

**The Rust College
Quality Enhancement Plan
2014 - 2019**

**Building Communities Academically
For Total Student Success**

(B-CATS²)

Improving First Year Math Skills



October 29-31, 2013



Rust College, Holly Springs, Mississippi

*In compliance with the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on
Colleges process of reaffirmation of accreditation.*



**Building Communities Academically for Total Student Success:
Improving First Year Math Skills**

Rust College

October 2013

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I. Executive Summary

The Mission of Rust College

The mission of Rust College, mostly recently approved in 2012, is clearly defined as it relates to the College's constituents, areas of instruction, academic focus, and integrative outcome.

Rust College is a historically Black, coeducational, senior liberal arts college founded in 1866 by the Freedman's Aid Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church. The College is related to the United Methodist Church, and dedicated to serving students with a variety of academic preparations, through instruction in the humanities, social and behavioral sciences, natural science, business, technology, and education. The College recognizes its function of education as being teaching and community service. Its primary mission, however, is teaching with a well-rounded program designed to acquaint students with cultural, moral, and spiritual values, both in theory and in practice.

Building Communities Academically for Total Student Success (B-CATS²): Improving First Year Math Skills is an educational plan that is reflective of this mission. The College arrived at the B-CATS² initiative for the QEP with involvement and input from the entire College community—faculty, staff, students, administrators, and outside stakeholders of Rust College (See Section II. Process Used to Develop the QEP). An extensive assessment of institutional data informed the QEP process in analyzing the academic success of Rust College students (See pages 16-19). The broad context that serves as the focus for the implementation of B-CATS² is the establishment of college contextual learning communities as an effective model for improvement in Math skills. Ultimately, this leads to positive impressions of students about the College and its learning environment. The success of first year students in particular has received a great deal of attention over the past decade in educational circles. Developmental or remedial programs have played a great role in helping to make under-prepared students college ready. Rust College has taken the position that the relative strength of an institution of higher education in producing successful graduates can have grounding in the academic success of students in their first year.

As a historically Black college in northern Mississippi, Rust College continues to experience many of the same challenges shared by a range of minority serving institutions and smaller, private institutions throughout the nation. Many institutions such as Rust have committed a significant amount of financial as well as human resources to

the basic skills education process (developmental education) in an effort to help new students be more college-ready by the end of their first year. Rust College offers comprehensive support and assistance of first year students through the Office of First Year Experience, which is responsible for addressing and facilitating each step of the process of moving new students through to college-ready status and persistence to the second year. It is through the work of the First Year Experience program that testing, placement and assessment of college-readiness for first year students at admission begin. Deficiencies in preparation for college-level Math, Reading, and Writing have been persistent in the population of students admitted to the college from year-to-year. Evidence of this trend is seen in the fact that, through admissions testing, 60-65% of incoming freshmen are placed in remedial or developmental courses. This deficiency has a negative impact on the ability of those students to do well in “gateway” or general education courses.

B-CATS² is an approach that Rust College has developed to address persistent under-performance of students in Math. ***Our goal, therefore, is to improve first year student academic performance in Math through contextual learning communities.*** There are two student learning outcomes that are the pillars of the B-CATS² plan: (1) **First year students will be able to demonstrate an increase in basic math skills through contextual learning communities** (2) **First year students who complete the basic math skills course within the contextual learning community will be able to describe/explain math concepts using real world examples.**

The contextual learning community and Math skills development through B-CATS² will serve as the central focus of the plan. Through admissions testing first year students will be placed in general education and/or basic skills Math courses. Then students will be engaged in the activities of their contextual learning community, based on the theme of the community for that year.

The process for initial testing and placement of students in developmental and/or general education courses will undergo extensive review in year one of the plan. Also during the first year of the plan the conceptual framework for implementing contextual learning communities will be piloted.

Students assigned to Basic Math will also be assigned to a general education Math course (for example, Quantitative Reasoning or College Algebra) and the course content will be contextual and based on the theme of the learning communities for that year. Themes might focus on politics or health and wellness, or current events related to the activities of the learning communities.

Faculty advisors (referred to as “think tanks”) will be assigned to each learning community in which ultimately all first year students will be placed. The think tanks will collaborate with professional counselors (one for each community) and student mentors for each community to design service-oriented activities of the community based on the topical focus. Counselors will direct the co-curricular activities of those communities, assisted by student mentors. Faculty think tanks will also advise Math faculty on modifying course content to reflect learning outcomes that would emerge from activities in the communities. Activities of the learning communities will consist of a wide range of experiences that potentially provide first year Math students a wealth of knowledge and exposure to the topical area. Assessment of the impact of contextual exposure in the topical area and basic Math skills development will take place annually.

Professional development for faculty, staff and administrators will take place throughout the implementation of the plan and address a range of elements of the college’s learning environment that impact student success. These include faculty-student relationships, student support and campus life.

Following are the key elements and summary of the Quality Enhancement Plan.

Key Elements:

The Rust College Quality Enhancement Plan is designed to give first year students the best opportunity to achieve success in Math. Students who score low on the Math placement test would be enrolled in Basic Math and also enrolled in a general education Math course. These courses will be taught within a contextual learning environment that reinforces student math skills. For example, in a contextual learning community with politics as a theme, concrete, real life examples that are meaningful and memorable can be an introduction to key mathematical concepts. The faculty think tanks would develop concrete, real life examples, identify resources, and collaborate with counselors to

create the activities for the communities. The faculty think tanks would design the syllabi and assessment methods for the Math courses.

