

LMU

Lincoln Memorial University
HARROGATE, TENNESSEE

Quality Enhancement Plan

2019-2024

Transparent Instruction in
General Education and Gateway Courses
for Student Success

Purpose. Tasks. Criteria.

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Executive Summary

Through multiple ongoing, comprehensive planning and evaluation processes, Lincoln Memorial University (LMU) has identified the topic *Transparent Instruction in General Education and Gateway Courses for Student Success* for this Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP). High-need and underserved students comprise a large proportion of the LMU undergraduate student body. Transparent Instruction has been shown to bolster student success in several ways: by building students' confidence, increasing their sense of belonging, and mitigating feelings of bewilderment or inadequacy early-on when they are first faced with college-level work. Transparent Instruction will help LMU address continued challenges in reaching improved levels of student success, as measured by the following: retention rates of freshmen students, especially first-generation college students (FGCS); general education learning; and graduation rates.

Scholarly literature defines underserved college students as those who fall into one or more of the following categories: first-generation college student (FGCS); low-income/low-socioeconomic status; or ethnically underrepresented (Gionoutsos and Winkelmes, 2016). At LMU, more than 50% of our fall 2017 entering students could reasonably be classified as underserved: 52.6 % (182/346) FGCS; 52% (180/346) Pell eligible; and 8.4% (29/346) ethnically underrepresented.

We expect that, through this QEP on Transparent Instruction at LMU, we can help our students by clarifying learning expectations and tasks in a simple pedagogical intervention, and thus enable all students to acquire academic confidence, metacognition skills, and a sense of belonging in college, all of which will enable them to persist in their college goals. By helping our students attain these skills and attributes, we will enable them to improve their General Education competencies, which ultimately will result in improvements in our overall student retention and graduation rates. Even students themselves have identified transparency as a strategy for enhancing their success (Lang, 2015; Sadowski et al., 2018), which helps persuade us that Transparent Instruction will benefit our entire LMU learning community.

After an extensive literature review and in-depth evaluation of our Strategic Goals, LMU's QEP Steering Committee proposes to help our students succeed and to meet these institutional goals as described in this Plan, in accordance with SACSCOC Standard 7.2 (a-e). Our Committee has defined the following outcomes for this Plan:

- Student Success Outcome #1—The QEP will improve student success in Gen-Ed and Gateway courses by offering more transparent instruction and more transparent syllabi.
- Student Success Outcome #2—Implementation of the QEP will improve student success by increasing students' overall sense of belonging to the general learning community at Lincoln Memorial University.
- Faculty Training and Development Outcome—Implementation of the QEP will increase student success through faculty training and development on improving course assignments, instructions, and syllabi by learning how to offer Transparent Instruction. Training faculty who teach Gen-Ed and Gateway courses to implement Transparent Instruction in these courses will be the primary activity of this QEP.

Introduction

Lincoln Memorial University (LMU) has developed the *Transparent Instruction in General Education and Gateway Courses for Student Success* QEP as a focused, ongoing course of action primarily to enhance student success and also to directly support our institutional goals. Specifically, we aim to implement Transparent Instruction in these General Education (Gen-Ed) and Gateway courses so instructors may give every student equal opportunity to understand the “whys, whats, and hows” of foundational coursework and to demystify what often seems to new college students to be disconnected and difficult work, by explaining the purpose, tasks, and criteria for assignments. As we will see below, transparent assignments have been shown to contribute to student success by building students’ confidence, increasing their sense of belonging, and mitigating feelings of bewilderment or inadequacy early-on when they are faced with college-level work. We have therefore designed a Plan that will incorporate faculty training, benefit all students as it specifically addresses the needs of our underserved students, and carefully measure the outcomes. The following narrative sections correspond with the SACSCOC Standard 7.2.

(a) Has a topic identified through ongoing, comprehensive planning and evaluation processes

Background for LMU’s Topic Selection

At LMU, strategic planning is an annual process, which now includes nearly 90 University leaders, including faculty, staff, and student participants ([Strategic Planning Retreat Attendance 2017](#); [Strategic Planning Retreat Attendance 2018](#)). The University identified student success to be of strategic importance as early as the [2001-2006 Strategic Plan](#), where it was Objective 2.3 “Increase student retention and graduation rates.” At that time strategies included items such as student-athlete accountability, improved student services, engagement in new student orientation, increased enrollment in the UACT 100 *Strategies for College Success* course, faculty use of an early warning system for students with difficulties, participation in the federally funded Student Support Services program, tutoring and career planning services, and facilities improvements. Measures planned and implemented since that time have been focused on student affairs and campus services rather than faculty development for instructional improvement. Recently the LMU strategic planning retreat resulted in an addition to Goal 1 with specific strategies to accomplish the QEP which were affirmed by the Strategic Planning Committee ([2019-2024 Goal 1 Objective 1.8](#)). These will be reviewed in July of 2019.

For the past 17 years, the LMU fall-to-fall IPEDS retention rates of first-time freshmen students have been as low as 59% and as high as 74% ([IPEDS Retention Graph](#)). These rates are well below the level the University community desires and below the rate at a number of peer institutions in the region which admit similarly-prepared incoming students ([Peer Comparison Retention Table](#)). In one form or another, this retention challenge has continued to be of great importance to the University. It has continued as at least one Strategic Objective with similar strategies since 2001 in the University Strategic Plan. In addition, the University has responded to the changing state and federal regulatory environment, which also has provided significant improvement in the environment for learning at LMU.

In 2010, the University renamed the retention committee to be the “Undergraduate Student Success Committee,” with a function to:

Review achievement and persistence data related to undergraduate student success to determine effectiveness of programs; evaluate and recommend program changes to assist students to remain enrolled and graduate; identify causes of student attrition; recommend appropriate data-driven actions to the University constituencies; review and update the Retention Plan. ([LMU Cabinet, Councils and Committees 2018-2019](#)).

This standing University Committee has a membership of 20 University leaders, including the President. Issues identified in 2010 through use of the Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory include dissatisfaction with “faculty providing timely feedback about academic progress,” “quality of instruction in classes,” and “tuition paid is a worthwhile investment.”

At its retreat in 2014, the University President’s Cabinet reviewed and acted on subsequent data to implement a 5-point plan to address retention by supporting: 1) required new-student orientation program, which included mandatory UACT 100 Strategies for College Success course enrollment for most first-time freshmen students, 2) required reporting of 3-week grades for all undergraduate students, 3) enhanced academic advising through additional Faculty Conference Week academic advisor training, 4) implementation of Academic Warning status for students with a semester GPA of less than 2.0, and 5) continued use of Concerned Conferences for at-risk students. All of these actions were implemented. Results so far have shown that fall-to-spring retention of students who participate in UACT 100 is 12% better than those who do not participate (91% vs 79%). Unfortunately, overall retention for all degree-seeking, first-time freshman students still falls below 75% from fall to the next fall ([IPEDS Retention Graph](#)).

Assessment results for general education competencies have started on an upward trajectory in the last year with an improved testing participation and performance protocol. However, the rolling average of achievement has not consistently reached or exceeded aspirational goal levels affirming the quality of learning we expect as a measure of student success at LMU. In addition, the participation in Gateway courses is increasing with the increased number of students majoring in programs which prepare them for health-related professional school programs. Students struggle in the areas of mathematics and chemistry where the “withdrawal, D and F” rates are over 10% for 9 courses affecting 1,113 duplicated students in two academic years. Fourteen other courses meeting gateway course definition are general education or remedial/developmental courses affecting 1,973 duplicated students in two academic years ([Gateway Course Analysis 2016-2017](#)).

From the focused 2013-2014 syllabus review by the General Education Committee, it was evident that many Gen-Ed courses lacked focus and clarity of expected Gen-Ed student learning outcomes, along with detail for assignments that would be graded ([9-14-2014 GE Committee Minutes](#)). There has not been faculty training or accountability to assure that major assignments in these Gen-Ed courses describe clear purposes, tasks, and criteria. In fall of 2017 the GE Committee members supported and voted to recommend the proposed QEP topic as a way to address what the GE Committee perceived as a long-standing need for increased transparency about the purpose, tasks and criteria of assignments in numerous Gen-Ed courses.

