

Quality Enhancement Plan Impact Report 2015

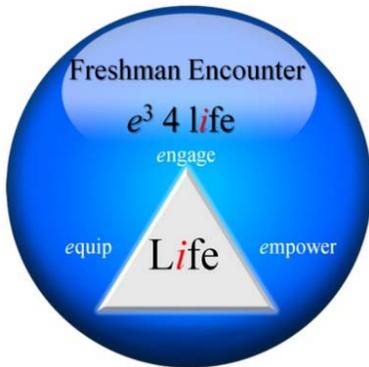
The Freshman Encounter: e³ 4 Life: Equipping, Engaging and Empowering for Life



Perry W. Ward, President



Title and Brief Description of QEP as Initially Presented



Freshman Encounter: e³ 4 life

Born out of a college-wide recognized need, Lawson State Community College's Quality Enhancement Plan, **Freshman Encounter: e³ 4 life** was designed to equip, engage, and empower (e³) first-year students with skills and knowledge to improve their opportunities to be successful at Lawson State and to provide effective engagement strategies to facilitate their success. The three-pronged initiative assists students in making the academic and social transition to college and has been integrated in the college's mission, vision, and goals. The QEP has been designed to help students learn to better navigate the scope and depth of what a full college experience has to offer; to improve student engagement levels; to broaden individual skills, abilities, and horizons; to strengthen intellectual and individual responsibility and independence; and to actively involve students in the learning process.

The strategic approach of the QEP involves three key components, which have been designed to embed student engagement campus-wide and to improve student learning and the environment that supports student learning. The plan included a major initiative plus two support initiatives: (a) the complete revision of the freshman orientation course (*The Freshman Academy, the primary goal of the QEP*); (b) a support initiative, the establishment of a faculty/staff development program (*FAME: Faculty Academy Master Educators*); and (c) a second support initiative, the creation of a one-stop student services center, the SPACE Center (*Student Persistence through Assistance and Collaborative Efforts*), open to all Lawson State students.

Succinct List of Initial Goals and Intended Outcomes:

Based on surveys, focus groups, and discussions with all stakeholders and constituents, the following areas were identified in 2009 as areas of weakness for first-year Lawson State students: technology skills; taking initiative and assuming personal responsibility; social skills in collegiate and professional environments; time management; and study skills. In light of these observations, the QEP was designed to center on one overarching theme, **e³ 4 life**: engaging, empowering, and equipping students (e³) for a lifetime of success, both in and out of the collegiate setting. The FAME instructors, trained over two semesters, were equipped with strategies to address such weaknesses and were immersed into a new curriculum designed to impact these identified shortcomings. Since the inception of the QEP in 2010, over 5,000 students have been impacted by the Freshman Encounter. Its initial goals are the following:

1. To **empower** students to discover and construct knowledge that will guide their academic, social, and personal choices.
2. To **engage** students in the learning process to be responsible college students.
3. To **equip** students with the skills and resources necessary to be successful both inside and outside of the classroom.
4. To focus on the **individual (i)**, on the initiative, integrity, and intellect that students need to be self-reliant and self-assured and to take responsibility for personal decisions.

Student learning outcomes (SLOs) Established:

1. Students will demonstrate the ability to use online technologies effectively in a collegiate environment.
2. Students will demonstrate the ability to employ critical thinking skills and logical thought processes in problem solving and decision making.
3. Students will demonstrate the ability to communicate effectively using written, oral, and listening skills.
4. Students will demonstrate appropriate social and teamwork skills within a collegiate setting.
5. Students will demonstrate the ability to identify and apply effective time management skills.
6. Students will demonstrate the ability to identify and apply effective learning/study skills.
7. Students will demonstrate the ability to identify leadership skills, work in a team environment, and engage in community building opportunities. (SLO #7 was reassessed and removed after Year 1 of the QEP. Some components were shifted to the Honors College and others were grafted into SLO #4 due to the overlapping nature of the two SLOs. See page 2 for further discussion related to this SLO change.)



Pictured above ORI101 Students in Class



Changes to the QEP and the Rationale for Such Changes

One of the most important and successful aspects of the QEP is Lawson State's approach of continuously reviewing its effectiveness and modifying the plan along the way to strengthen it. It is important to note, however, that *major revisions* of the original plan have not been necessary, due to its depth, rigor, and detail. (In fact, Lawson State received *no recommendations* from the visiting SACS team in 2009.) Many small adjustments have been necessary, however. To ensure that a focus on continuous improvement remained central to the QEP, a QEP/FAME Focus Group and Debriefing was conducted annually to discuss the relevant strengths and/or weaknesses of the overall QEP and the Freshman Academy course in particular, the primary initiative of the QEP. The Focus Group has worked over the years not only to strengthen the QEP, but to perfect and sharpen its overall impact on student learning and engagement. The following changes were born out of the yearly Focus Group sessions from 2010-2015.

Freshman Academy Course Delivery:

Streamlining: After Year 1, several aspects of the Freshman Academy course (ORI 101) were automated and streamlined for greater efficiency and ease of use, freeing up the facilitator for more mentoring, modeling, and general engagement. Self-graded online quizzes were introduced. *Quick Guides* were created for faculty and students: to-do lists, schedules, reminders, and so forth. Tabs were added to the Blackboard template to further organize and streamline the delivery. These additions constitute a workflow method that the students learn as they execute it: how to follow a calendar and a to-do list, how to plan and strategize ahead of time, how to gather necessary tools and information, how to prioritize tasks, how to honor hard deadlines, and other similar essential skills. This is part of our strategy to achieve SLO #5, Time Management.