Summary of the Quality Enhancement Plan Implementation Over Five Years:

1. Review current testing and placement of first year students in developmental courses.
2. Create pilot groups to test the impact of contextual learning on first year student math skills development and knowledge of real-world math concepts.
3. Group first year Math students into contextual learning communities based on real-life themes.
4. Create faculty think tanks to inform the activities/experiences of the learning communities.
5. Think tanks build modules in Math courses designed to enhance Math skills development and promote learning Math based on real-world contextual environment.

II. Process Used to Develop the QEP

Faculty, Staff and Student Involvement

Over a two-week period in the spring of 2012, groups consisting of faculty, staff and students were charged by President David L. Beckley to take a close look at institutional data on a range of both curricular and extracurricular areas. After addressing college data, the groups then submitted abstracts of proposed plausible designs for the QEP that would yield long-term benefits for Rust College students. In addition to proposing the creation of learning communities that could strengthen the academic performance of first year students, other topics included enhanced use of technology, emphasis on critical thinking and reading, increasing cultural sensitivity, and bolstering basic skills in Science and Math (See **Table 10. Possible QEP Topics**). “Creating Learning Communities that Strengthen the Academic Performance of First-Year Students” emerged as the leading topic from among the focus groups and was given affirmative consideration by President Beckley and the President’s Cabinet as a topic for further study.

At the annual Managers’ Institute at Lake Tiak O’Khata, in Louisville, MS, May 17-18, 2012, President Beckley introduced his selection for the director of the QEP process. In the summer of 2012, a QEP Core Committee was named and by fall 2012, the Committee began a weekly dialogue of planning, the collection of additional data on the proposed topic and an exploration of possible outcomes the plan would address. It was important that final approval of the QEP topic be consistent with the College’s mission, be a logical continuum of gains made through the implementation of the QEP of 2009-2014, and have firm linkage with the College’s current Strategic Plan.

Subsequent involvement by faculty and staff included presentations on the QEP and feedback at the Fall 2012 and Fall 2013 Faculty and Staff Conference at the beginning of the academic years. There was an intensive faculty development presentation on the QEP, led by the Core Committee of the QEP, during Faculty Development Morning on March 20, 2013 (See Appendix C). Faculty separated into groups, each taking an aspect of the proposed QEP and reporting out to the body at large (See Appendix C). All faculty and staff received a briefing from the Director of the QEP at the Managers’ Institute at the end of May 2013. There was significant feedback from faculty and staff through email and comments on the QEP blog.

Student, Campus and Community Involvement

In addition to student participation in the first focus groups in the spring of 2012, students remained very much a part of the evolving process of QEP planning. There were two student representatives on the Core Committee of the QEP, the Student Government Association (SGA) president, and another member of the Senior Class. On February 27, 2013, the college held a formal Kick Off to the QEP. The goal was to create awareness and energize the Rust College and wider community to the QEP process at Rust College. Student leadership was very a part of that process, as members of the SGA, Pan-Hellenic Council, Residence Assistants, Peer Advisors, and class officers met with the Core Committee to Plan the Kick Off for the QEP. The entire student population responded to surveys addressing issues related to the proposed topic, and students volunteered to participate in focus groups and offered in depth insight into aspects of the QEP (See Appendices).

The Kick Off of the QEP on February 27, 2013 was widely publicized, both on campus and in public media. The week prior to the kick off, the director of the QEP appeared on both the campus radio station, WURC, as well as on "Campus Report," the campus television public relations program, airing on WTVA-Tupelo/Columbus, Mississippi, which also airs on Comcast Cable. Articles about the QEP and the Kick Off appeared in Campus NewsBriefs, which is the College's weekly newsletter, and the QEP also appeared in The South Reporter, the local Holly Springs, Mississippi newspaper. Over 400 students, faculty, administrators, civic leaders and members of the community attended the kick off to the QEP. The Mayor's Office, tourism officials, public schools administrators, and others were present, some who gave remarks and offered support for the QEP.

The Rust College QEP blog site was initiated in July of 2012. The purpose was to make available to students, faculty, staff, alumni, friends and prospective students the progress of the development of the QEP. Since then, there have been over 4,000 hits on the site.

Future Involvement

Future involvement of the entire Rust College and Holly Springs community is critical for the program's success. The Plan calls for identifying Student Mentors whose role will be to assist counselors in leading the activities of the contextual learning communities. Faculty members are the central ingredient for success. They will be required to think about the teaching of mathematics differently; to develop instructional tools and plans

that have real-life thematic components; engage with counselors and students and course/syllabi development; and adapt to assessment models that include other faculty and staff and as well as national assessment tools. Staff, particularly First Year Experience Staff, will become the lynchpin. They will be the direct link between the faculty and community and serve as a resource for faculty in locating and creating resources for student success. Moreover, as part of the expectation of the QEP to energize the campus in service learning and involvement in social concerns each year the whole campus will have a week-long focus on service learning activities. Participation from the wider community surrounding the college is extremely important. The contextual learning environment will be very dependent on cooperation from key elements and entities that make up the Rust College-Holly Springs, Mississippi area. For example, if the contextual learning theme is politics or civic responsibility, then local municipal government, local media and other related entities must be open and receptive to receiving Rust College first year students for real world learning opportunities. This type of relationship between the College and the community must be ongoing throughout the duration of the implementation of the Plan.