Recent evaluation and planning processes have also supported a focus on improved instructional approaches for student success. In the spring of 2017, a survey was conducted to solicit QEP topic ideas for the second LMU QEP. There were 41 total suggestions put forth from the LMU community which included undergraduate students, graduate students, faculty and staff. These ideas

included at least 26 suggested topics focused on improved teaching and learning (Survey Response Table). In addition, the latest NSSE results (2018) for LMU indicate the perception by freshmen students that course sections are not taught in an organized way compared to what freshmen perceive at other private, not-for-profit institutions (item 5b; -14), and at institutions with similar IPEDS undergraduate enrollment (-12). Overall, for NSSE “effective teaching practices” ratings group of questions, the LMU mean score was below the expectation level of first-year students in the same comparison groups noted above. The University believes this concern will be addressed by the proposed QEP topic implementation which will also include significant training in course design and instructional strategies as related to adjusted transparent assignments. Based upon the scholarly work previously published, the QEP Steering Committee as proxy for the University community, also believes that the research supports that this change in instruction will lead to improved student success.

During the last 10 years faculty development spending has generally been approved for sending faculty members to scholarly meetings. While this spending on scholarly travel helps address the elevated expectations of a level 6 institution, it has not been focused on improved knowledge and skills for instruction and student success. By selecting Transparent Instruction as the QEP topic, LMU will address faculty development to provide better instruction through improved pedagogical knowledge and skills.

The QEP’s scope of focus, on Gen-Ed and Gateway courses, has been chosen to put the resources where LMU believes the greatest impact will result. The University expects that this outcome will be evident using existing measures of academic knowledge and skills for foundational competencies in general education. The University believes that improved student learning will confirm published research that students’ increased academic success will result in a better sense of belonging and ultimately persistence at LMU (i.e., student success).

Published Literature that Supports LMU’s Topic Selection

LMU’s student body comprises a significant number of first-generation and low-income students of diverse ethnicity, whose learning and persistence needs differ from students whose parents have attended college, guide their children through the process, and earn a comfortable living. LMU’s QEP Steering Committee has explored a wide body of scholarly literature about student success and interventions geared toward helping high-need students achieve success. In the review below, we include evidence that shows Transparent Instruction in Gen-Ed assignments effectively helps address inequities of preparedness, emotional support, and financial security that many of our students may be susceptible to in their formative college years. If we can help our students by clarifying expectations and tasks in simple pedagogical interventions, we enable *all* students to more quickly grasp the rigors of college work, learn with more confidence, and persist in their college goals, ultimately improving knowledge in foundational courses, overall student retention, and graduation rates.

Underserved Students: Problems of Inequity Hinder Success

An examination of our students’ obstacles to success indicated that we needed to better understand how underserved college students learn. An underserved college student is someone who falls into one or more of the following categories: first-generation, low-income/low-socioeconomic status, or ethnically underrepresented (Gianoutsos & Winkelmes, 2016). As increasing numbers of underserved students enter college in the twenty-first century, educators must learn *how* they learn and how to help them succeed (Ramaley, 2016). Higher education’s understanding of learning has in some ways outpaced our conceptions of teaching (Bass, 2012), especially as student demographics—

and their differing needs of engagement—shift. Underserved students generally struggle in their first years of college more than their better-prepared counterparts and need help “leveling the playing field” in terms of settling into the demands of coursework, as well as adjusting to unfamiliar people and living environments. As Mary-Anne Winkelmes argues (2015), a significant challenge for instructors is providing equity of experience for all students.

Providing equity of experience, however, requires that we gauge for different levels of preparedness and acknowledge that all students do not learn in the same way. Underserved students often lack an understanding of what will be expected of them in their coursework, which negatively affects their learning and success (Jonsson 2014). Some may perceive racial and gender gaps between themselves and successful students in the classroom (Watkins & Mazur, 2013; Miyake, et al., 2010; Hausmann, Ye, Schofield, & Woods, 2009; Wilson & Linville, 1982). Such perceptions may indeed impede learning in a way that prompts students to feel that they are incapable of completing a course or degree program. For example, academic settings can be threatening for negatively stereotyped students, causing stress, anxiety, and feelings of alienation that undermine academic performance (Shnabel et al., 2013). Other underserved students with high failure rates suffer from a lack of family support, inadequate academic preparation, and motivation gaps compared to more successful learners (Treisman, 1992). Therefore, providing an equitable experience for all students is a challenge requiring nuanced sensitivity to numerous, dissimilar needs.

To compound their disadvantages, underserved students also face the same problems that prepared students face. A major psychological factor in most freshmen’s academic success seems to be the need for a sense of belonging—a sense of having positive relationships with others (Walton & Cohen, 2011). Many students worry about whether they “belong” in college, particularly in the first difficult year, and their worries about social acceptance can even impact their health and well-being. In one such study, authors Walton & Cohen (2011) devised a brief narrative intervention to frame social adversity as shared and short-lived, with positive results suggesting that inequality between marginalized and non-marginalized groups arises not solely from structural factors, but also from concern about social belonging.

Other scholars have studied types of interventions designed to foster a sense of belonging and help students persist in their academic goals. For example, one study (Hausmann, Ye, Schofield, and Woods, 2009) discussed “sense of belonging” in terms of an affiliation with the campus community that, arguably, keeps students in college. Their interventions consisted of small gifts, such as magnets and decals with the school name on them, as well as direct communication from college officials indicating they cared about students’ success. This study found that white students receiving the intervention persisted at a higher rate than minority students who received the same intervention. Another study (Paunesku et al., 2015) examined “mind-set interventions” to evaluate students’ beliefs about school and learning and found them to be very beneficial to students at risk of dropping out.

Additionally, an intervention called attribution therapy was featured in a Wilson and Linville study (1982), in which the coinvestigators videotaped upperclassmen talking about their struggles in their freshman year. Current freshmen who were concerned about their grades and viewed the video improved their grades over the following year and were less likely to leave college. Finally, another group of investigators (Shnabel et al., 2013) concluded that writing about social belonging, another narrative intervention, improved the academic performance for members of negatively stereotyped groups, particularly female and black students. In reviewing literature on social-psychological interventions in education, Yeager & Walton (2011) concluded that, while some are promising and

can bring about positive changes in individuals' academics and persistence, the interventions must be context dependent and dependent on the educational environment.

At LMU, the context and educational environment for improving student success is clear. We recognize particularly in our underserved freshman and sophomore student population many of the challenges they confront, as identified above, and will address them through the teaching intervention of *Transparent Instruction for General Education and Gateway Courses*. Our QEP aligns with the initiative created by Mary-Anne Winkelmes, PhD, who created transparency in teaching and learning—a protocol for making explicit to students what the process of teaching and learning in college entails. This protocol enables underserved students to more easily decipher assignments, grasp the reasoning behind them, and see how their work will be assessed.

A growing body of research indicates that students who are provided with these transparent assignments—the purpose (the rationale or the “whys”), the tasks (the “what”) for an assignment, and the criteria for grading and assessment (the “how”)—feel more confident academically and feel that they belong in college, which, as we have seen, helps predict whether they succeed in foundational freshman courses and persist in their studies (Berrett, 2015). For LMU the Transparent Instruction QEP will create a common language across Gen-Ed and Gateway courses to allow all incoming students to navigate the disparate work requirements and understand professors' expectations from the outset.

Transparent Instruction: A “Teaching Intervention”

Transparent Instruction will address many of the concerns education scholars have raised about institutional outcomes and student success. The higher education literature of recent decades focuses heavily on outcomes, frequently on what institutions (faculty, staff, and administrators) need to do to increase student retention or “persistence” (Kuh, 2016, p. 49). How do we help students finish what they start and reach their goals? Since student persistence is threatened by various characteristics (Kuh, et al., 2007), many of which deter or impede underserved students, institutions must become sensitive to students with these characteristics and be ready with early interventions that strengthen factors that predict success (Kuh 2016).

One such factor that we believe Transparent Instruction will reinforce for our students is “goal realization,” which Kuh describes as a point “when students find their studies personally meaningful, comprehend the relevance of what they are learning, and are able to apply at least some of what they are learning to some aspects of their lives they consider important” (2016, p. 52). Students have trouble articulating what they hope to gain from college and, crucially, often do not see the relevance of what they are studying to things that matter in their lives (Kuh, 2016). Helpfully, a transparent framework drives directed communications between students and instructors in which instructors strive to help students draw meaningful connections between coursework and real-world experiences, thus increasing the accessibility and relevance of each assignment for students (Gianoutsos & Winkelmes, 2016).

