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Appendix G:
The Quality Focus Essay

The Quality Focus Essay

When an institution undertakes self-evaluation for accreditation, it may identify policies, procedures, or practices in need of change or student outcomes it wishes to improve. An institution may make some changes or improvements immediately, before an evaluation team arrives. Other changes and strategies for improving outcomes will require a longer time to accomplish. These changes and strategies should be identified as the institution's plans for improvement (action plans), and should be integrated into the ongoing planning and decision-making processes at the college, with timelines for completion. Using the format of a Quality Focus Essay (QFE), an institution will identify two or three "action projects" for further study and action that have good potential for improving student outcomes. The projects should be related to Accreditation Standards, emerge from the institution's examination of its own effectiveness in accomplishing its mission in the context of student learning and student achievement, be based on the institution's analysis of data collected, and identify areas of needed change, development, and improvement. The *Guide* provides questions intended to stimulate discussion and assist the institution in selecting appropriate action projects for the QFE in boxed format proceeded by the notation QFE. The QFE, with a 5,000 word limit, describes the projects in detail to include the following components:

- Identification of the Projects: The projects should be vital to the long-term improvement of student learning and achievement over a multi-year period;
- Desired Goals/Outcomes: The QFE should describe specific, well-defined goals expected to lead to observable results;
- Actions/Steps to be Implemented: The QFE (or an Appendix to the QFE) should provide the steps to be implemented for each project;
- Timeline: The QFE (or Appendix) should include a calendaring of all steps to be implemented;
- Responsible Parties: The QFE should provide clear lines of responsibility for implementation and sustainability;
- Resources: The QFE should include a realistic plan for the resources (human, physical, technology, or financial resources) the institution will need in order to implement and sustain the projects;
- Assessment: The QFE should include the institution's plan for evaluating the outcomes and effectiveness of the projects.

The comprehensive evaluation team and the Commission will review and provide constructive feedback on the QFE, with the goal of supporting institutional efforts to enhance student learning and achievement. At the Midterm, the institution will provide a progress report or, if the projects are completed, a final report on the outcomes of the projects.