The Institutional Student Outcomes - Rust College Strategic Plan 2009-2014

Preamble/Introduction: Students graduating from Rust College with a four-year degree are expected to demonstrate knowledge, skills, and attitudes gained from the following focal points of institutional learning.

Technology: Students completing a degree will demonstrate the effective use of information technology in individual assignments, research and presentations as well as in collaborative efforts.

Analytical Thinking: Students completing a degree will demonstrate analytical and critical thinking skills, synthesis and evaluation of data and problem-solving skills.

Communication: Students completing a degree are expected to effectively use verbal, electronic, and print modes of communication to interact in the broader society.

Service learning in a Global Community: Students completing a degree must demonstrate useful knowledge that will benefit and meet specific needs in their local or global community.

Discipline Content: Students completing a degree will demonstrate effective knowledge, skills, and attitudes that are specific to their chosen academic program.

The General Education Core Competencies

In the 2008-09 academic year, a task force identified by the Vice President of Academic Affairs recommended to the Academic Council and the faculty a revision of the core competencies that would inform the General Education curriculum, which all students graduating with degrees must complete. The college-level competencies within the general education program are:

Competency 1: Demonstrate an understanding of the foundations of major cultural and multi-cultural issues, and sociological, ethical and human behavioral concerns.

Competency 2: Demonstrate knowledge of mathematics at the college algebra level, including quantitative reasoning and logical thinking, and identify and extract relevant and appropriate data within a mathematical environment.

Competency 3: Recognize a problem, review problem data, develop plausible solutions and evaluate results.

Competency 4: Develop research questions, formulate testable hypotheses, analyze and interpret data (hypothesis testing, drawing inferences) and draw conclusions.

Competency 5: Demonstrate competence in written communication (grammar, spelling, punctuation, and organization) and oral communication skills in a variety of contexts.

Competency 6: Demonstrate knowledge of basic biological as well as physical science concepts and principles and demonstrate literacy in basic computing.

Competency 7: Demonstrate understanding of global leadership, core leadership values and styles and show knowledge of the major philosophies and religions of the world.

Summary of Linkage of the QEP with Prior Institutional Planning

Rust College systematically engages in institutional planning and assessment. This ensures that the long-term vision, goals and overall mission of the College are continually improving. The organizational structure of the institution and its system of checks and balances create an environment where the delivery of service to its constituents can be maximally achieved.

The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools approved the previous Rust College Quality Enhancement Plan in the reaffirmation process of 2004. At that time, SACS maintained a different set of guidelines to inform the QEP process. Nevertheless, it is noted here the 2004 QEP focused on increased retention of first year students, which remains a central part of the college's strategic plan. The 2004 QEP incorporated a coordinated, interrelated, college-wide process with the goal of creating a student-first culture and an environment designed to increase students' persistence to the second

year through nurtured, holistic learning and by equipping them for a lifetime of service.

The following were the objectives of the 2004-2009 Quality Enhancement Plan.

- Identify and modify institutional attitudes and practices that may cause students to feel disengaged from the institution;
- Increase student engagement with the curriculum, the advising process, and student services during their matriculation to graduation;
- Maintain an environment that will enhance the intellectual life of the campus and foster opportunities for community service that result in lifelong learning and service.

Subsequently, with the approval of the **Rust College Strategic Plan of 2009-2014** (page 9), the College built upon the focus of the 2004 QEP and ensured that the spirit of the QEP was reflected in overall institutional planning moving forward. Thus, what is presented here in the current Quality Enhancement Plan is a representation of the College’s vision and long-term planning over the past decade and demonstrates the strength of its commitment to positive outcomes for its students.

The Rust College QEP Committee

In keeping with the requirements for the Quality Enhancement Plan, the leadership activity that led to the development of the QEP process reflects broad-based participation from throughout the College community. There is faculty representation from each academic division, student leaders, and key personnel from First Year Experience staff. The Vice President of Academic Affairs and Vice President for Assessment and Accreditation both are ex-officio to the committee, to ensure that process is fluid. Following the naming of a director of the QEP at the May 2012 Managers’ Institute, the president later approved a list of persons to serve as the QEP Core Committee. It would be the role of the Committee to provide structure for the plan, engage the College community to provide necessary input, identify resources and budget, promote the plan and present it for approval by the College community in preparation for submission to the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.

Table 1 below gives names, titles and units of the college that the QEP Core Committee members represent.