Distance Education: In 2014, Lawson State submitted a Substantive Change to add its first online program. As a result, an online version of ORI is now offered. Before students may enroll in an online section of ORI, they complete a brief pre-assessment inventory of their technological skills as well as a short preparatory course in Blackboard navigation, discussion boards, netiquette, etc. About 10-20% of ORI sections are delivered online and the new venture has been highly successful.

Transfer-students: A transient-student version of ORI101 is now offered for students who transfer in 12 or more hours from another college or university. This course is an online, self-paced introduction to Lawson-specific policies, processes, procedures, and technologies. The students are not taught social skills or soft skills in these special sections. Because it is no longer the Freshman Academy *per se*, due to its lack of mentoring and personal contact, these classes have migrated out of the QEP domain into that of Academic Affairs.

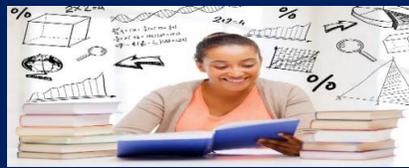
Online group work: In response to student complaints about the logistics of meeting outside of class (reported by FAME instructors at the Year 1 Focus Group), online groups were added in Year 2 (2011) to teach social skills and group dynamics in a virtual environment in addition to what the students learn in the face-to-face environment.

Textbook Elimination: During Year 1, the Freshman Academy used a textbook customized by the QEP Curriculum Team. However, after the first Focus Group was held assessing the first year, it was determined that a textbook was no longer needed. As a result, Blackboard features were enhanced, and a Weekly Quick Guide was added, as well as other features such as "To Do Lists", a comprehensive list of assignments, online content, materials, resources, and so forth. In other words, the Blackboard course became independent unto itself and was no longer dependent on additional resources.

Freshman Academy Curriculum Design:

Student Learning Outcome #7: During the first year (2010), it became apparent that teaching leadership in isolation did not blend well with the other components of the course and threatened to overwhelm the curriculum. In addition, the QEP Curriculum Team realized that the new Honors College would emphasize leadership skills and service learning, so these components were allowed to migrate to the Honors College. Thus, in an effort to avoid further duplication, the Leadership Team and the Curriculum Team determined that SLO #7 was no longer necessary, as similar components (i.e., social skills, group dynamics, teamwork, and leadership skills) were already being addressed and measured in SLO #4.

Service Learning: After the first-year, it became apparent that the initial ORI 101 curriculum design was far too ambitious and that too much material had been included. Students found the workload much too heavy for a 1-credit, non-academic course. Many reported that they spent much more time and effort on ORI101 than on any other class. The service learning component was especially time consuming and logistically complex for all involved. So it was shifted out of ORI101 and moved to the new Lawson State Honor's College.



Changes to the QEP and the Rationale for Such Changes Continued

Live Action Test: After the first year, FAME faculty recommended that students should not only be required to demonstrate an understanding of various online technologies (e.g., Blackboard, email, Student Suite, eWithdrawal, etc.), but that they should be given a chance to demonstrate practical competency. A live-action test was then added to the course. Students must show their instructor that they can log in to various platforms and perform common functions such as replying to an email message, checking grades, updating personal information, locating Admissions/Records Office forms, and so on. This new test allows us to better assess the students' achievement of SLO #1, online technology skills.

Personal Responsibility and Ethical Decision Making: Based on the FAME faculty's observations and recommendations, the Freshman Academy unit on personal responsibility and ethical decision making was re-strategized and expanded to allow for more open-ended class discussion. Video vignettes from the ABC television program *What Would You Do?* were incorporated into this unit. Students critically evaluate the social and ethical situations presented and then discuss effective responses under the guidance of their faculty mentor. This better supports SLOs #2 (critical thinking), #3 (communication skills), and #4 (social skills), as well as Goal #4 (taking responsibility for personal decisions).



Learning Styles: The unit that presents various learning styles and strategies has been revised twice. The FAME faculty reported a lack of rigor in the original unit, and students were not demonstrating mastery of the concept. The most significant change includes an application activity added to the Final Exam project. Each student is now required to experiment with some of the strategies that are recommended for his or her particular learning style and then to report on the experience in the Final Exam class presentation.

Information Literacy/Library Use: In response to our assessment of students' information literacy skills, the Library Orientation component was redesigned and expanded twice in support of SLO #6 (learning/study skills). Initially, Library Orientation was not a part of the Freshman Academy; however, after Year 1, it was folded in as a requirement. In Year 3, the curriculum was revised in order for students to actually register online for their Library Orientation course directly within the ORI 101 class.

Degree Plan: In response to student performance and perception, this unit was expanded significantly in the third year. It is now includes more detailed examples pulled from various programs, majors, certificates, etc. It includes a more methodical breakdown of the degree plans' components. Students form groups by major/program and explore the specific details of their own plans. They also must now complete a degree-mapping exercise in which they outline a plan that leads them to graduation or completion. Students report that this helps them to visualize success better than simply planning each semester as it arrives.

Faculty & Staff Academy/FAME (Support Initiative #1):



The Center for Teaching Excellence in Learning (CTEL) is responsible for the training of FAME faculty. During Year 1, it was determined that the *Faculty Academy* and the *Staff Academy* would be combined into one FAME Academy. As the training program evolved, it became clear that one program could be comprehensive enough to serve both faculty and staff needs. About 25% of the current FAME pool are staff members, and staff are eligible for FAME training even if they will never teach OR101. So the goals of both initiatives are clearly met with one program, FAME. At the start of the QEP, our plan was to recruit and train new FAME members annually. However, after training two FAME classes (2010 and 2012), we now have a pool of qualified, dedicated instructors sufficient for our enrollment, with very few individuals leaving the ranks. We reassess our FAME numbers each year and could resume training more faculty and staff at any time. Another change has to do with the delivery of training. Continuous training is not always conducted on the campus of Lawson State. Rather, CTEL uses *Lynda.com* (which is a training online company) to deliver specialized training to FAME faculty including advanced Blackboard training and other Web 2.0 training. A face-to-face training session, however, is still conducted every August.

