Jeffrey Darrow, Mathematics	Dr. Julie Hall, Biology	Dr. Jason Fowler, Biology
<b>2020-21</b>	ISYS Team: Mrs. Erika Eschberger, Dr. Jason McConnell, Dr. Sheree Schneider, & Dr. Elizabeth Yagodzinski	Dr. Thomas Bragg, English	Dr. Abigail Heiniger, English
<b>2021-22</b>	Dr. Muthu Dharmasena, Biology	Dr. Jacques Debrot, English	Mrs. Elise Syoen, UACT
<b>2022-23</b>	Dr. Kevin Cooper, Physics	Dr. Thomas Shell, Chemistry	Dr. Savannah Campbell, Psychology
<b>2023-24</b>	Dr. Jacques Debrot, English	Dr. Thomas Shell, Chemistry	Dr. Kevin Cooper, Physics

In addition to the top three award recipients, three honorable mention awards were given each year to outstanding faculty. Here are the recipients from the past five years:

<b>Academic Year</b>	<b>Honorable Mention - \$250</b>	<b>Honorable Mention - \$250</b>	<b>Honorable Mention - \$250</b>
<b>2019-20</b>	Dr. William Hardy, History	Dr. Whitney Kistler, Biology	Dr. Barbara Shock, Biology
<b>2020-21</b>	Dr. Thomas Bragg, English	Dr. Noel Cawley, Environmental Science	Dr. Abigail Heiniger, English
<b>2021-22</b>	Dr. Rebecca Brackmann, English	Dr. Jeffrey Combs, History	Dr. Lee Gilroy, Psychology
<b>2022-23</b>	Dr. Stephen Everly, Chemistry	Dr. Jason Fowler, Biology	Dr. Lindsay Horne, Biology
<b>2023-24</b>	Dr. Carson Benn, History	Mr. Shane Goad, Psychology	Dr. William Hardy, History

While faculty were only required to incorporate transparent instruction into the general education and gateway courses for the QEP, many faculty chose to use the framework in upper-level classes as well as in some of the professional programs. There was interest in also recognizing faculty that were using transparency in classes

beyond the scope of the QEP. In the 2021-22 academic year, we added a seventh award to recognize faculty teaching “Beyond the QEP.” Here are the recipients of these awards:

<b>Academic Year</b>	<b>Beyond the QEP - \$250</b>
<b>2021-22</b>	Dr. Wanda Morgan, Marketing
<b>2022-23</b>	Dr. LaRoy Brandt, Biology
<b>2023-24</b>	Dr. Julie Hall, Biology

---

## Transparency Continues Through Syllabi

As mentioned in the August newsletter, the QEP Steering Committee, with support from the General Education Committee, has decided to continue with transparency beyond our five-year QEP period. The following statement will be added to the syllabi template for general education/gateway courses. Additional programs that want to incorporate and embrace transparency, are welcome to do so and include this statement! Here is the new excerpt for the syllabi - faculty will be adding their own course-specific details where appropriate in their syllabi:

### **Transparent Instruction**

LMU is committed to teaching General Education and Gateway courses with a transparent framework. LMU is focused on providing clear purpose, tasks, and criteria (PTC) in syllabi and selected assignments. This is an effort to promote inclusivity for all learners.

Syllabi will outline course-specific purpose, tasks, and criteria. The Purpose will identify the learning objectives including the skills and knowledge to be gained—both for the class and beyond college. The Tasks will list the activities and steps that students will perform to complete the assignments. The Criteria will detail the grading rubrics and point structure.

Syllabi will be posted by the schools to the Academic Affairs Bulletin Board. Faculty can continue to use transparent assignments, but they do not need to submit them to a centralized person.





## QEP Steering Committee

The Quality Enhancement Plan is known as a “5-year” plan with reports to be calculated and submitted in the sixth year to the accreditor. The reality, however, is that the work begins years before the QEP actually starts implementation. A core group of people worked together to identify a topic and help determine the direction of the plan.

LMU’s institutional accreditor is the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC). Following the Standard 7.2, LMU must do the following:

The institution has a QEP 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.