Table 1. THE QEP CORE COMMITTEE

Member’s Name	Title	Department or Unit
Dr. Kenneth E. Jones, Faculty/Staff, QEP Chair	Chair, First Year Experience Program;	Academic Affairs

Member's Name	Title	Department or Unit
	Assoc. Professor of Humanities	
Mrs. Martha Stovall, Faculty, Co-chair	Asst. Professor, Education/Sociology	Division of Education
Dr. Sharron Sarthou, Faculty, Recorder	Asst. Professor, Coordinator of English	Humanities
Dr. Rhonda Kuykindoll, Faculty	Asst. Professor, Biology	Science and Mathematics
Dr. Marco Robinson, Faculty	Assist. Professor, History	Social and Behavioral Science
Ms. Chiquita Walls, Staff	Director of Student Support Services	Academic Affairs
Ms. Shelly Jackson, Staff	FYEP Counselor/Retention Coordinator	Academic Affairs
Mr. Alfred Worthy, Faculty	Instructor, Accounting	Business
Mr. Chase Carr, Student	Student Government Association President	Student Affairs
Mr. A.J. Thurman, Student	Mass Communications Major	Student Affairs
Dr. Paul Lampley, Administration (Ex-Officio)	Vice President/Dean	Academic Affairs
Dr. Sandra Vaughn (Ex-Officio)	Vice President for Assessment and Accreditation	Assessment and Accreditation
Mrs. Vivian Gulledge (non-member) Office Support	Administrative Assistant to the Office of First Year Experience	Academic Affairs

When the Core Committee began to meet formally at the beginning of the fall 2012-13 Academic Year, they addressed expectations for completion of the plan, including possible outcomes, needed resources, roles, action plans, and activities. The timeline for development of the QEP is as follows.

Table 2. Timeline to Develop the Quality Enhancement Plan

Timeline	Actions	Personnel	Resources
January-March 2012	President brain storms with vice presidents to establish focus groups consisting of faculty, staff and students to assess institutional data and propose a range of possible QEP topics	President, faculty, staff and students	Institutional assessment data.

Timeline	Actions	Personnel	Resources
April-May 2012	A tentative topic emerges.	The focus groups, President and President's Cabinet.	Review of institutional data
May 2012	President appoints a director for the Quality Enhancement Plan at Spring Managers' Retreat.	President	N/A
August 2012	Surveys administered to faculty and staff on proposed topic. Incoming Freshmen surveyed.	Faculty and staff; administered by FYE staff	Office support
September 2012	QEP Core Committee identified and approved; initial planning begins.	QEP Core Committee	Office support
October 2012	(1)QEP establishes guidelines for role of students. (2) Possible SLOs discussed. (3)Timeline for the QEP planning begins. (4) Marketing ideas addressed.	Core Committee	Office support
November-December 2012	Topic for the QEP is narrowed; SLOs and proposed assessment methods discussed.	Core Committee	Office support
January - March 2013	QEP document and Implementation Plan are outlined (doable and assessable) and presented for approval; QEP Promotions/ Marketing of QEP initiated; initiate discussion groups	QEP Committee and Director, President, President's Cabinet, students faculty and staff	Office support

Timeline	Actions	Personnel	Resources
	around the QEP topic.		
April-May 2013	Review Literature and begin writing the QEP document.	Core Committee and editing/proofing team	Office support
June 2013	Feedback from first draft.	President, President's Cabinet and Faculty	Office support
August 2013	Draft finalized.	President, President's Cabinet and faculty	Office support
September 2013	Final QEP document submitted to SACS	SACS Liaison	Office support

III. Identification of the QEP Topic

In the Spring of 2012, the President and the vice presidents identified persons from the faculty, staff administration and students who would form initial focus groups for the purpose of proposing to the College a number of possible topic areas that might serve as the focus of the QEP. Below is an example of the form used to gather data in discussions about the QEP.

QEP LUNCHEON MEETING
Tuesday, February 7, 2012
11:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m.
McMillan Multi-Purpose Center (Gym)

REPORT FORM ON QEP DISCUSSION
(Group report must not exceed two pages)

Group:

Location:

Leaders:

Topic:

Rationale: (Must support and address Student Learning. Design to improve the academic program)

Literature Review:

Implementation Steps to include the involvement of the entire campus:

Estimated Cost of Implementation: (Sample Budget)

List two possible consultants with expertise in the field for (1) assisting in developing and (2) serving on visiting committee.

Other Remarks:

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The president identified two persons (one faculty member and one staff member) to lead teams consisting of faculty, staff and students. The directions included to meet and dialogue about possible QEP topics, review institutional data and submit a document based on the specifications indicated on the form above. The following is a list of the

types of institutional assessment data used to help develop topics for the QEP. In tables 3-7 are examples from recent institutional assessment.

- Graduation and Retention Trends
- TABE Test (Test of Adult Education) scores and placement
- Passing rates of Basic Skills courses (Academic Skills Program)
- Passing rates of General Education courses
- ACT Scores
- Technology Descriptive Assessment
- Grades First Reports
- Freshmen Assessment Test (Related to the Praxis I)

Examples of Summary Institutional Data Reviewed by Focus Groups

Table 3. *Six-Year Graduation and Persistence/Retention Trend

Entering Year		Fall 2006		Fall 2007		Fall 2008		Fall 2009		Fall 2010		Fall 2011		Fall 2012	
		#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
1	Entering Cohort	256	X	331	X	350	X	379	X	270	X	248	X	278	X
2	Number of students from Line 1 who returned for a 2 nd year	181	71%	231	70%	226	65%	255	67%	149	55%	156	63%	X	X
3	Number of students from Line 1 who returned for a 3 rd year	148	58%	152	46%	149	43%	165	44%	93	34%	X	X	X	X
4	Number of students from Line 1 who returned for a 4 th year	121	47%	108	33%	106	30%	129	34%	X	X	X	X	X	X
5	Number of students from Line 1 who returned for a 5 th year	87	34%	51	15%	47	13%	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
5	Number of students from Line 1 who returned	17	6%	18	5%	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Entering Year		Fall 2006		Fall 2007		Fall 2008		Fall 2009		Fall 2010		Fall 2011		Fall 2012	
		#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
	for a 6 th year														
6	Number of students from Line 1 who Graduated in 4 years (or Less)	53	21%	46	14%	38	11%	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
7	Number of students from Line 1 who Graduated in 5 years of less (include line 6)	73	29%	68	21%	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
8	Number of students from Line 1 who Graduated in 6 years or less (include those From Lines 6, 7 & 8)	90	35%	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