SPACE Center (Support Initiative #2):

The SPACE Center (Student Persistence and Assistance through Collaborative Efforts) has not changed in its overall design and approach. The only significant change is that it has had to adjust to its growing popularity by offering more online seminars to address eCollege students. It has increased the number of students served each year, as well as the number of special programs and workshops that support and reinforce the QEP's goals and outcomes. Webinars and tutoring are now both offered online and on both campuses. It is anticipated that eSPACE offerings will continue to evolve; thus, the center is extremely focused on expanding these types of services on a continuous basis.



Direct Impact on Student Learning and the Environment That Supports Student Learning, Including Achievement of Goals and Outcomes

The QEP has had a profound effect on Student Learning, more so than any other single initiative in the history of Lawson State Community College. Its college-wide implementation has created a sustainable and impacting central focus on student improvement, and its concentration on equipping, engaging, and empowering students has dramatically transformed the culture and ethos of Lawson State, its students, and its employees. From the inception of the SPACE Center, to the formation of inspiring FAME instructors (who touch the life of every freshman student entering Lawson State), to the Freshman Encounter experience that has proven effective in preparing a more equipped freshman student, our retention and student learning rates have improved, and our students are benefiting greatly.

The overarching support of each goal of the QEP is addressed (measured) through the overall effectiveness of seven Student Learning Outcomes, the SPACE Center (initiative), and the centralized impact of targeted FAME training, which emphasizes the facilitator's role in the development of students. The chart below outlines the direct connection of each QEP goal to the parameters of how each goal is being influenced and measured for its effectiveness overall.



SLO#1: Students will demonstrate the ability to use online technologies effectively in a collegiate environment.

SLO#2: Students will demonstrate the ability to employ critical thinking skills and logical thought processes in problem solving and decision making.

SLO#3: Students will demonstrate the ability to communicate effectively using written oral, and listening skills.

SLO#4: Students will demonstrate appropriate social and teamwork skills within a collegiate setting.

SLO#5: Students will demonstrate the ability to identify and apply effective time management skills.

SLO#6: Students will demonstrate the ability to identify and apply effective learning/study skills.

QEP Goals:	Goals Linked to Student Learning Outcomes
Empowering students to discover and construct knowledge that will guide their academic, social, and personal choices.	Targeted SPACE Center activities; FAME Training Initiatives; SLO #1, SLO #2, SLO #3, SLO #4, SLO #5, SLO #6
Engaging students in the learning process to be responsible college students.	Targeted SPACE Center activities; FAME Training Initiatives; SLO #1, SLO #2, SLO #4, SLO #5
Equipping students with the skills and resources necessary to be successful both inside and outside of the classroom.	Targeted SPACE Center activities; FAME Training Initiatives; SLO #1, SLO #2, SLO #3, SLO #4, SLO #5, SLO #6
Focusing on the individual (I) , on the initiative, integrity, and intellect that students need to be self-reliant and self-assured and to take responsibility for personal decisions.	Targeted SPACE Center activities; FAME Training Initiatives; SLO #1, SLO #2, SLO #5, SLO #6

SLO #1: Students will demonstrate the ability to use online technologies effectively in a collegiate environment.

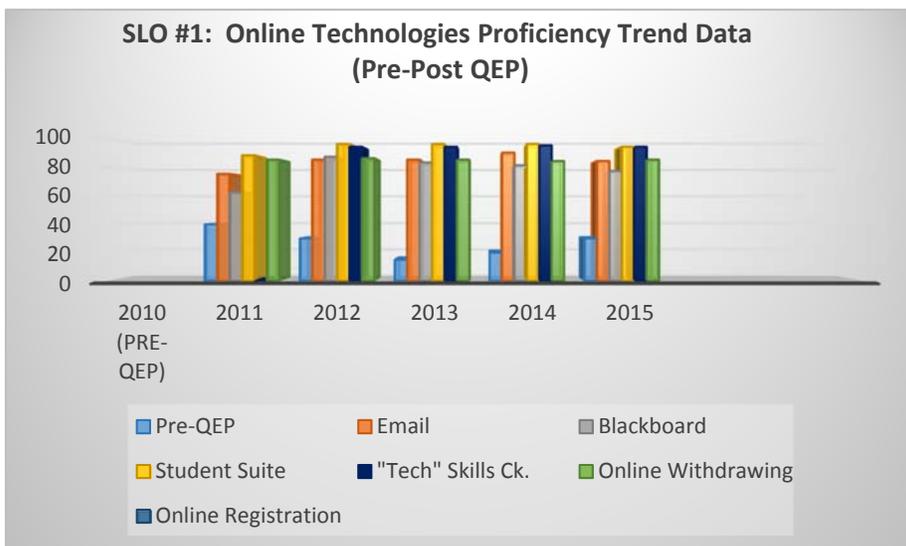


Prior to the inception of the Freshman Academy, use of online technologies (which the faculty, staff and community viewed as essential skill sets for 21st Century students to acquire) was viewed as a weakness. Many students attending Lawson State lacked experience with technologies in large part due to economic disadvantages and lack of exposure to computer applications in many surrounding high schools and homes. As a result, students were overly dependent on staff to complete even the most basic functions (e.g., registration) and were not taking ownership for their own learning. Thus, the Freshman Academy course was designed to totally immerse students in the use of technologies. Given the tremendous technology gaps facing Lawson State students, screen casting and video tutorials were used throughout the curriculum in order to aid in teaching students multi-tiered processes and required

technical operations (e.g., *How to Register Online*, *How to File a Complaint*, *How to Use Student Email*, *How to Withdraw*, *How to Interpret Your Degree Plan*, and so forth). An essential ingredient in the course design is that all ORI101 courses use the same online Blackboard template. In doing so, all students enrolled in the Freshman Academy have access to the same information and online experiences via recorded lectures and tutorials.