Confidence in their ability to grasp assignments and meet expectations directly affects students' learning and persistence. Particularly with the underserved student population in mind, some scholars posit (whether right or wrong) that teaching and learning today are at odds with each other: a problem, either way, that transparency can alleviate. Randy Bass (2012) asserts that because higher education's knowledge of learning has outpaced our teaching methodologies, tension has been created between informal modes of learning (like information-gathering students do on the internet and social media) and the traditional, formal curriculum (i.e., self-contained courses) still embraced by the academy. Bass advocates strategies for a re-centered curriculum that would emphasize

integrative, experiential learning and more high-impact practices (HIPs). HIPs are particularly well-suited for helping students see the connection between college and the “real world” that lies beyond.

Bass recommends team-based course design and delivery to help support students, expand their knowledge of interdisciplinary connections, and give them confidence in collaborating with peers and professionals across the disciplines. In fact, a multi-disciplinary team at California State University—Los Angeles (Fisher, et al., 2016) recently contributed to a national project, *Transparency and Problem-Centered Learning*, in which they demonstrated how the kind of approach Bass (2012) describes above does indeed work with Transparent Instruction to engage and motivate underserved students. They approached their multi-course transparency project “through a community cultural wealth lens” (p. 8) that explored how different disciplinary methods could inform solutions to local problems. This framework made classwork relevant to students, particularly as classes took place sometimes beyond campus, within their own community. The authors claim that “All of the faculty involved in this teaching and learning initiative agree that teaching with transparency methods and problem-centered learning was very productive. There is no question that intentional transparency benefitted our students; in fact, it clarified class goals and assignments for both students and faculty” (p. 9). Moreover, the students were given “ownership” of transparency in the project, using it to become more successful in their classes. These authors’ approach highlights ways that faculty can use and augment transparency from intentional assignment design to course design.

No one method will work for all courses and to drive all students’ success, and we therefore reviewed several relevant articles focusing on a variety instructional approaches that might be helpful in faculty workshops as we roll out the Transparent Instruction QEP. For example, we examined articles that encourage learner-centered teaching methods (like active, experiential, cooperative, and problem-based learning) that make students take more responsibility for their learning (Felder, 2011), as well as reasons why students resist these methods. Many students, particularly those underserved, see college in terms of work to complete, not learning to be embraced, and are often afraid to speak in up in class for fear of making a mistake. Additionally, they think of learning as listening to lectures and taking notes and tests—a disjointed series of tasks for which they have no real learning choices (Doyle, 2008). Therefore, building assignments that “level the playing field” with common language and structures (i.e., Purpose-Tasks-Criteria) that explicitly forge links between the classroom and career becomes increasingly important in academia today. For Joseph Lowman (1996), instructors must take steps to make out-of-classroom assignments valuable; they must clarify difficult concepts, provide examples and illustrate their importance, and connect assignment concepts to course content and in-class material. Lowman’s pedagogical advice is reflected in the tenets of Winkelmes’ transparent framework, which calls for the same clarity of purpose, exemplary instances of the required tasks, and connections to the wider course material.

Our Committee also reviewed articles that observe how teaching affects student thinking. In one report from findings based on Harvard Assessment Seminars, the author found that assigning multiple assessments was more beneficial to student thinking than few large assessments, as multiple assessments force students to organize their thoughts at smaller time intervals. This organization aids in the synthesis of content and in developing their understanding of the material (Fiske, 1990). Similarly, Peter Elbow (1997) recommends assigning numerous low-stakes writing assignments, as a means of getting students to think—and think about why they think that way—to learn and understand more of the course material without the strangulating fear of high-stakes writing that makes them often struggle in non-productive ways. Lots of low-stakes writing, Elbow contends, helps students find their own language for the issues of the course and gives instructors a better

view of how students understand the material. In short, low-stakes writing improves high-stakes writing.

Recommendations by both Elbow and Fiske in essence refer to metacognition, the awareness or analysis of one's own thinking, which, when fostered, can help students reflect on their learning processes and connect coursework to larger life questions. Transparent Instruction will facilitate metacognition in Gen-Ed and Gateway courses by virtue of its simple design. Students approaching tasks for a particular purpose, with clear assessment guidelines provided in advance, will be better able to think about their thinking actively in those crucial first- and second-year courses.

Critical thinking, advanced by the practice of metacognition, frequently cited in the literature as a desirable student-learning outcome that all educators are familiar with and invested in nurturing, is also a skill significantly enhanced by Transparent Instruction. Employers, too, value critical thinking and count it as one of the most desirable skills for new-hires, along with the ability to apply knowledge in real-world settings, to make ethical decisions, to work in teams, and to communicate well orally and in writing (Hart Research Associates, 2015). Winkelmes has investigated the employer-valued skills cited by Hart Research Associates' study over several years of transparency investigation. Her study revealed statistically significant improvements in these skills, with the greatest gains realized by underserved students (Transparency in Teaching and Learning Project, 2015).

The TG Philanthropy Project: A National Study of Transparent Instruction for Underserved Students

Our QEP Committee was pleased to read the findings of this national project, whose authors used Transparent Instruction in problem-centered courses to develop and test the impact of using more transparent methodologies and to build upon existing research on the role of transparency and high-impact teaching practices. This national project was conducted in 2015 by seven colleges and universities that enroll large underserved student populations (Brown McNair, 2016). The faculty teams at these colleges were trained in transparent teaching practices designed by Mary-Ann Winkelmes, and each team published their findings in the Winter/Spring 2016 edition of the journal *Peer Review*. As Tia Brown McNair states, "The project documented the value of increased transparency about learning outcomes as a positive influence on several factors that advance student success, including students' sense of belonging" (p. 5). Following are brief quotations about the benefits of Transparent Instruction, drawn from the articles documenting this project.

Winston-Salem University developed a cross-disciplinary team that "functioned as an *authentic learning community*" that "allowed us to exchange ideas, clarify our thinking, share student reactions, and provide professional support" (Bazemore-Walker, 2016, p. 23). As a result of an overhauling of several critical institutional areas, including their General Education program, "WSSU students now experience a more coherent curriculum—one that exposes them to diverse disciplines while simultaneously cultivating specific twenty-first century skills" (p. 21). These outcomes, as we have discussed above, are similar to LMU's Transparent Instruction goals for Gen-Ed and Gateway courses.

St. Edward's University chose for the project five instructors representing disciplines that teach foundational courses involving "introductory to mid-level" General Education content. The primary challenge this team encountered by implementing transparency practices was "the dilemma posed by withholding such practices from the control [group] courses" (Musselman et al., 2016, p. 28). Because "instructors generally recognized that intentionality and transparency help students learn more and produce better work" (p. 28), they "struggled with how to fairly provide all those benefits

to one section” and not to the other. The primary benefit noted by instructors was their “heightened sense of awareness in the process of assignment and course design” (p. 30). That is one of the primary benefits we also seek for our faculty at LMU.

Commenting on the findings of the entire project, Ashley Finley discusses VALUE rubrics, noting that rubrics “can be instruments for transparency, as well as tools for assessment” and help “to accomplish two essential practices of transparent teaching—to clearly articulate the intended outcome and to communicate how students will be evaluated” (p. 41). Providing and discussing rubrics before assignments helps allay students’ anxieties about the *grade* by allowing them to focus instead on thinking about how the tasks need to be accomplished. Discussing scored rubrics *after* an assignment reinforces the concepts in question and therefore increases students’ confidence in their ability to master them.

Providing an overview of the national project, as well as synthesizing data and research culled by the University of Nevada at Las Vegas (UNLV) over a several-year span, Mary-Ann Winkelmes and her team of co-investigators in the TILT-Higher Ed Project (Transparency in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education) provide the issue’s most salient broad-based analyses and results. Here, we quote Winkelmes, et al. directly:

- “The results of our project suggest that faculty can contribute to increasing all students’ success, especially that of underserved students, in their first year of college (when the greatest number of students drop out).”
- “In courses where students perceived more transparency [...] they experienced significantly greater learning benefits compared with their classmates who perceived less transparency around assignments in a course.”
- “Specifically, students who received more transparency reported gains in three areas that are important predictors of student success: academic confidence, sense of belonging, and mastery of the skills that employers value most when hiring.”
- “For first-generation, low-income, and underrepresented students, those [‘substantively important and statistically relevant’] benefits were larger” (2016, p. 33).

This article, titled “A Teaching Intervention That Increases Underserved College Students’ Success,” contains a transparent assignment template and numerous bar graphs delineating the statistical findings of UNLV’s study data (Winkelmes et al., 2016, pp. 31-36).