**Number (#) and Percentages (%). Bachelor's First time, full-time degree-seeking undergraduate students. New students who transferred from other colleges are not included.*

Table 4. TABE Test scores and placement for Fall 2012

ASP Subject area	TABE Level D	TABE Level E	TABE Level M	Total(%) of class of 278	Percent of 181 tested
Reading	81 (58%)	5 (3%)	54 (39%)	140 (50%)	77%
Math	91 (55%)	8 (5%)	66 (40%)	165 (59%)	91%
Language	95 (59%)	14 (9%)	52 (32%)	161 (58%)	89%

Total Freshman Class	278	100%
Total Freshmen tested	181	65% of class
Total Passed all three tests	3	1% of those tested
Total Exempted otherwise	97	35% of the class
Total placed in ASP courses	178	64% of the class

TABE Test Key:

- E=Easy (2.0-3.9)
- M=Medium (grades 4.0-5.9)
- D=Difficult (grades 6.0-8.9)
- A=Advanced (9.0-12.9)

* Passing rates are for first module (Fall 2012) through fourth module (Spring 2013).

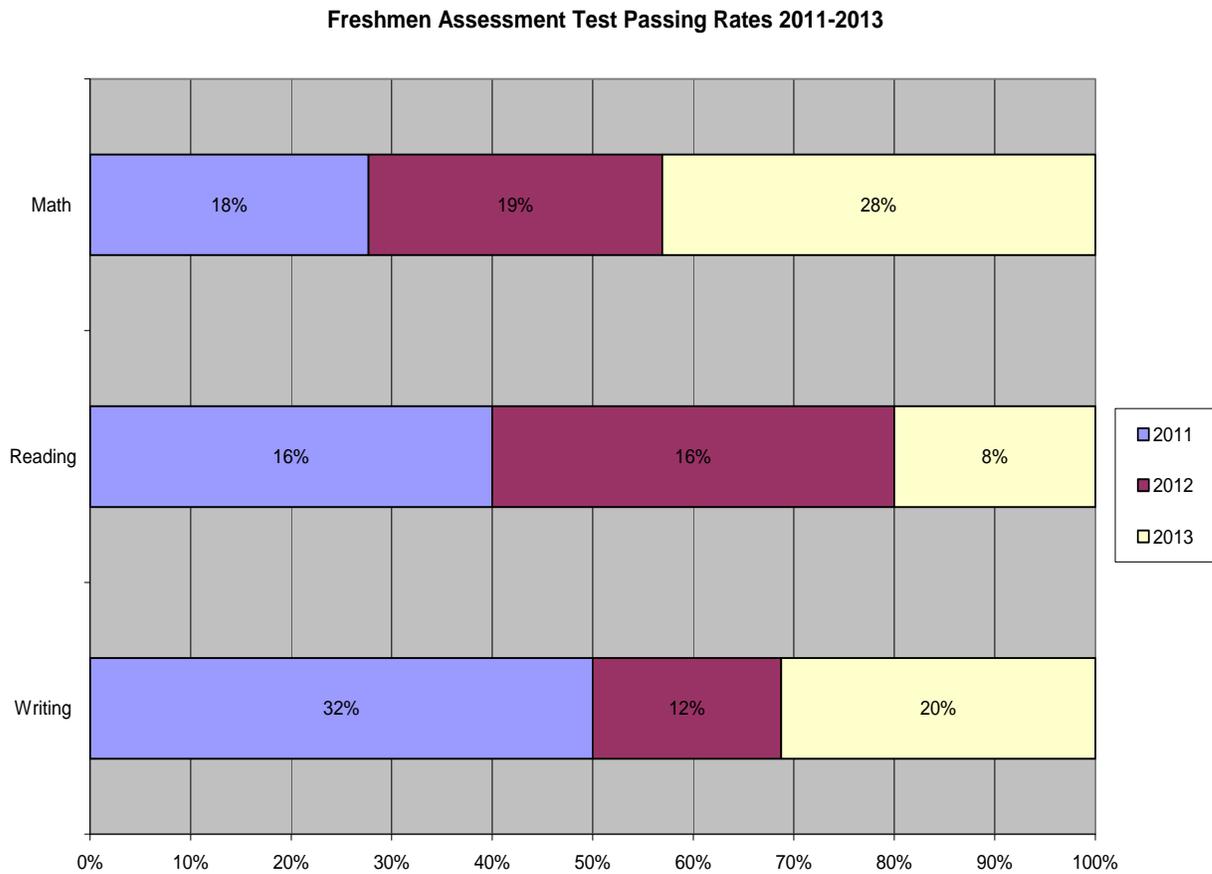
TABLE 5. Average Incoming ACT Scores Fall 2012

Enrolled full time students	25 th Percentile	75 th Percentile
Composite	14	21
English	11	21
Math	14	22