From the early days of researching the QEP possibilities, to the present day, we would like to recognize the following people that have contributed and served on the QEP Steering Committee:

<u>Faculty/Staff/Student</u>	<u>Department/Office</u>
Dr. Joshua Boone	Mathematics
Dr. Jacob Carver	Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness
Dr. Kevin Cooper	Physics
Dr. Lisa B. Cox	Business
Dr. Molly Duggan	QEP
Sarah Griffith	Nursing
Nikki Lockhart	Public Relations
Sarah Long	Student
Madison McClelland	Student
Dr. Joanna Neilson	School of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences
Dr. Adam Rollins	College of Mathematics, Sciences, and Health Professions
Dr. Martin Sellers	School of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences
Mrs. Sandra Southern	Allied Health Sciences
Dr. Jay Stubblefield	Division of Academic Affairs
Dr. Sandra Weems	English
Dr. Elizabeth Yagodzinski	Center for Teaching and Learning Excellence

We would also like to thank those that are no longer on the committee or on campus, but certainly played a role on the Steering Committee in helping to create and implement the QEP:

Marisa Anders, Deatric Alexander, Dr. Karen Carter, Dr. April Church, Alisha Helton, Dr. Amiel Jarstfer, Dr. Alexander Parks, Lucas Payne, Dr. Kala Perkins-Holtsclaw, Dr. Minh Tam Schlosky, Dr. Mark Tew, Jasmyne Thomas, Dr. Robin Wilson, and Dr. Travis Wright.

---



## QEP Focus Group Moderators

Each semester, a student and faculty focus group convened to answer questions related to course syllabi and assignments. Sessions lasted between 45 minutes to one session that took two meeting times totaling nearly 3 hours because the faculty were so engaged. Moderating a group, following a script, but also trying to adjust with the conversation, can be difficult. In addition, the moderators tried to be sure that each participant had the opportunity to answer each question and sometimes provide follow-up. We recognize and thank the following people that lead focus groups over the past five years:

Dr. Chessica Cave, Mrs. Carolyn Gulley, Dr. Megan Owens, & Ms. Sandra Southern

---

## QEP Administrative Support

Behind the scenes there are people that quietly help us to continue on our QEP path in an orderly fashion. There are a number of people over the past five years that helped us from ordering supplies, typing up meeting minutes, to transcribing focus group recordings. Thank you to the following people for providing administrative support to the QEP:

Dannielle Brooks, Lee Ann Goins, Heather Howard, Amy Lee, Andy Shipley, & Tracy Williams

# QEP Data Support

How do we know if we are making a difference? By analyzing data! From pulling data reports, to combining reports, to navigating technology, to sending out and collecting surveys, it takes a team of people that can access our data systems and network. We thank the following people that have helped us to collect our assessment measures over the past five years:

Mr. Ritchie Bradley, Dr. Jacob Carver, Mrs. Erika Eschberger, Dr. Kala Perkins-Holtsclaw, Dr. Carl Larsen, Mrs. Melinda Turner, & Dr. Elizabeth Yagodzinski

---



## Important 2024 Dates

October 23	Steering Committee Meeting
October 24-25	Fall Break
November 27-29	Thanksgiving – No Classes
December 9-13	Final Exams
December 14	Commencement

## Important 2025 Spring Dates

January 6	Undergraduate Classes Begin
January 20	Martin Luther King Jr. Day – No Classes
February 12	Founders Day
March 1	5 <sup>th</sup> -Year Interim Report (including QEP Impact Report) due to SACSCOC
March 24-28	Spring Break – No Classes
April 18	Good Friday – No Classes
April 28 – May 1	Final Exams
May 3	Commencement

# Video Involvement

Through the course of the QEP planning and implementation, our Marketing Department created three videos to explain the QEP and our lessons learned. We thank the following current and former students that gave testimonials on the videos from the student perspective and how they received this new pedagogy:

Emma Cummings (Bradley), Hannah Knight, Chrissy Bradley, Lara Gunter, Madison McClelland, Ritchie Bradley, Christian Piercy, and Sarah Long

We thank the following faculty and staff that appeared in the videos and shared their classroom experiences:

Dr. Joanna Neilson, Dr. Travis Wright, Dr. Amiel Jarstfer, Dr. Julie Hall, and Dr. Jason Fowler

From the Marketing Team, we thank the following individuals that had a role in recording, editing, and producing the videos:

Nikki Lockhart, Marisa Anders, Katelin Chadwell, and Kate Reagan

Thank you to the people in front of the camera and behind the camera, for helping us communicate and narrate our QEP Transparent Instruction messages. These contributions help us to tell our stories. All videos are posted to the QEP website on the Institutional Effectiveness page for your viewing pleasure.



## By The Numbers . . .

37,302	Student surveys submitted for transparency between spring 2019 – spring 2024.
3,639	Assignments reviewed for transparency for the QEP between fall 2019 – spring 2024.
1,898	Number of syllabi reviewed for transparency for the QEP between fall 2019 – spring 2024.
2	The minimum number of transparent assignments that faculty included in each general education and gateway course to reflect transparent instruction over the past five years.

Thank you for reading the QEP newsletter. The QEP Office is located in 118 Grant Lee. Questions can be directed to [Molly.Duggan@LMU.net](mailto:Molly.Duggan@LMU.net).