Environment: The College also (as part of the QEP) moved the former orientation class out of a traditional style classroom and created two new ORI classrooms both fully equipped with new computers, furniture, and wireless Internet access. Creating a new learning environment that was supportive of the use of technology was not only essential in getting freshman students to gain more experience with technologies, but it enabled the FAME instructors to emphasize the use of technology in the class and students to gain a better understanding of its power.

Blackboard: 100% of classes taught at Lawson State are supported via the Blackboard Learning Management System. The Freshman Academy curriculum, intentionally, does not have a textbook. The course, and all of its content, is located online via Blackboard. Thus, for the freshman student enrolled in ORI 101, he or she must rely on technology to access all assignments, lectures, materials, directions, tests and grades. This delivery platform not only is beneficial in terms of developing technical skills, but it also enables students to gain a level of confidence in their ability to maneuver through course content in all of their academic courses. This is an important aspect within the Student Learning Outcome itself, for if we can break down fears and empower students to successfully access technology, they are more likely to engage in other classes and use media (external to LSCC).



Student Learning Outcome Gains: Assessment of this specific Student Learning Outcome is varied. Embedded assessments included Blackboard online exams on Email, Blackboard, Student Suite (which is the platform that houses all pertinent student information), and a technical skills “Live Action” test in which FAME instructors observe and assess each student’s technological proficiency. Trend data (outlined in the table above) demonstrate that over the last five years, proficiency of online technologies ranged from 70% to as high as 98% on select assessments. On average for 2015 (collectively), students are over 80% proficient as compared to pre-QEP data where the numbers were under 40% proficient in the use of technologies.

Improved Online Learning Environment: One of the most impacting changes that was born out of the QEP was the college’s new website, launched in Spring 2014. The website was designed to support and simulate the same learning environment that freshman students are accustomed to experiencing within the Freshman Academy course. It equips, engages, and empowers students directly through online resources, information, and immediate online assistance. The focus of the website is to build on the students’ technological skills (developed in the Academy) and continue to deliver critical information online exclusively. Like the class, the website provides online resources via video and step-by-step tutorials. Tutorials on *How to Complete a Complaint*, to *How to Register*, *How to Interpret Degree Plans*, *How to Access Student Email and Student Suite*, *How to Withdraw* and more are embedded throughout the various student navigational pages and provide for an engaging online web experience that supports the QEP, its focus, and its goals—and in particular this learning outcome. Website usage data (as charted on the right) offers additional insight into the overall achievement of this

Website Pages: Click to Explore	Duplicated Student Access #s
Blackboard	3,135,841
Student Portal	333,167
Student Suite	209,480
Register Now!	114,658
Student Email	102,229
Schedule Classes	52,288
Catalog Handbook	37,044
eWithdrawal	32,576
Library Services	31,867
eCollege Info.	29,317
STARS (Transf Guide)	24,160
SPACE Center	18,961
June 2014-July 2015 Website Usage Data	

outcome: that students demonstrate the ability to use online technologies effectively in a collegiate environment.”



FAME Faculty during their extended two-semester training and preparation (via CTEL) are also trained not only on the Freshman Academy curriculum, but also on the technologies employed within the curriculum. *Lynda.com*, an award-winning online training program, which offers over 5,000 training videos from experts in the field, was used to train FAME instructors. Given that FAME instructors are both faculty and staff members, it was essential to provide training that was all-encompassing and prepared FAME instructors for technological questions. Thus, each FAME instructor is Blackboard Certified and has been walked through the curriculum one module, one lesson, one skill set at a time to ensure that all faculty are technically savvy and capable of leveraging the use of technology in the classroom/learning environment.

Pictured left (FAME Graduation and Receiving of FAME Jacket)

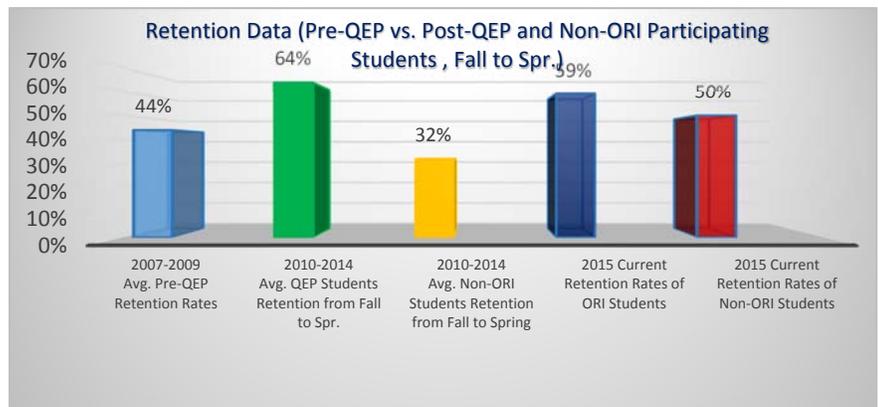


SLO #2: Students will demonstrate the ability to employ critical thinking skills and logical thought processes in problem solving and decision making.