Table 6. Passing rates of General Education courses for Academic Year 2012-13

Course	Total Enrolled	Pass	Pass Percentage	Repeat	Repeat Percentage	Incompletes	Incompletes Percentage
Biological Science/Lab	220	176	80%	35	16%	9	4%
Intro to Computer Science	175	134	77%	38	21%	3	2%
Basic Writing	116	84	72%	31	27%	1	1%
Composition I	292	229	78%	61	21%	2	1%
Composition II	181	124	69%	56	31%	1	-1%
African Diaspora I	250	223	89%	27	11%	0	0%
African Diaspora II	261	216	83%	29	11%	16	6%
Fine Arts	18	13	72%	4	22%	1	6%
Humanities Seminar	191	159	83%	32	17%	0	0%
Basic Math	128	95	74%	31	24%	2	2%
Intermediate Algebra	61	46	75%	14	23%	1	2%
Quantitative Reasoning	42	22	52%	18	43%	2	5%
College Algebra	87	65	75%	18	21%	4	4%
Geometry & Trig	37	33	89%	3	8%	1	3%
Physical Science/Lab	195	158	81%	25	13%	12	6%
College Reading	73	54	74%	19	26%	0	0%
Biblical Studies	207	160	77%	46	22%	1	1%
Spanish I	54	46	86%	4	7%	4	7%
Spanish II	15	14	93%	1	7%	0	0%
Speech	87	56	64%	31	36%	0	0%

Table 7. Freshman Assessment Test Passing Rates 2011-13



The Freshmen Assessment Test was administered to all first year students. The test is based on retired Praxis exams in the subjects of writing, reading, and math. Passing rates are determined by the state of Mississippi (Praxis I) Test Requirements for 2011. The Praxis I exam was first administered to Rust College freshmen in 2011 as an external examination to assess first year student college readiness in reading, writing and math. Thus, the results show passing rates in those areas for the years, 2011, 2012, and 2013. Results of the test show consistently that a low percentage of Rust College first year students passed the test in any of the three areas for the three years.

Review of Institutional Technology

An assessment was also made of student access to technology and overall use of technology in the campus community. The backbone of the technological infrastructure is the Datatel management system, which serves as the platform for all business, academic and non-academic technology support for the College. Blackboard® is installed campus wide and serves as instructional management support. There are currently 329 computer terminals on the campus, housed in several locations, including academic buildings, dormitories, and the Leontyne Price Library. Rust College has a Computer Resource Committee that oversees the technology and computing resources of the college. The committee collects information to assess the usage of current information and technological resources and makes appropriate recommendations for the development of the comprehensive plan for implementing information technology.

First year students have access to the Plato lab, in which 30 terminals are located. Plato software supports instruction in all three of the basic skills courses. Also all first year student academic enrollment data are input into the Grades First early warning system. Grades First reports show that, on the average, First Year Experience Program counselors have 4.5 visits from each advisee over a three-module period. On the average, counselors enter 2.3 summary reports over a three-module period (noting any form of communication with or about advisees) into Grades First.

The implementation of the Web tutorial USA Funds Life Skills began in the fall 2011 semester. The program teaches financial literacy and builds social and study skills. Since that time, approximately 85% of all first year students access the system and engage USA Funds lessons per module.

Summary of Review of Institutional Data

Review of institutional data showed that there were several areas of service delivery to students that might become the focus of the QEP. For example, the most recent data showed that 65% of students in the Fall 2012 incoming freshman class were placed in developmental courses. This represents a significant portion of the freshman class. A relatively high percentage of the 65% tested (181 students) for developmental placement was placed in Basic Reading (77%), Basic Writing (91%), and Basic Math (89%) respectively (Table 4). Overall passing rates of all students in basic skills (developmental) and general education courses were good in most areas. But repeat

rates across all general education and developmental courses were consistently in the double-digit percentages. While first year developmental education students as well as non-developmental students both passed general education and basic skills courses at an average rate of over 75%, the students did not pass skills assessment in reading, writing, and math tested by the external (Praxis I) exam. For example, only 28%, 19%, and 18% of first year students passed the Math assessment portion of the Praxis I in years 2013, 2012, and 2011. **Thus, institutional data show how improvement in the performance of first year students in reading, writing, or math would be an important goal for the Quality Enhancement Plan. The data also show that of all first year students, those identified for placement in developmental courses are especially in need of skills development in any of those areas.**

Selection of the topic for the QEP

In the weeks following the activities of the focus groups in February of 2012, the Office of Institutional Assessment reviewed all of the data and proposed topics submitted by each group and generated a summary of proposed topics (See Table 8 below). The proposed topics ranged from enhancing use of technology, emphasizing critical thinking and reading, increasing cultural sensitivity, bolstering basic skills in science and math, to creating learning communities to support the academic performance of first year students. A review of the proposals by the President's Cabinet, which includes representation from each unit of the College, produced Group Topic 10 as the suggested focus for the QEP. Subsequent surveys administered at the Managers' Institute in May of 2012 and the Faculty and Staff Fall 2012 Conference confirmed the topic, "Creating Learning Communities that Strengthen the Academic Performance of First-Year Students." Subsequent analysis of institutional data by the Core Committee for the QEP produced the suggested narrowing of the topic to focus on the specific strengthening of math skills. The Cabinet, faculty, staff and students later approved the B-CATS² acronym in December of 2012 as the slogan for the topic of the QEP.