(b) Has broad-based support of institutional constituencies

The LMU planning and evaluation process is established and functions as a comprehensive and inclusive process. Originating in the annual Outcomes Assessment Report process for all academic programs and administrative units (as deemed appropriate by each LMU Vice President), progress toward institutional and strategic goals is shared annually at the Strategic Planning Retreat, which includes about 90 faculty and staff and students from undergraduate and graduate programs. Vice Presidents or their designees present on each of the eight Strategic Goals, providing updates on their progress during the first half of the retreat. Each strategic goal and related objectives are reviewed and revised by teams of 10-12 representatives from across the campus community. Major strategic goals and objectives from LMU Strategic Plans ([Retention from Strategic Plans 2001-2018](#)) have addressed aspects of student success and as noted above, a QEP specific goal was added to the 2019-2024 LMU Strategic Plan ([2019-2024 Goal 1 Objective 1.8](#)).

The other inclusive group which has been involved and strongly supportive is the General Education Committee. This Committee recommended this as the QEP topic early in the planning

process ([Minutes of the GE Committee August 24 2017](#); [Minutes of the GE Committee October 26 2017](#)), after discussions in a couple of Committee meetings as a natural consequence to discussions on improving instruction to improve student learning and success in Gen-Ed courses. The General Education Committee membership includes representatives of each academic discipline, which delivers Gen-Ed courses and members of each school that relies on general education for its programs, such as Allied Health and Nursing ([2018-2019 LMU General Education Committee](#)).

The LMU Academic Council formally approves academic program actions. Academic Council represents the entire academic community of LMU and includes ex officio members from academic support and administrative areas also related to student success ([2018-2019 Academic Council Membership](#)). The results of the QEP topic survey and general rationale about Transparent Instruction as an approach to improve student success was presented to the Academic Council on September 14, 2017 ([AC Minutes 9-14-2017](#)). The Academic Council approved the QEP topic on February 22, 2018 ([AC Minutes 2-22-2018](#)).

Other significant meetings of constituencies where information on the Transparent Instruction QEP was shared include: 1) the All-Employee meeting August 8, 2018; 2) All-Faculty Meeting August 8, 2018; 3) All-Faculty Meeting April 26, 2018; 4) All-Faculty Meeting November 2018. Each of these meetings is either live-streamed to extended learning sites or ITV is utilized for an inclusive meeting with 2-way communication with extended learning sites. A complete [QEP formulation timeline](#) of meetings demonstrates those involved since June 2017. Additional meetings are planned with University constituencies for more Q&A as a lead-up to the beginning of faculty development workshops on transparent instruction.

As this topic is focused on faculty development for improving instructional knowledge and skills to impact student success, faculty discussion and affirmation has been most important. The President's Cabinet has been updated regularly ([Cabinet and Executive Council Minutes](#)); and the Academic Programs Committee of the LMU Board of Trustees has been briefed on the QEP topic ([BOT Academic Programs Committee Presentation November 6, 2017](#)) and provided an update on the QEP topic May 4, 2018 ([Report to the LMU BOT Presentation May 4 2018](#)). The LMU Board of Trustees has also been briefed on the proposed Transparent Instruction QEP ([QEP Executive Summary](#)). The initial budget, fiscal year 2019, to support the QEP received approval May 4, 2018 ([BOT May 4, 2018 Minutes Excerpt QEP - Approval of Budget FY2019](#)).

(c) Focuses on improving specific student learning and/or student success

To improve student success via Transparent Instruction in Gen-Ed and Gateway courses, the University proposes to focus training and accountability on instructors of these courses ([LMU General Education and Gateway Courses FA2018 SP2019](#)), both full-time and part-time faculty ([Faculty listing for GE and Gateway Courses FA2018 SP2019](#)). Training will include workshops to introduce the faculty to the general and specific pedagogical approach of instructional clarity. Faculty will then individually apply this training to their own courses. We then plan to have faculty interact with their peers to evaluate and critique the efficacy of Transparent Instruction in formal and informal ways through reciprocal review. Rubrics for both syllabus evaluation and classroom evaluation have been designed by these faculty. We have also created an opinion survey for faculty to be used each semester for applicable courses, to measure faculty opinions on Transparent Instructional approaches.

The expected outcomes for faculty are as follows:

- Rubrics will be utilized by interdisciplinary groups of faculty who have undergone transparency training to assess Gen-Ed and Gateway course syllabi and assignments on a semester-by-semester basis. Each rubric has a 4-point scale, and the target for success will be at least 80% of all Gen-Ed and Gateway course syllabi and instructional assignments to score at least a 3 in each category of the rubric. A 3 on the rubric represents “Somewhat Transparent” and a 4 on the rubric represents “Transparent.”
- By year three, all Gen-Ed and Gateway courses will have provided transparent assignments. Evidence will be collected by using the Transparent Instruction Syllabus Rating Rubric by an interdisciplinary group of faculty led by a trained rater from outside the discipline.
- For faculty teaching Gen-Ed and Gateway courses, at least 60% will respond to pre- and post-training opinion surveys to assess the value of Transparent Instruction to improve student attitudes about major assignments. These surveys contain Likert scale questions between 1 and 5 measuring faculty perceptions of their attitude and knowledge of Transparent Instruction prior to and following their transparency training. The target for success will be to show a statistical difference in mean survey scores between pre- and post-training surveys. These surveys will be administered to faculty who have received the training and implemented it in at least two major assignments in a course.
- By year three, a review of all undergraduate syllabi for courses with at least 10 students enrolled will show recognizable elements of Transparent Instruction. An interdisciplinary group of faculty led by a trained rater will use the Transparent Instruction Syllabus Rating Rubric. We expect that trained faculty will find value and begin incorporating transparency in their other courses as evidenced by elements in non-Gen-Ed and non-Gateway course syllabi.

Faculty Training Process

Lincoln Memorial University’s Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) focuses on student success in the classroom and on learner progress toward their degree by targeting an important element of classroom instruction: *instructors communicating transparent requirements for successful assignment completion*. Instructors must give clear and Transparent Instructions for required assignments as research shows that attention to this aspect of teaching can increase student success. Transparent assignments build students’ confidence, increase their sense of belonging, and mitigate feelings of inadequacy especially in first-generation college learners (Gianoutsos & Winkelmes, 2016).

Lincoln Memorial University will accomplish the goal of improved student success using Transparent Instruction through targeted faculty development of all Gen-Ed and Gateway course instructors in Transparent Instructional methods. This faculty development workshop series will be required of all Gen-Ed and Gateway instructors and will allow all participants to successfully modify existing assignments and deliver two transparent assignments in their Gen-Ed and Gateway courses beginning with the Fall 2019 semester. Over subsequent semesters, any new Gen-Ed instructors will be trained and then modify and deliver at least two transparent assignments in *each* Gen-Ed and Gateway course that they teach.

Creating Transparent Instructions for assignments is only one part of the faculty development plan. Each assignment revised during the workshop series will have three transparent parts: Transparent Instructions, a transparent rubric, and annotated mock student assignments. The annotated mock assignments will show students both an exemplary and poor example of the assignment deliverable. The workshops will also introduce and encourage overall transparent syllabus design. The QEP

Steering Committee expects that the participants in this faculty development workshop series will implement these ideas in all of the classes they teach, not just Gen-Ed and Gateway courses.

The objectives for Transparent Instruction faculty development are as follows:

1. Faculty will demonstrate an understanding of the QEP faculty training and development goal and Transparent Instructional concepts and practices.
2. Faculty will apply the concepts of instructional transparency including Purpose, Tasks, and Criteria.
3. Faculty will modify and deliver for their Gen-Ed or Gateway course(s): two transparent assignments with accompanying rubrics and annotated assignment examples in each Gen-Ed and Gateway course. At the end of the training, faculty will have two transparent assignments, two annotated assignments, and two assignment rubrics.
4. Faculty will also begin revising their course syllabi to make them more transparent. The time commitment for this faculty development workshop series will be twelve (12) hours with six (6) hours of guided instruction and six (6) hours of continued work outside of the workshop sessions.
5. Faculty will evaluate and reflect on their experiences with instructional transparency and the effect on student learning and success.

To accommodate nearly one hundred instructors, the University will offer multiple cohorts in different formats. Three cohorts will be offered in (5) five workshops over (6) six weeks beginning in early April and skipping the University's final exam week. Cohort A will meet Wednesdays at 3 p.m., Cohort B will meet Fridays at 10 a.m., and Cohort C will meet Fridays at 3 p.m. Cohort D will meet one Saturday in April and will target adjunct instructors who cannot travel to Harrogate multiple times over the semester. Cohort E will be an asynchronous online course delivered in Blackboard that will follow the same pattern as Cohorts A, B, and C. Cohort E is intended for full-time staff who teach and cannot attend five workshop sessions. Cohorts D and E will require special permission to join from the appropriate school dean and the Vice President for Academic Affairs.