Before the inception of the QEP, the College noted some very negative trend data regarding critical thinking skills. A large majority of our students (as identified in the Pre-QEP survey of student weaknesses) lacked the ability or “know how” to critically consider the ramifications of their actions (or lack thereof) as it related to problem solving and decision making. Struggling students tended, prior to the QEP, not to communicate and to just abandon their classes or programs without notice or engagement. So while withdrawal rates were lower in the past, failing rates were higher because students tended not to use the advising/counseling process or Withdrawal process or to critically analyze their situation academically and make sound, rational decisions related to the analysis of obstacles they encountered. As a result, retention suffered.

Hence, higher retention rates combined with an assessment of whether students used the SPACE Center services serve as the

initial basis to determine if the QEP has impacted students’ ability to critically think through problems, and as such, to make more informed decisions that positively impact their ability to maintain their enrollment. As demonstrated in the table (on the right), one of the most statistically significant outcomes in assessing QEP data is that if a student opted *not* to take ORI 101 their fall semester (and waited until the spring) their retention rates fell dramatically (from 64% retained to 32% retained). The College recommends, of course, that all students take ORI101 their first semester, but some students still (at times) opt out and wait until the spring. As mentioned previously, retention alone does not fully tell the story. Over the last five years, over 5,000 students have accessed support services via the SPACE Center. Thus, taking ORI101 (upon initial entrance into the college), combined with seeking out SPACE Center services enables students to make more informed decisions about their education and how to better



manage obstacles that often typically hinder non-traditional students.

Critical Thinking Assessments Usage & Proficiency Rates	Pre-QEP Fall 2009	2011	2012	2013	2014
SPACE Center Services Counseling/Advising Visits (Reported by: AccuTrack)	N/A	13,502	12,357	12,357	8,203
Positive Rating--Student Perceptions of Improved Critical Thinking Skills	N/A	821/1029 (79.7%)	707/878 (80.5%)	553/682 (81%)	187/238 (79%)
eWithdrawal Rates	2% (Students not following Process)	5.0%	3.7%	3.5%	4.5% (Students following process)
ORI-Career Fair Project	N/A--Didn't Exist	92% n= 1037	96% n=851	99% n=774	99% n=856
ORI-LSCC Project	N/A--Didn't Exist	92% n=1187	96% n=906	95% n=930	98% n=874
ORI-Degree Plan Analysis Mapping Assignment	N/A--Didn't Exist	N/A— Didn't Exist	N/A— Didn't Exist	New! 90% n=827	87% n=787
Completion of STARS 4-year Transfer Guide	3,119 (47%) n=6633	3,027 (43%) n=7054	3,866 (76%) n=5103	3,530 (77%) n=4609	2,881 (62%) n=4645
Registering Online (Enrollment drops by online Registrations hold firm)	1,966(30%) n=6633 (over 3 semesters)	5,500(78%) n=7054 (over 3 semesters)	5,052(99%) n=5103	4,724 (102%) n=4609	4322 (93%) n=4645

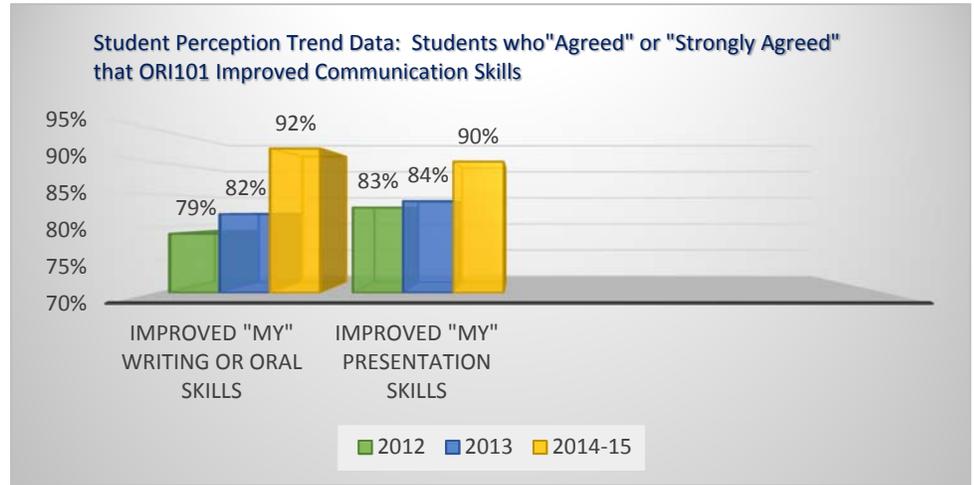
Thus, student engagement within the SPACE Center is an essential element in assessing whether students are critically thinking and seeking out support services to assist in problem-solving issues related to academics, child care, transportation, and so forth. This outcome was also measured by various critical thinking embedded assignments within the ORI101 course to include: the Career Fair Project (which requires students to research, synthesize and analyze information related to their career choice); a Degree Plan Mapping assignment, which requires students to analyze their degree plans and map out their course sequence towards graduation; completion of a STARS Transfer Guide which outlines their

transfer track; completion and communication of the LSCC Project, which requires students to investigate on-campus processes and address higher ordered questions from FAME Facilitators and classmates or complex processes at the college. Results demonstrate a high usage rate of the SPACE Center. An analysis of student success rates on embedded assessments shows that over 80% of ORI 101 students were successful on each assignment.

SLO #3: Students will demonstrate the ability to communicate effectively using written, oral, and listening skills.

The third Student Learning Outcome addresses an identified and important deficiency, particularly in urban, low socio-economic settings: lack of strong communication skills (both written and oral). It is important to note the intent of the QEP was never to eradicate communication problems (in an 8-week term), for that is the function and purpose of the General Education curriculum. Rather, the intent of this outcome was to stress to entering students the importance of communication and listening skills and to expose students to effective communication skills within a collegiate setting.