Table 8 is a summary of the range of proposed topics for the QEP emerging from the institutional focus groups.

Table 8. Proposed QEP Topics Emerging from Spring 2012 Campus Focus Groups

Group and Topic	Summary
Group 1: Developing the Holistic Student	Address the physical fitness and mental preparedness of students through the improvement of facilities and equipment on campus in the area of exercise and counseling to address behavior issues in the classroom and residence halls.
Group 2: Reading for Better Civility and Cultural Sensitivity	Reading can serve as catalytic for personal growth, improved deportment within the academy, and increased understanding of cultural diversity.
Group 3: Joining Access with Excellence	A holistic approach to support at-risk students through focused skills developmental programs supported by mentoring, technological literacy, psychological support, and attentive academic advising.
Group 4: Strengthening and Expanding Technology Across Campus	Implement a stronger and expansive technological system at Rust College.
Group 5: Revitalizing First Year Program to Incorporate Technology, Reading, Writing, Critical Thinking, and Basic Math Skills	Provide historical legacy of the Rust College tradition, understand its core values, make the First-Year Experience a central and sustainable part of the institution's fabric.
Group 6: Enhancing Educational Programs through Technology: Promoting Critical Thinking to Prepare students for life-long learning in a global society	Provide high quality academic preparation for students within a technologically advanced context and strive to create a history of innovation and the effective use of technology to improve student learning.
Group 7: Creating Learning Communities that will strengthen basic skills and address student behavior for all freshmen and transfers	The Learning Community model will increase student engagement, build unity among students and employees, address unacceptable behavior consistently and increase the rate of retention.
Group 8: Revitalizing the First Year Experience	Enhance the experience by institution a required reading and creative writing component. This will enhance the readiness of our students for the upper level courses.

Group and Topic	Summary
<p>Group 9: Incorporating technology into the curriculum with emphasis on critical thinking, reading, writing, and math comprehension</p>	<p>Upper level classes can be enriched by incorporating technology into the curriculum for research and basic skills reinforcement; upper division classes need freshman students to have basic skills in reading, writing, and Math and to be prepared to learn.</p>
<p>Group 10: Bridging the Gap Through Learning Communities (as it relates to the Freshman Experience)</p>	<p>The development of learning communities would increase retention and narrow the gap between the freshman and sophomore year. These communities would provide a better foundation as students enter their major areas of study. They would create a cadre of students more proficient on standardized tests.</p>

IV. Student Learning Outcomes for the QEP

With review of institutional data complete and having identified a conceptual framework for the QEP, the QEP Core Committee put forth for consideration by the College learning outcomes for B-MACS² as follows.

QEP SLO 1: First year students will be able to demonstrate an increase in basic math skills through contextual learning communities.

First year students who complete the basic math skills course within the contextual learning community will be able to perform operations on sets; the basic principles of logic; solve basic algebraic problems; and represent math information using appropriate technology.

QEP SLO 2: First year students who complete the basic math skills course within the contextual learning community will be able to describe/explain math concepts using examples from the real world.

First year students will show knowledge of math experiences expressed in the real world through specialized activities consistent with a contextual learning community theme and creation of instructional modules around those activities and experiences emphasizing math as a context.

V. Literature Review

a. Developmental Education

There has been an intense debate over the past decade about the cost-effectiveness and relative success of developmental/remedial programs at institutions of higher education. The arguments have been on all sides: against remediation at four-year colleges and universities, for and against remediation in community colleges, for remediation only in the public schools (often perceived as the origins of the need for remediation in the first place), and remediation at institutions motivated by students' level of college readiness based on social, demographic, and other factors (Roueche and Roueche, 1999). Historically black colleges and universities have been in the thick of the ongoing conversation about remedial/developmental education. African Americans enrolling in colleges and universities are among those groups most in need of some kind of intervention to help them to be more prepared for college. The Southern Education Foundation's report, "The Role of Minority- Serving Institutions: In Redefining and Improving Development Education" (Parker, 2012) reports findings from a study by Atwell et al (2006) showing a significant percentage of African American and urban students make up the total number of persons who enroll in developmental courses. For example, 52 percent of students from urban high schools, 43 percent of African American students, and 52 percent of students from low SES backgrounds are involved in some aspect of remediation. Each year, more than half a million college students complete developmental courses (www.southerneducation.org).

The arguments for and against developmental education are varied indeed, but the economic impact specifically cannot be ignored. As many as 14 states, many of which are in the south, limit or prohibit state funding for remedial education at four year schools (Parker, 2012). Because historically black colleges or universities educate nearly half of all African American students (thinkhbcu.org), policies that limit funding for remediation can work against the academic success of many students seeking degrees from those schools. The economic burden on private institutions serving predominantly black students because of the rising cost of higher education in general can compound this problem in the long run. The enigmatic consequence is that many HBCU institutions must recruit a sufficient number of students with a range of levels of college preparation in order to remain economically viable, yet must also direct valuable resources to remediation in order to ensure the students are adequately prepared to succeed. More

and more predominantly Black institutions are weighing their options for developmental studies.

Leticia Tomas Bustillos in her presentation to the Wal-Mart Foundation, AIHEC, HACU & NAFEO Student Success Collaboration in Denver, Colorado on September 13, 2012, identified four major strategies used in developmental education programs around the country.