All participating instructors will receive the [Transparent Instruction QEP Manual](#) and will bring this document with them to each workshop session. Participants will also have access to these materials electronically through The QEP Transparent Instruction Blackboard Organization. The Transparent Instruction QEP Manual provides transparent instructional resources including videos, a literature review of Transparent Instruction articles, example transparent and non-transparent assignments, a transparent assignment template, a checklist for transparent assignments, example assignment rubrics, and a link to rubric generators.

Rubric Generators:

<http://rubistar.4teachers.org/index.php>

<http://www.learner.org/workshops/hswriting/interactives/rubric/>

Prior to the first workshop, participants will provide two current assignments from one of their Gen-Ed or Gateway courses to the QEP Steering Committee. Assignments will be chosen by Department Chairs or Course Directors in LNCN-100, LNCN-300, UACT-100, HIST-121 online and HIST-122 online. These assignments will then be evaluated by students visiting the Tagge Center for Academic Support. Students will be asked to rate one assignment using the [Instructional Assignment Rating Rubric](#) designed by the Office of Institutional Research. Participation in this rating of assignments will be voluntary for students and will be facilitated by the Director of Academic Support.

The facilitators for these workshops will be members of the QEP Steering Committee who have significant classroom experience, including the QEP Director; the Director of Online Learning; the Dean of Mathematics and Science; the Dean of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences; the Department Chair of Undergraduate Business; the Department Chair of Humanities; and several full-time faculty members drawn from across the departments that offer Gen-Ed and Gateway courses. All facilitators will be trained prior to the workshop series and will design a common training curriculum to provide a consistent product across all workshop tracks.

In the first workshop, facilitators will introduce Transparent Instruction, engage the participants about their attitudes toward this teaching approach, and prompt discussion of the literature review. Participants will take a pre-survey of their perceptions of transparency ([Faculty Pre-Training Survey](#)) and discuss assigned common readings including several video clips that will be accessible through the QEP Transparent Instruction Blackboard organization site. The workshop facilitators will aggregate the survey data to better understand where the participants stand on the topic and will shape training accordingly.

Participants begin hands-on work of altering a current assignment in the second workshop. For this workshop, participants will bring two copies of one of the assignments that they have previously given to the QEP Steering Committee and will work in pairs with another instructor from a different discipline. During this pairing activity, participants will talk through the assignments they have brought to the workshop. Working with someone from a different discipline will give each participant a different perspective on his or her assignments. If the instructor has not created an assignment that an individual from a different field can understand, then the instructor does not have a transparent assignment. Pairs will be asked to explain their assignments to each other and, in turn, each member will be asked to explain back to his/her partner what the purpose, task, and criteria are for the listening partner's assignment. Following this peer examination, the facilitators will give the participants the results of the student evaluation of the same assignments. This evaluation will provide the instructor with insight on how the assignment is perceived by some students and how it can be made more transparent.

After this pairing activity, workshop facilitators will walk through examples of non-transparent and transparent assignments and introduce the participants to several tools designed to help instructors think through their assignments. These resources will be included in the workshop manual and provided in the QEP Transparent Instruction Blackboard organization site. Handouts and resources will include the following items: [Transparent Assignment Template](#), [Self-guided Draft Checklist for Designing Transparent Assignments](#), [Assignment Cues](#) (designing an assignment [adapted from Bloom's Taxonomy]), and [Checklist for Transparent Assignments](#). Between the second and third workshops, participants will continue to revise their assignments using transparency principles.

The third workshop will entail a dual track for quantitative and non-quantitative courses and will cover the effective use of assessment, focusing on the use of rubrics and annotated examples as important tools for students to help them better understand the assignments instructors give in class. This workshop will demonstrate development techniques for annotated assignments and rubrics; both quantitative and non-quantitative. Instructors of computational or quantitative courses (Chemistry, Physics, Mathematics, Accounting) will focus on developing the Purpose component of assignments for those subjects. Facilitators will stress the importance of instructors explaining their assessment approaches to students, including sharing the rubric or rubrics the instructor will use to evaluate student work and providing annotated examples of completed work that corresponds to that assignment. Participants will view and discuss several examples of effective rubric use and will

be introduced to the Blackboard rubric tool and other free web-based rubric generators. With these tools, participants will begin building their own rubric for their first assignment and creating an annotated mock student assignment.

The fourth workshop will provide another hands-on pair sharing experience in which participants will work with their original partner to share and talk about the assignments they have revised and the new rubric(s) and annotated example(s) they have created. For the second part of the workshop, participants will find a new partner and start discussing the second assignment, second rubric, and second annotated example. Between the fourth and fifth workshops, participants will complete revising their second assignment and creating the second rubric and second annotated example.

The fifth workshop will serve as a reflection for the workshop series and a discussion of applying transparency principles to course syllabi. Participants will bring and hand in both transparent assignments, both annotated examples, and both rubrics. The facilitators will then initiate a group discussion about the workshop series, Transparent Instruction, and the participants' experiences through this workshop. Building on the good experiences that the QEP Steering Committee is confident the participants have had, the facilitators will introduce the idea of applying transparency to course syllabi, providing an example of a transparent syllabus and a [transparent syllabus rubric](#) to help guide participants in changing their course syllabi. At the end of the session, participants will be asked to complete a post-workshop attitudinal survey ([Faculty Post-Training Survey](#)) designed to measure possible changes in attitudes toward Transparent Instruction. Before leaving the final session, participants will hand in their two revised assignments, the two rubrics developed, and the mock student assignments.

Over time, this transparency training will be incorporated into the University's onboarding process for all new instructors who will teach Gen-Ed or Gateway classes. For new full-time faculty, the University will include this training in the New Faculty Academy that the Vice President for Academic Affairs conducts every fall term. For adjuncts faculty, the QEP Director will modify and implement the online asynchronous course workshop track from the Spring 2019 workshop series as necessary.

Student Success Outcomes

For the student success aspect, ongoing general education assessment of student learning outcomes will continue, but with analyses focused on students' General Education competencies in the identified courses. A student survey will be administered annually to gauge student opinions about instructional clarity. This opinion survey will also include questions typically used by other researchers to measure the academic confidence of and sense of belonging for these same students and comparison groups. Questions will be added to the standard course evaluation question set. The NSSE and the Ruffalo Noel-Levitz SSI will continue to be administered during the QEP for close monitoring of items related to instructional engagement and clarity.

The expected outcomes for students are as follows:

- Improve ETS Proficiency Profile Exam average to a rolling average of 60th national percentile. This will be measured in LNCN300, when cohorts 1-3 reach junior status, for General Education course success.
- Improve the retention rates for first-time, full-time, degree-seeking freshman from 73% to 78% by year 5.
- Improve the retention rate for first-time, full-time, degree-seeking FGCSs from the current rate of 65% to at least 75% within five years.

- As measured via student and faculty Focus Groups, at least 80% of codes identified from the transcription data will exhibit perceived improvements in student success.
- As measured via end-of-course evaluations for each Gen-Ed or Gateway course section, the target of success will be at least 80% students will indicate “sense of belonging,” or that their course helped them feel they are a member of the LMU learning community.
- Using pre- and post-QEP Implementation Course Assessments, we will measure students’ perceptions of improved success. The pre-survey will have a question such as, “I feel that I am a member of my school’s community,” and the post-survey will have a question such as, “How much has this course helped you to feel that you are a member of your school’s learning community?” The target for success will be to show a statistical difference in mean survey scores between pre- and post-evaluations.
- Improved satisfaction with clear instruction in Gen-Ed and Gateway courses as measured by the standard questions added to the standard course evaluation. The target for success on the LMU Undergraduate Student Satisfaction Survey questions, related to the quality of academic instruction, is at least 90% of students will indicate their satisfaction as “Agree” or “Strongly Agree.”

Over the duration of this QEP, it should be possible to follow four cohorts for fall-to-fall retention (freshmen to sophomore), three cohorts from freshmen to junior year start, two cohorts from freshmen to senior year start, and one cohort from freshmen to 4th year graduation. During this same time we expect to follow the development and success of at least 40 full-time faculty, 20 full-time staff who teach at least one of these courses regularly, and 20 part-time faculty. This QEP should impact at least 300 course sections per year and as many as 1,400 (unduplicated head count) students per year. Currently, we have 294 first-time freshmen in Gen-Ed and Gateway courses. There were 801 first-generation college students of classifications in these same courses for the fall 2017 semester. The University sees this as a significant and appropriate opportunity to impact the success of students in support of our institutional mission.