Multiple-assessments (both direct and indirect) were used to assess student success within this outcome since the inception of the QEP. The key indirect measure used is via a student perception survey targeting the skill itself. Students are asked, upon completion of the class, if they “strongly agree,” “agree,” or “disagree” that the course improved their ability to communicate more effectively (via written and oral means). Within the ORI 101 curriculum, there are also several embedded direct assessments designed to measure this outcome, including a brief essay. Working collaboratively, students are also required to deliver three oral presentations as part of their Project-Based Learning experiences within the course. The Freshman Academy class requires students to work in peer groups on two projects and to complete one on their own. Indeed, the last project (which is the Career Fair Project) requires students to present their project orally on their own and write up all researched information on their field of choice. Students learn via recorded lectures (via listening skills) and video (within the ORI101 course) how to effectively communicate and listen. The course includes an extensive embedded online series on presentation skills and oral presentation best practices. In addition to the Career Project, writing is also assessed within the former *Facing the Giants* movie assignment



(viewed in Years 1-4) and now the *Good Will Hunting* assignment. Students are asked to write a narrative on overcoming obstacles and lessons learned from the film. Results of these collective assessments demonstrate that students within the Freshman Academy exit the class with improved perceptions about their

Projects (Written, Oral, Listening Assessments)	2012-2013	2013-14	2014-15
Written & Oral Project #1	96.2% (872/906)	97% (802/827)	98% (750/767)
Written & Oral Project #2	96.4% (732/759)	99% (738/749)	98% (810/829)
Career Project	96% (n=851)	99% (n=774)	99% (n=856)
Film Narrative (listening)	89% (662/741)	85% (422/494)	New Film! 45% (212/467)

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SLO #4: Students will demonstrate appropriate social and teamwork skills within a collegiate setting. (Combined with SLO #7)

As previously discussed, the Freshman Academy curriculum is project-based. Two of the three projects require students to work effectively in groups. Data related to student success on each project is highlighted in the above “Projects” chart outlining project success. That output is also used as the direct and explicit measure of Student Learning Outcome #4. During the first few sessions of the Freshman Academy, students participate in team-building exercises led by their facilitators to gain familiarity and comfort with their fellow students. After these initial team games, students are placed in groups based on their skill set and are taken through a series of recorded lectures and activities (within the Freshman Academy curriculum) so they can understand how

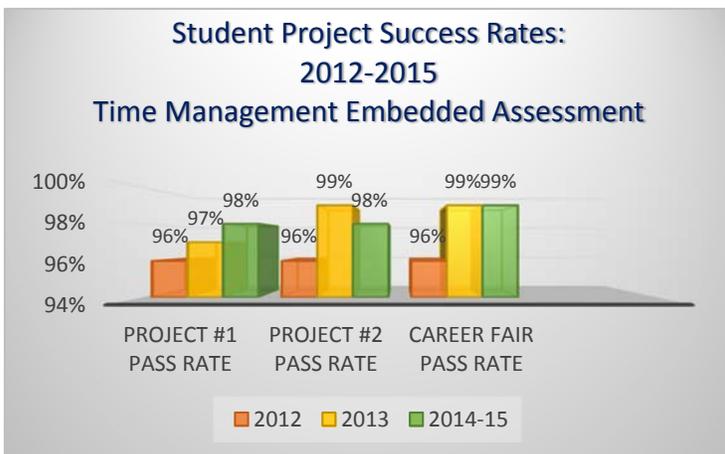
Perception Survey Results “Strongly Agree” or “Agree” On Improved Social/Teamwork Skills	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015
Indirect Data Results:	86% (n=588/681)	81% (n=442/546)	87% (n=205/235)

groups function and how to participate in groups and manage conflicts. Equally important, FAME Facilitators are trained to monitor group dynamics and intercede if groups struggle and need mentoring and guidance. As outlined in the “Projects” chart

above, the two Problem-Based Learning projects are highly successful, with pass rates in the high 90’s (97.3%). In assessing this outcome indirectly, students are also surveyed (as part of the curriculum) to determine if, upon exiting the Freshman Academy, they feel more competent in both their teamwork skills and their overall understanding of group dynamics. Results indicate a positive trend with over 84% of students (on average) reporting they feel prepared to work in groups.

SLO #5: Students will demonstrate the ability to identify and apply effective time management skills.

In 2009, during the planning of the Freshman Academy, curriculum designers examined different approaches to the standard ways of teaching students the importance of time management, for it was identified as particular weakness in our students. This was also stressed during the facilitators' training modules because the lack of time management skills and the propensity to procrastinate can lead to failing assignments, then failing tests, then failure of classes. As such, the Freshman Academy Curriculum Committee examined countless approaches, and determined that the standard textbook way of teaching time management did not fit well with the engaging atmosphere of the Freshman Academy.



Hence, in keeping with the principles of project-based learning, the Curriculum Team believed that time management was better taught via praxis, rather than by extended theory. Hence, the course and the projects therein were designed so that successful completion of the course requires a student to discover and implement effective time management strategies and apply those strategies in "real life" situations via their team and Career Projects. If not, the student would not be successful in the course. Indeed, there are three key benchmarks that are set in the course that require students to plan, research, create, and deliver projects by specific and intentional deadlines. Further, failure to meet the deadlines renders the students incapable of passing the Freshman Academy course. The FAME instructors agree that the three major projects are quite challenging from a time-

management perspective, especially in a mini-term section (which requires students to complete all course work and three projects within just seven to eight weeks). FAME instructors have been encouraged to observe closely students' progress as they work through the multiple steps and to mentor and guide them on identifying and applying key time management strategies to meet such deadlines. FAME instructors emphasize the setting of realistic goals, organization, and setting priorities. As previously discussed under Student Learning Outcome #3, students in the Freshman Academy have been very successful in completing both their team projects and Career Projects, which demonstrates the effective application of time management techniques. Equally important indirect measures indicate the students also affirm that the Freshman Academy course has helped them in improving their time management ability. In fact, 197 out of 235 randomly surveyed students stated that they either "Strongly Agreed" or "Agreed" (84%) that "The FA course made [them] more effective in managing [their] time in order to meet deadlines, finish projects, etc."

