Clarification on Proposed QEP Topics

The Del Mar College QEP Team has reviewed the proposed QEP topics and is requesting that you provide further development of the idea by responding to these standardized questions. We thank you for your input and participation in assisting the College in developing a well-defined, meaningful QEP.

What is the specific problem or opportunity that this QEP topic addresses?

Critical thinking/problem solving as a shared central component across curricula at Del Mar College.

This QEP topic addresses an important goal of many (if not all) college-level programs: the encouragement of students’ critical thinking and problem solving abilities. While each program and course certainly seeks to ensure that students master fundamental concepts and basic information, each program and course should also emphasize tasks and problems whose primary purpose is to encourage and improve students’ ability to use and apply concepts and information in important ways. This sort of application and use of basic information, combined with serious analysis of both the basic information itself AND they way in which that information was applied and used, should result in deeper learning. It should also result in constantly improving thinking and reasoning among students, which, according to the Foundation for Critical Thinking, is the definition of critical thinking.

I believe that most college faculty view these sorts of student outcomes -- deeper learning, greater ability to apply that learning to appropriate problems and situations, and greater self-awareness among students of how to use what they learn and to regularly assess those uses for themselves -- as among the most important goals of higher education.

Which students or group of students would be the focus of this topic?

I would hope that all of the college’s students, through their major programs, would be the focus of this topic because there is not one program -- whether academic or technical and occupational -- that should not seek to encourage and improve its students’ critical thinking/problem solving abilities.

Which departments, offices or programs would be involved?

I would hope that all of the college’s departments, offices, and programs would be involved in any effort to make critical thinking/problem solving a central theme of a Del Mar College education.

What are the specific results that you expect to achieve from the implementation of the QEP?

*College faculty, staff, and students will engage in a serious, extended discussion of the goals of a college education.
*College faculty, staff, and students will be enriched through research into the meanings of critical thinking, leading to a college-wide understanding (and, if possible, definition) of critical thinking.
*College faculty, staff, and students will develop and share specific methods for structuring critical thinking into each program and into as many courses as possible so that regardless of a student’s major field he/she is consistently expected not only to learn basic information but to apply and analyze that information and then assess this application and analysis of basic information.
*Del Mar College students, regardless of major field, will leave the institution as more critical, self-aware thinkers.

Describe how this QEP affects student learning.

This QEP has the potential, I believe, to add depth, substance, and coherence to student learning. Students will be expected -- as they already are in many courses and programs -- to go far beyond simply learning basic information. They will be expected to understand the meaning and importance of that information, to apply that information in a variety of ways and situations, and to examine and evaluate those applications. Should this expectation become a college-wide norm, it would serve to "connect" courses and programs as they have not usually been connected -- adding coherence to students’ experiences in their courses. Demonstration of critical thinking abilities among students certainly would suggest a successful educational experience. In addition, such abilities would serve students well in the continuation of their education, in their entry into the workforce (as employers have consistently emphasized the need for their employees to be able to apply and use information), and as they take their places in an increasingly complex democratic republic where the ability to reason and understand and question (in short, to think critically) is essential.

These responses are due in the office of the VPI by April 2, 2007. Date Received in office of VPI: 4-2-07