

Building the Brotherhood: A First-Year Initiative to Form Good Men and Good Citizens in an
Atmosphere of Sound Learning
Hampden-Sydney College's Quality Enhancement Plan Committee
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Consistent with the Hampden-Sydney College mission statement—*“To form good men and good citizens in an atmosphere of sound learning”*—our Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) introduces a revised First-Year Experience that directly impacts student learning through an emphasis on student engagement, reflection, and connection. Entitled “Building the Brotherhood: A First-Year Initiative to Form Good Men and Good Citizens in an Atmosphere of Sound Learning,” the QEP builds directly upon best practices research, institutional data, and ongoing strategic planning initiatives.

The QEP Steering Committee, in consultation with the Dean of the Faculty, and the Offices of Student Affairs, Student Success, Career Education and Vocational Reflection, Alumni Relations, and members of the Student Government, developed an FYE with three primary components: Reflection, Discovery, and Connection.

Reflection: Based on the assumption that a “good man and good citizen” is self-aware and able to relate empathically to the diverse experiences of others, the FYE engages students in ongoing reflection on their personal experiences and the experiences of others as they relate to the themes of honor, citizenship, service, purpose, and masculinity.

Specifically, the First-Year Experience under the QEP proposes to provide a series of opportunities for students to engage in intentional and guided discussions with each other, with upperclassman RAs, and with faculty/staff facilitators. Further, these discussions should focus on the key ideas that rest at the core of our mission—“to form good men and good citizens”.

A series of small-group discussions will occur over the course of the first semester, some integrated with other freshman activities, and all focused on the core themes. Each session will involve a faculty/staff facilitator.

Students participating in this component of the First-Year Experience will:

- 1) Demonstrate understanding of the diversity of human experiences and use this understanding to adjust or reflect on their own attitudes and beliefs.
- 2) Be able to articulate changes to their own attitudes and beliefs resulting from this engagement with others and with their community
- 3) Be able to apply the academic mission of the College and liberal arts curriculum to specific, real-world experiences.

Discovery: The FYE introduces students to the process of scholarly inquiry as a means of enhancing reasoning skills, emphasizing the value of informed, civil discourse, and increasing students' engagement in their own educations.

Working closely with these faculty, who represented all three academic divisions (Natural Sciences and Mathematics, Social Sciences, and Humanities), the QEP Steering Committee proposed a plan that would involve enrolling all freshmen into one freshman-only section of a class in their first year at the College. Included classes would range from small, seminar style courses to larger survey courses and would include any academic discipline. As part of the class, all students will be introduced to the basic skills of scholarly inquiry through work on a significant, inquiry-based, in-class project.

Each course designated as a freshman-only, inquiry-based learning course will have the following goals:

- 1) Students will learn to differentiate between personal beliefs and evidence and to evaluate the credibility of source information.
- 2) Students will learn to articulate a feasible research question.
- 3) Students will learn to apply the research methods used in a particular discipline and will gather evidence relevant to the research question.
- 4) Students will learn to apply appropriate scholarly convention when reporting or performing in their discipline.
- 5) Students will learn to situate their scholarly inquiry within a broader context.
- 6) Students will better understand the value of collaborative scholarly activity.

Connection: Because understanding how to communicate effectively and professionally with others is a necessary skill for workplace success, the FYE connects students with alumni mentors who will foster students' professional communication skills and model the applicability of a liberal arts education to the working world.

Based on review of the literature and discussions with relevant constituents, the QEP Steering Committee proposed that H-SC develop a formal, structured alumni mentoring program as part of students' first-year experience.

The program will connect interested freshmen with alumni mentors in the spring of their freshmen year. The formal mentoring relationship will last for one year, expiring in the spring of sophomore year, when most H-SC students declare their academic major. Over the course of the formal mentorship, students will engage with their alumni mentors in written and spoken communications. Alumni mentors will provide regular feedback to students and will help students to develop their goal setting and professional networking skills. In addition, alumni mentors will model for students the ways in which the skills and themes at the core of their liberal arts education can be translated to professional settings.

Students participating in the alumni mentor program will:

- 1) Demonstrate appropriate professional communication.
- 2) Increase their professional networking confidence.
- 3) Demonstrate the ability to set clear, professionally relevant goals.

The QEP Director and Steering Committee in partnership with the Office of Institutional Effectiveness will work together to assess student learning outcomes associated with each component of the FYE, as well as the broader impact of a more cohesive FYE at the College. Data will include student work samples and other behavioral indicators, as well as surveys of student, faculty, and staff responses to the initiatives. These data will provide evidence of progress and will also be used to guide ongoing program development. Importantly, because the First-Year Experience QEP at H-SC will be built upon and is integrated with existing campus-wide initiatives, it will remain a priority and continue to develop in years to come.