(d) Commits resources to initiate, implement, and complete the QEP

Initiation of the QEP

Lincoln Memorial University has a history of commitment to student success, evidenced by clear faculty responsibilities related thereto and a variety of campus services focused on outcomes related to student success. These resources are already in place and will be used to ensure a smooth implementation of the QEP. The University has been committed to student success of all students for multiple decades as evidenced by the LMU faculty Appointment Agreement and Position Profile, which includes responsibility for service on committees and for academic advising. These responsibilities are accounted for in semester-by-semester Faculty Workload forms which department chairs, deans, and the VPAA review. The University provides initial training in academic advising during the onboarding process for new faculty. This includes orientation to the elements of student career planning and course selection, affective environment and support systems, tutoring, student activities, and new student orientation. Faculty and staff members actively participate in the LMU Welcome Weekend for freshmen and through the UACT 100 College Success course. Stipends are paid to those who provide this service beyond normal duties. The Dean of Students Office develops a well-planned, intense, first six weeks of the semester to help freshmen students adjust to college life and to be aware of policies, offices, and expectations. Likewise, in programs, such as the Caylor School of Nursing, the onboarding process for new students commits extra time and resources of personnel and designs social events to support longer-term student success. The

[LMU Academic and Student Services website](#) provides a description of many of the established offices helping support student success.

The University also provides for faculty support and development to deliver Gen-Ed and Gateway course instruction through face-to-face, hybrid, and online course delivery methodologies. The Center for Teaching and Learning Excellence (CTLE) supports the Annual Faculty-Staff Conference Week workshop sessions which include instructional and student support training. Relevant session topics supporting student success in August 2018 included: career services, student athletes, student conduct process, student activities and services, cooperative learning, online learning, student engagement and Blackboard, teaching and grading with rubrics, and the engaged classroom. The CTLE supports classroom and online course development and accountability processes under leadership of the Director of Online Learning and the Instructional Technologist positions. These two positions are funded through Academic Affairs at an annual expense of \$158,627 plus an operational budget of \$35,451.

Selected LMU Faculty, academic chairs, and deans have traveled to professional meetings or participated in a workshop specifically focused on Transparent Instruction, Gateway courses, and/or student success. This has included travel of two members of the QEP Steering Committee to the “2018 Achieving the Dream” conference in Nashville. Two Gateway course faculty members, Drs. Cooper and Boone, are participating in the March 2019 Gardner Institute Gateway Conference in Atlanta. Preparations have also included a virtual workshop on Transparent Instruction on September 25, 2018, led by Dr. Mary-Ann Winkelmes with 13 LMU participants, including the VPAA. This workshop was focused on key members of the learning community with the expectation that several would become part of the broader QEP training resource group composed of QEP Transparent Instruction trainers. These trainers will be required to complete the Transparent Instruction training in an exemplary manner and implement in each of their courses along with participation in a TILT-focused professional conference or non-LMU training workshop.

The work of formulating the QEP has been accomplished through the QEP Steering Committee. The work of incorporating the institutional research has been through the support of the normal operational functions of the Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness and of Academic Affairs. This has been a grassroots process and of low costs because it has utilized the normal processes of the University. Membership of the QEP Steering Committee includes seven full-time faculty, two students, and seven staff with part-time faculty appointments. Committee members are organized into three Task Groups: training, assessment, and promotion/marketing (Table 1). The student members participate as their schedules allow.

Table 1: QEP Steering Committee/Task Groups

Name	Unit	Task Group
Kevin Cooper, Ph.D.	Mathematics and Sciences (Physics)	Training
Alexander Parks, Ed.D.	Education	Training
Karen Carter, Ph.D.	Business (Information Systems)	Training
Adam Rollins, Ph.D.	Mathematics and Sciences (Biology)	Training
Joanna Neilson, Ph.D.	Arts, Humanities, & Social Sciences (History)	Training
Elizabeth Yagodzinski, Ph.D.	Center for Teaching and Learning Excellence	Training
Joshua Boone, Ph.D.	Mathematics and Sciences (Math)	Assessment
Martin Sellers, Ph.D.	Arts, Humanities, & Social Sciences (Political Science)	Assessment

Kala Perkins-Holtsclaw, Ed.D.	Institutional Research and Effectiveness	Assessment
Amiel Jarstfer, Ph.D.	Academic Affairs	Assessment
Sandra Weems, Ph.D.	Arts, Humanities, & Social Sciences (English)	Marketing
Sandra Southern, M.S.	Allied Health Sciences	Marketing
Robin Wilson, Ed.D.	Nursing	Marketing
Travis Wright, Ph.D.	Academic and Student Support Services	Marketing
Nikki Lockhart, MBA	Public Relations and Marketing	Marketing

Additional resources are being committed and utilized to initiate the QEP. These are mainly to promote awareness and to provide training of faculty. Promotional materials are low cost. These are in the form of one-page flyers: one for faculty and one for students; video production of testimonials; social media postings by the Public Relations Office and a business card sized promotional card. Total out of pocket direct expenses are less than \$2,000. The largest expense to initiate the QEP is for faculty development in the form of a stipend for each full-time and adjunct faculty member who completes the Transparent Instruction workshop training. This total cost is about \$45,000 in the first year. Full-time faculty will complete six hours in a face-to-face workshop with the expectation of six more hours on their own to rework major projects/assignments in each of their general education courses. Assignment modifications will be incorporated into syllabi used by adjunct faculty where multiple sections of a Gen-Ed or Gateway course exist. For this service each of the estimated 52 full-time faculty members will be paid an additional \$500. Adjunct faculty will receive \$400 each for less extensive work but may involve travel or collaborating via distance communication technology to reach the same level of understanding and skill in delivering Transparent Instruction. Those full-time faculty members facilitating the transparent instruction workshops will receive an additional stipend of \$300 each.

The final element of resources to initiate the QEP is the hiring and onboarding of a QEP Director. This position reports to the Vice President for Academic Affairs (VPAA) and is designed to provide oversight so that the plan's components occur following the timeline set by the QEP Steering Committee. The responsibilities include facilitating workshops, identifying/developing assessment components, helping train new full-time and adjunct faculty, arranging meeting locations, facilitating communications, preparing materials, collecting results and analyzing the data, presenting data to the QEP Steering Committee, and reporting regularly to the VPAA. A LMU [QEP Budget for 2019-2025](#) has been planned but requires annual review and approval by the VP for Finance and is part of the overall University budget approved by the Board of Trustees each year.

Implementation of the QEP

Moving from initiation to implementation leverages some resources already explained: QEP Director budget and faculty development funding to pay faculty stipends for implementing Transparent Instruction within courses. The additional elements requiring resources to implement will be those to facilitate the organized and regular QEP assessment processes and metrics. This includes cost and cost-sharing for assessments, including costs for the NSSE, the Ruffalo Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory, and costs for internal assessor stipends to review and rate assignments and syllabi. Assessors will be full-time faculty who will be paid a stipend of approximately \$35 per hour for QEP assessment work above and beyond their normal duties. Other implementation costs will be for training additional instructional personnel as they are on-boarded. As new instructional personnel are typically on-boarded during fall prior to the first day of

classes, it may be necessary to provide compensation for training time for those who will teach Gen-Ed or Gateway courses. The QEP Director will be responsible for arranging and providing this training. These expenses beyond that of the QEP Director position compensation should be minor, but would include meeting supplies and refreshments.

As with any ongoing academic process where continuous improvement is expected, such as general education, more extensive faculty development will most likely require faculty participation in professional organization meetings. Registration and travel funds are a necessary resource for both the QEP Director and key faculty each year. Significant information about other institutional QEPs is shared at SACSCOC meetings, and thus LMU will support the regular attendance of the QEP Director at both the Annual Meeting and the Summer Institute. Faculty teaching Gateway courses will also be encouraged to participate regularly in relevant meetings. LMU expects that key personnel will be presenting outcomes of the QEP at scholarly meetings and regional institutional meetings, such as the Appalachian College Association Summit. The travel expenses are expected to be between \$12,000 and \$17,000 each budget year.