SLO #6: Students will demonstrate the ability to identify/apply effective learning/study skills.

The Learning Styles unit requires students to make practical use of the insights gained from an online Learning Styles personal assessment/inventory that they take online. The idea is to expose students to their learning style (auditory, visual, tactile, sensory, etc.) and teach them the various approaches/strategies learners can use in the classroom in order to make gains academically. A team approach is also used: students with similar learning styles are grouped and have to research and investigate proven strategies. From there, students are required to apply at least two strategies in an academic class setting and report this "real-life" application as part of the Final Exam in the Freshman Academy course. The FAME instructors report that this application greatly improves upon the previous approaches that have been tested over the years and are satisfied that the Learning Styles component of the Final Exam presentation captures accurately the students' achievement of this outcome.

A multi-assessment approach of both direct and indirect measures indicates a positive trend as it relates to measuring the overall effectiveness of this outcome. In looking at trend data from 2011-2015, over 80% of students (collectively) reported that they

Trend Data	Pre-QEP	2011	2012	2013	2014-15	Trend +/-
Academic "Failing" Alerts (Trend Data)	12.4%	24.9%	9.3%	6.3%	1.5%	Trending Down
Graduate Rates (Spans of Years) % of Awards Received by Enrolled Students	1,007 (12.7%) Award Avg. 12,829 Enrollment	2008-2010 vs. 2012-2015 ← →			1,929 (20%) Award Avg. 9,543 Enrollment	Trending Up
GPA's (Pre/Post QEP)	2005-2010 Avg. 2.384	Multi-Year Averages			2010-2015 Avg. 2.735	Trending Up
Academic Suspension Rates # of Student Suspensions Issued	53	38	44	26	31	Trending Down

either "Agreed" or "Strongly Agreed" that they felt engaged in the learning process within the Freshman Academy. In addition, over 80% of students also "Agreed" or "Strongly Agreed" that, because of the Freshman Academy, they felt stronger academically and had better study skills and habits. Direct measures of learning do support these findings, for students

who took the Freshman Academy course have (a) higher GPA's than non-Freshman Academy students, (b) have higher retention and graduation rates and (c) have lower suspension rates. Collectively, the Assessment Team finds these findings not only a positive indicator of the overall success of the QEP, but truly view these findings as the most important (of all findings).

The QEP's Impact on the Student Learning Environment:

The QEP has been transformative in changing the culture and learning environment at Lawson State. Through the sustained implementation of the QEP, and with needed modifications based on assessment data, the college has developed the infrastructure, expertise, and determination necessary to support continuous improvement in the first-year experience at Lawson State. Many lessons learned from the QEP have propagated out to influence and improve other programs and initiatives at the college, and in doing so, the theme of equipping, empowering and engaging weaves through the very fabric of the institution. Indeed, no single entity showcases the impressive influence (and lessons learned) from the QEP more than the

College's new and engaging website, created in 2014. To our benefit, the main website designer was also the lead Freshman Academy's curriculum designer, so the synergy between the two worlds was and remains deliberate and impactful. The website design is based directly on *equipping, engaging, and empowering* the user in the same manner as the Freshman Academy. Like the Freshman Academy, the website uses tutorials, step-by-step instructional design, and screen casting to engage students and equip them with the information to become more independent, self-governing students. In essence, the student learning environment has been extended beyond the Freshman Academy. Emphasis has been placed on equipping users (in a very intuitive way) to key information, helpful resources, and processes much like the class (e.g., registration information, eWithdrawal, Code of Conduct, eCollege, Student Handbook, etc.). Further, based on college-wide survey results of faculty and staff, over 92% of respondents reported that, due to this extended learning environment, lines in various offices are noticeably shorter; advisees arrive at appointments more informed and prepared; and fewer students display a helpless, dependent attitude regarding basic college functions. Thus, the new website allows us to move beyond the Freshman Academy by breaking down its "walls" and changing the students learning environment college-wide. **Click to Explore from Our Students' Perspective:** Experience *Lawson State's website designed to equip, engage, and empower.*

SPACE Center: Since the implementation of the SPACE Center in 2010, the services provided have evolved to meet the needs of LSCC students and have positively supported and impacted the learning environment tremendously at the college. More programs have been expanded and developed in the area of student success. English and math tutors are housed in the SPACE Center, and student participation is growing daily. Students can now submit inquiries directly to a counselor via the SPACE Center webpage. New computers were purchased for the lab with updated software to give our students a "cutting edge" advantage in technology. As a result, the majority of first semester full-time students are being advised through the SPACE Center. Students continue to seek advising and registration assistance in large numbers. Collaboration with the Freshman Academy has served to increase the SPACE Center lab usage and student participation in support services such as counseling, mentoring, tutoring, study groups and seminars/workshops. In fact, since the implementation of the SPACE Center, a total of 51,475 support services contacts have been documented. In addition, the student persistence rate has been positively impacted (with students taking ORI 101 having a 50% higher retention from fall to spring semesters). The services provided by the SPACE Center have empowered students to make better decisions regarding their education. The positive impact on student persistence, academic success, and increased graduation rates will continue to be realized as the SPACE Center and its services continue to evolve and expand.