Hosting focus groups to hear the opinions of both faculty and students is an important aspect of the assessment process. Supplies for these meetings will be funded from the [QEP annual budget](#). Focus group events will occur four times per academic year, and the meetings will be organized two meetings for students and two meetings for faculty.

Finally, it is important to recognize the successful efforts of faculty who implement Transparent Instructional practices in such a way as to be notable and even exemplary. Nominated faculty members will be recognized through awards after a careful review of syllabi and assignments in conjunction with student feedback. The top award recipient will receive \$1000, followed by awards of \$750, \$500, and three of \$250, so that a total of six instructional faculty are recognized each year. Full-time and adjunct faculty are eligible for the annual awards. The review will be completed and award decisions made by members of the QEP Steering Committee, and an Awards Task Group that will be created during the first year of the QEP.

Completion of the QEP

Completion of the QEP involves the finalization of assessment efforts and the development of the impact report. As Transparent Instruction becomes more ingrained within the collective processes of targeted faculty members, LMU anticipates that Transparent Instruction will become the norm, not only in Gen-Ed and Gateway courses, but in other courses taught by these same faculty members. As long as LMU intentionally offers Transparent Instruction focused faculty development, broad-based integration should continue until the natural evolution of teaching and learning methodologies displaces it with an even better approach for student success.

The University will continue support of the QEP Director including travel to share successes and ways to improve Transparent Instruction quality, especially as it supports student success. At this time, LMU has targeted meetings such as the SACSCOC Annual Meeting in December 2024, the Gateway Course Experience Conference March 2024, Appalachian College Association Summit in October 2024, and others such as the Association of American Colleges and Universities annual meeting, as key opportunities for the QEP Director to broadly share the impact of the QEP with a wide audience. The University will continue to fund the QEP Director position until the Fifth-Year QEP Impact Report is completed and submitted to SACSCOC. At that time, the QEP Director may transition to another role within the institution. The institution has also dedicated resources to support QEP completion, including professional meeting conference registration and travel

expenses for key faculty leaders presenting QEP outcomes. Final awards for exemplary work and successes of the faculty in the LMU Transparent Instruction QEP will be awarded at the All-Employee University Meeting in August 2024.

(e) Includes a plan to assess achievement

Our assessment of the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) will follow LMU's institutionally established process of Outcomes Assessment Reporting. The institution utilizes Outcomes Assessment Reports (OAR) to gather, from a broad range of assessment measures, a variety of data concerning the effectiveness of educational programs, administrative units, academic and student support units, General Education, and the Quality Enhancement Plan.

Outcomes Assessment Reports (OAR) are generated at the conclusion of each academic year by each institutional unit. The OAR for the QEP will follow the same annual process in assessing the overall effectiveness of the QEP. The QEP OAR will reflect goals established in the QEP, student success and faculty training and development outcomes, related University and strategic goals, methods for assessment (measurement), targets for success, and recommendations for improvement. The QEP OAR will be prepared annually in May by the QEP Director and will be submitted to the Office of Institutional Effectiveness by June 15 each year. The QEP Steering Committee will annually review the OAR findings during June to assess ongoing achievement of the QEP goals, to make plans for continuous improvement, and to inform strategic planning.

Goals of the QEP

Lincoln Memorial University has two overarching goals for the QEP. The first goal is to improve student success through implementation of the QEP. The second goal of the QEP is to improve student success through the training and development of faculty related to transparent pedagogy. Gen-Ed and Gateway faculty will be trained to develop more transparent syllabi and more transparent course assignments.

Outcomes of the QEP

The QEP comprises two student success outcomes and one faculty training and development outcome:

- Student Success Outcome #1—The QEP will improve student success in Gen-Ed and Gateway courses by offering more Transparent Instruction and more transparent syllabi.
- Student Success Outcome #2—Implementation of the QEP will improve student success by increasing students' overall sense of belonging to the general learning community at Lincoln Memorial University.
- Faculty Training and Development Outcome—Implementation of the QEP will increase student success through faculty training and development on improving course assignments, instructions, and syllabi by learning how to offer Transparent Instruction.

Rationale for Selection of Assessment Measures

The QEP Assessment Task Group and the Office of Institutional Effectiveness began the process of determining how best to collect, measure, and assess data to determine the achievement of QEP goals and outcomes. The QEP Assessment Task Group carefully examined the literature on student success related to Transparent Instruction, expanded upon existing institutional assessment measures, considered the importance of nationally normed assessments, and analyzed benchmarking

data with peer institutions to develop an array of quantitative and qualitative, direct and indirect, and formative and summative measures ([Digest of Assessment Measures](#)).

Specifically, the review of literature showed that elements of Transparent Instruction in foundational course assignments effectively address inequities of preparedness, emotional support, and financial anxiety that many of our target student demographics are susceptible to in their formative college years; addressing these inequities should improve student success. High-need and underserved students comprise a large proportion of the LMU undergraduate student body. As a result of the literature review, the need to assess First-Generation College Student (FGCS) success and students' sense of belonging within the LMU learning community was evident. The literature on transparent pedagogy also informed the selection of measures for faculty training and development.

Additionally, student retention and graduation data were collected from the Integrated Post-Secondary Education Data System (IPEDS) on LMU's East Tennessee peer institutions who are also members of the Tennessee Independent Colleges and Universities Association (TICUA) and/or the Appalachian College Association (ACA) for the past five years. LMU ETS Proficiency Profile exam data for General Education competency assessment was analyzed for the past five years. The Assessment Task Group and the Office of Institutional Effectiveness also analyzed findings from the past three administrations of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), the Ruffalo Noel Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory (SSI), and the LMU Undergraduate Satisfaction Survey. These data were utilized in the measurement selection process and also served as baseline data for minimum thresholds of achievement and targets for success.

Assessment Instruments

- [ETS Proficiency Profile Exams](#)- Improved student success in General Education competencies will be directly measured by administering the ETS Proficiency Profile Exam. All undergraduate students will complete the ETS Proficiency Profile Exams during their junior year in the LNCN 300 course required of all students to assess their general education competencies. Lincoln Memorial University has utilized the ETS Proficiency Profile Exams to assess students' competencies in General Education since 2013.
- [Retention Rates](#)- Student success in persisting toward degree completion will be directly measured by tracking and analyzing student retention rates. Retention rates will be calculated for two student populations at LMU: all first-time, full-time, degree-seeking freshmen and all first-time, full-time, degree-seeking, first-generation college student freshmen. Retention rates for each population will be calculated for freshman to sophomore years.
- [Graduation Rates](#)- Student success will be directly measured through tracking and analyzing four-year and five-year graduation rates for first-time, full-time, degree-seeking freshmen and first-time, full-time, degree-seeking, first-generation college student freshmen. LMU will have two sets of four-year graduation rate data and one set of five-year graduation data throughout the five-year QEP implementation period.
- [National Survey of Student Engagement \(NSSE\)](#) - LMU has utilized NSSE for almost two decades to gauge undergraduate student engagement in the campus learning community. The NSSE obtains, on an annual basis, information from hundreds of four-year colleges and universities nationwide about student participation and satisfaction in programs, activities, and services that institutions provide for student learning, success, and personal development. The NSSE will be utilized as an indirect measure to assess student perceptions of improved success through increased instructional clarity, as a result of the QEP implementation.

- [Ruffalo Noel Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory \(SSI\)](#) - LMU has utilized the SSI occasionally during the past two decades to gauge undergraduate student satisfaction. The SSI measures student priorities and student satisfaction. The SSI has been taken by over 5 million students at over 2,700 campuses, which provides valid national benchmarking data. The SSI will be utilized as an indirect measure to assess student perceptions of improved success through instructional clarity as a result of the QEP implementation. The SSI will also be utilized to indirectly assess students' sense of belonging to the general learning community at LMU.
- [LMU Undergraduate Student Satisfaction Survey](#)- The LMU Office of Institutional Effectiveness surveys students twice a year using an internal undergraduate student satisfaction survey. The survey results are analyzed and utilized for strategic planning and decisions. The LMU Undergraduate Student Satisfaction Survey will be utilized to indirectly assess student satisfaction related to the quality of academic instruction, as a result of the QEP implementation.
- [Pre- and Post-QEP Implementation Course Evaluations](#)- The QEP Assessment Task Group has developed pre-and post-QEP implementation evaluation forms that will indirectly measure student perceptions of improved student success, as a result of increased instructional clarity and transparency after QEP implementation. ([Pre-QEP Implementation Course Evaluation](#), [Post-QEP Implementation Course Evaluation](#))
- [Student Success, Syllabi, and Course Assignments measured using Student and Faculty Focus Groups](#)- Student and faculty focus groups will be conducted to indirectly measure students' perceptions of improved success, to indirectly measure faculty and student perceptions of improvements to course syllabi, and to indirectly measure faculty and student perceptions of improvements in course assignments and instructional transparency. ([Focus Groups Overview](#), [Faculty Transparency Focus Groups](#), [Undergraduate Transparency Focus Groups](#))
- [Syllabi and Instructional Assignments measured using Rubrics](#)- The QEP Assessment Task Group developed rubrics to assess the transparency of course syllabi and course assignments. Both rubrics were developed according to the literature and highlight the task, purpose, and criteria aspects of instructional transparency. The rubrics will be utilized by interdisciplinary groups of faculty who have undergone transparency training to assess Gen-Ed and Gateway course syllabi and assignments on a semester-by-semester basis. Each interdisciplinary group of faculty will be led by an experienced QEP Transparent Instruction trainer. ([Syllabi Rubric](#), [Instructional Assignments Rubric](#))
- [Faculty Pre- and Post-Training Surveys](#)- The QEP Training Task Group has developed pre-and post-training surveys to indirectly measure faculty perceptions of their attitude and knowledge of Transparent Instruction prior to and following their transparency training. ([Faculty Pre-Training Survey](#), [Faculty Post-Training Survey](#))
- [End-of-Course Evaluations](#)- Each semester all LMU students have the opportunity to evaluate their courses and faculty by completing end-of-course evaluations. The end-of-course evaluations will be utilized also during the QEP to indirectly measure students' sense of belonging to the general learning community at LMU.

Targets for Success and Justifications

[ETS Proficiency Profile Exams](#)- The General Education Committee at LMU has collected and analyzed the ETS Proficiency Profile Exam scores over the past five years and the current five-year rolling average of national percentiles is 53.6%. The target for success for the QEP will be to achieve a rolling average of 60th national percentile.

- [Retention Rates](#)- The Office of Institutional Effectiveness at LMU annually tracks and reports institutional retention data. The target for success for the QEP will be increasing first-time, full-time, degree-seeking freshman to sophomore retention rates to at least 78% within five years and the same rate for first-generation college students to at least 75% within five years. The current institutional student achievement goal for retention is 75%, and was set based on analyzing the past five years of retention data in comparison of LMU to East Tennessee TICUA institutions and East Tennessee ACA peer institutions. The most recent overall LMU retention rate is 73%, with the first-generation college student retention rate being 65%.
- [Graduation Rates](#)- The Office of Institutional Effectiveness at LMU annually tracks and reports graduation rate data to IPEDS for 4-year, 6-year, and 8-year time periods. Graduation rates will be tracked throughout the QEP for first-time, full-time, bachelor's degree seeking freshmen and for first-time, full-time, bachelor's degree seeking, first-generation college student freshmen. The target for success for first-time, full-time, bachelor's degree seeking freshmen for 4-year graduation rates will be 50%, with a 5-year graduation target of 55%. The target for success for the first-generation college student cohort 4-year graduation rate will be at least 45%, with a 5-year graduation rate target of at least 50%. All targets were set based on the analysis and trends of past LMU graduation rate data.
- [National Survey of Student Engagement \(NSSE\)](#) - The target for success on the NSSE will be to increase student satisfaction on each survey administration so the satisfaction scores related to instructional clarity are higher than LMU Carnegie Class and Private, Non-profit peer institutions. The past three administrations of the NSSE have shown lower scores for LMU than for LMU peer institutions.
- [Ruffalo Noel Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory \(SSI\)](#) - The target for success on the SSI is to increase student satisfaction related to instructional clarity beyond the national satisfaction percentages, and to have a gap between student satisfaction and importance ratings related to sense of belonging of at most 0.25. The past three administrations of the SSI have shown student satisfaction percentages less than the national percentages on instructional clarity. The survey question related to sense of belonging will be a new assessment measure for the institution specifically measuring if the student feels they are a member of the LMU learning community.
- [LMU Undergraduate Student Satisfaction Survey](#)- The target for success on the LMU Undergraduate Student Satisfaction Survey questions, related to the quality of academic instruction, is at least 90% of students will indicate their satisfaction as "Agree" or "Strongly Agree." The 90% target of success was chosen based on the analysis of past survey data, which showed 81%, and projecting how the implementation of the QEP will improve student satisfaction.
- [Pre- and Post-QEP Implementation Course Assessments](#)- A student survey instrument will be utilized to measure student perceptions of improved success pre- and post-QEP implementation. The target for success will be to show a statistical difference in mean survey scores between pre- and post-QEP implementation evaluations.

- Student and Faculty Focus Groups- Student and faculty focus group discussions will be facilitated by LMU assessment professionals. The target for success for all focus groups will be at least 80% of codes identified from the transcription data will exhibit perceived improvements in student success.
- Rubrics- Rubrics will be utilized by interdisciplinary groups of faculty who have undergone transparency training to assess Gen-Ed and Gateway course syllabi and assignments on a semester-by-semester basis. Each rubric has a 4-point scale, and the target for success will be for at least 80% of all Gen-Ed and Gateway course syllabi and instructional assignments to score at least a 3 in each category of the rubric. A 3 on the rubric represents “Somewhat Transparent” and a 4 on the rubric represents “Transparent.”
- Faculty Pre- and Post-Training Surveys- These surveys contain Likert scale questions between 1 and 5 measuring faculty perceptions of their attitude and knowledge of Transparent Instruction prior to and following their transparency training. The target for success will be to show a statistical difference in mean survey scores between pre- and post-training surveys.
- End of Course Evaluations- The Office of Institutional Effectiveness has added a question to the end-of-course evaluations to assess student perceptions of being a member of the general LMU learning community. The target of success will be that at least 80% of students will indicate that their course helped them feel they are a member of the LMU learning community.

The [QEP Assessment Plan](#), [QEP Timeline Overview](#), and detailed [QEP Assessment Timeline](#) provide details of the above-mentioned measures and the timing of the assessments. The QEP Director will annually collect and report all assessment data using the Outcomes Assessment Report, in addition to collecting and analyzing data each semester for the purpose of assessing QEP progress and recommending necessary improvements. The Office of Institutional Effectiveness will provide appropriate support to the QEP Director in the data collection and analysis processes. The QEP Steering Committee will review the data at the end of each semester and at the conclusion of each academic year to assess the overall annual effectiveness of the QEP, and will make recommendations for improvement going forward. The Vice President for Academic Affairs will be responsible for facilitating recommended improvements and budgetary modifications.

Conclusion

Lincoln Memorial University proposes the above Plan to incorporate Transparent Instruction into our Gen-Ed and Gateway courses, beginning in Fall 2019. Through the efforts of our QEP Steering Committee, we have

- a) Identified the Transparent Instruction topic as beneficial to our students and institutional goals, after extensive reviews of relevant scholarly literature and of the University’s Strategic Planning Goals.
- b) Obtained broad-based support of our institutional constituencies, including input and support from our learning community starting with General Education Committee and being affirmed by the LMU Academic Council and various committees of faculty, staff, and students. The President, Vice Presidents, and deans have provided input and affirmation and the Board of Trustees has been briefed during the process.
- c) Focused on improving specific areas of student success, defining expected outcomes for both faculty and students, which will begin with in-depth faculty training in Spring 2019.
- d) Committed resources to initiate, implement, and complete the QEP, starting with the formation of the LMU QEP Steering Committee, which has prepared this Plan, and

extending to the hire of a QEP Director, who will oversee its implementation and maintenance during the next five years.

- e) Included a plan to assess the achievements of Transparent Instruction, aligning with the stated Goals and Outcomes of the QEP.

The LMU QEP Steering Committee acknowledges the interdependent nature of work vital to student success and any program of outcomes improvement. “That is, both student effort and institutional effort are needed to increase the odds that all students will complete their studies and graduate with the knowledge and proficiencies they need to survive and thrive in the twenty-first century” (Kuh, 2016, p. 49). A culture of transparency can provide a framework wherein students’ knowledge and ways of knowing not only inform, but also shape their instructors’ teaching and learning (Fisher et al., 2016). Even students themselves have identified transparency as a strategy for enhancing their success (Lang, 2015; Sadowski, 2018). Understanding what work lies ahead for students and faculty as we implement our plan, we are eager to begin, confident that *Transparent Instruction for General Education and Gateway Courses* will benefit our entire LMU community.

[LMU Transparent Instruction References](#)