SPACE Seminar / Visitation Topics		Duplicated Student #'s
Advising/Registration	Freshman Academy	2010-11: 6,054
Class Assignment	Mentoring/Tutoring	2011-12: 13,502
Computer Lab	Seminar/Workshop	2012-13: 12,357
Tutoring	Study Group	2013-14: 8,203
Counseling	Advising/Registration	2014-15: 11,359



FAME: A deliberate intent of FAME (as part of the QEP) is to equip, empower, and engage faculty. Presently, there are 22 FAME Instructors who represent both faculty and staff (college-wide). FAME instructors play varied roles at the college from the Director of Admissions; to a Career Services Director; to faculty; to recruiters and more. In total, FAME Instructors (over the course of the QEP) have successfully taught over 5,000 freshman students via the Freshman Encounter. As noted, their training is extensive and encompasses both

facilitator training and technology training. The idea is to perfect their skill sets so that the training enables FAME faculty to broaden their teaching approaches in their regular classrooms and expand technology use in offices, not just in their ORI 101 classrooms. In doing so, the college-wide learning environment improves.

This impetus on engagement in large part, then, is designed to change the overall learning environment for students in class and within offices throughout the college. As such, the college has invested over \$250,000 in Surface Pros, Smartboards; iStand Patient Stimulators; computer labs; Cougar automatic cash cards; and kiosk computer systems in key offices including Financial Aid and Admissions; Tegrity software (for screencasting); new website construction software; and Advocate software for online complaint reporting, etc. What is driving this cultural shift and change is the QEP. The idea is simple: equip, engage, and empower faculty and staff, and in doing so, improve the learning environment for all students, both inside and outside of the classroom. Reflections, though, highlight even broader implications of FAME and the overall impact that the QEP has had on the broader college community.

Reflections:

Five years ago, Lawson State set forth on an ambitious project to enhance student learning by engaging, equipping, and empowering our first-year students for success in the classroom and beyond. The results have been overwhelmingly successful as the College's overall mission, vision, and goals have clearly been advanced. Grade point averages and retention rates have increased, and faculty and staff report a dramatic improvement among our students. They are more prepared, more confident, and more invested than ever before. Along the way, many lessons and innovations have propagated out from the QEP to enhance the overall environment at Lawson State. These include the following:



Engagement and Its Demand: Expansion of the Freshman Academy Model College-Wide:

One of the most important take-aways from the QEP centers on the college's evolving perceptions about engagement. Initially, we approached this project to fully engage students in the Freshman Academy classroom and to engage our FAME faculty and equip them with state-of-the-art strategies to improve student learning. We also focused on targeted SPACE Center activities and support. However, what we failed to realize (upon reflection) is that in doing so, we were creating a newly informed student who would ultimately expect the same type of full-fledged involvement and engagement within all classrooms and within all offices (in terms of delivery of services). As a result, within the first two

years of the QEP, we quickly learned that we had to do a better job in expanding teachings and Web 2.0 strategies beyond the FAME faculty and ORI101 classroom (in order to sustain the engagement level and student expectations set by the Freshman Academy). Accordingly, we acquired *Lynda.com* (which works to train faculty and staff online 24/7); we added more technology to classrooms to include Smartboards, Elmo devices, clickers, simulation mannequins, and computers. We also automated numerous college processes and information including, but not limited to, eWithdrawal, eCatalog, eHandbook, eTutorials, eCalendar, eHelpDesk, eAdvising Center, ePayment Center, eCode of Conduct, eClass Scheduling, eComplaint Process, eForms, eCounseling, eTutoring, eResources, and so forth. Additional online training platforms were crafted to include a Blackboard certification course for instructors; a Blackboard eTutorial webpage for students; a new faculty and staff training course; an eCollege certification course; and the creation of a new eCollege division. So, in retrospect, the QEP forced the college to broaden its technological reach and widen its approach in order to meet the expectations set by the Freshman Academy students exiting ORI101 (college-wide). All of this has grown out of the Freshman Academy's course delivery methods, refined over several years of assessment and the use of results, and upon reflection, has changed the overall learning environment for all.

Intrusive Advising Needed: Although the Freshman Academy has exceeded our expectations in almost every aspect of its implementation, and retention and student learning has improved, one stark reality is that our students still are withdrawing from classes at levels we believe to be too high. During the Pre-QEP Phase, as previously noted in this report, students would just too often abandon their classes and fail. So, while the SPACE Center exists for the purpose of advisement, because the withdrawal process is online and easily accessible, students self-reported (in a 2015 survey) that they skip the advising step altogether at times. Thus, upon reflection, the college now realizes that this process needs to be revamped. As such, the college is now working on a new intrusive advising program that will require students to go through a series of advising steps prior to withdrawing online.

Mentoring: We have learned that technology can greatly improve training, but for mentoring, there can be no substitute for human contact. The Freshman Academy has been effective because it relies not only on an engaging array of technological resources, but also on dedicated, enthusiastic, positive faculty and staff. Whenever we have relied too heavily on technology, the students' performance in that area has declined, but when we have adjusted to a more thoughtful balance between technology and face-to-face, students have thrived. This lesson has already benefitted our new eCollege and Honor's College.

Over the last five years, the three main components of the QEP—the Freshman Academy, FAME, and the SPACE Center—have become completely institutionalized and will continue even after a new QEP is implemented because they have proven to be indispensable. All in all, the QEP has been an excellent opportunity to revisit the ways in which we serve our first-year students and has had a broad, positive impact on the College's ethos and atmosphere.