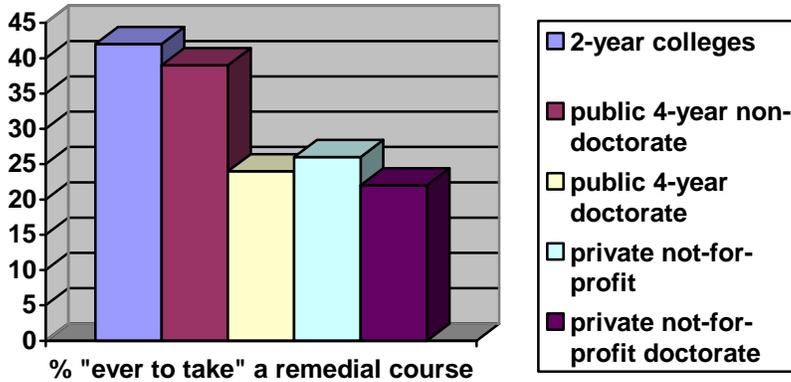
- Interventions to Avoid Developmental Education—programs that attempt to bridge the gap created by under preparation for college and shore up students' abilities to compete.
- Programs that Accelerate Student Progress in Developmental Education—programs whose goals are to cut costs of remediation by getting students early into college-ready courses.
- Contextualized Instruction—programs that attempt to create a learning “environment” for students that foster developmental progress.
- Supplemental Supports—through instructional aids, tutoring services, and other support designed to assist students in progressing to college-ready studies.

In the *Lumina Foundation Focus Fall 2008* publication “Remediation Redux,” it was noted that there are generally five common trends or attributes that characterize developmental education:

- Learning communities that foster shared knowledge in small-group settings in which students take tandem courses that pair seemingly diverse subjects to aid student learning—English paired with biology, for instance, or algebra paired with basic writing.
- Success centers that combine personalized supplemental instruction with cutting-edge software.
- Data-driven analyses that help colleges and universities identify student deficiencies early and address problem areas that arise over the course of their postsecondary education.
- Simple emphasis on improving developmental education instruction by providing faculty development and by hiring instructors with specific training and experience in developmental education.

There are other strategies as well. Clearly, certain strategies are much more cost-intensive than others, and hybrid versions of remediation strategies are also part of the mix. The role of technology in developmental instruction particularly has become a central focus of educators at many schools. Models such as Emporium and Web-based tutorials such as Plato, Educo, Pearson and others vary in their utilization of human-versus-technology resources to drive developmental education progress. Testing and accurate placement of students at the developmental level play essential roles leading to student success. COMPASS, ACCUPLACER, or TABE (Test of Adult Basic Education) tests are very crucial for diagnosing (and avoiding misdiagnosing) students' strengths in Math, Reading, and Writing. Swail (2003) reminds us of the significance of indicators such as ACT or SAT scores and high school grade point averages being used as indicators of the probability students will be academically prepared for college. Swail also warns that students who are educated in often "under-resourced and understaffed schools" are at higher risks to "underachieve" and not reach their full potential (Swail 2003, 58). It is a strong argument for programs to include developmental education for closing the gap for under-prepared students.

While the pros and cons of remediation/developmental education continue to be debated, remediation classes are found in 95 percent of community colleges and 78 percent of four-year schools around the country (National Council of Education Statistics, 1995). A study conducted for the Department of Education (Aud et al, 2011) exploring the percentages of persons "ever" having taken developmental or remedial courses shows four-year public institutions that do not offer doctorate degrees are second (39 %) only to two-year colleges (42 %) for this category of college enrollees.



Given these approaches to remediation/developmental education, it is clear that there remains strong support for these efforts at colleges and universities throughout the country, including at historically black colleges and universities. Thus, viable developmental education programs are seen as crucial to the success of many institutions of higher education.

b. The First Year Experience

First Year Experience programs are traditionally designed to assist freshmen and new transfer students in making a successful transition into collegiate life. Dwyer (1989) reports that some of the first notions of freshman experience programs date back to the 17th century as there were persistent needs to intervene on behalf of freshmen who often were hazed by upperclassmen. While appealing to parents of students to assist in the university's attempts to resolve such matters, gradually formal programs for the first year have become mainstays in higher education.

First year programs are as diverse as the colleges that serve the thousands of students who enter their freshman year. Some programs include learning communities, others do not. Some have a course or seminar requirement with common readings, and others are hybrids. At best, the design of the first year experience program is based on the college's mission, unique student population served, and the goals and objectives of the program. Their commonalities are increasing student retention, providing a well rounded academic experience to aid in student transition, and student engagement (Dwyer 1989).

Discussions about first year experience programs seem to focus on three areas: (1) first year experience programs and their services at various colleges and universities; (2) first year student success and needs, including national surveys; and (3) best practices in teaching, assessing, and retaining first-year college students.

The Freshman Year Experience: Helping Students Survive and Succeed in College by M. Lee Upcraft and John N. Garner (1989) has been described as presenting an authoritative, comprehensive guide to the policies, strategies, programs, and services designed to ensure student achievement in the first year of college, thus facilitating student retention and academic success in subsequent years. They identify six elements to student success.

- **Developing Academic and Intellectual Competence.** Students should be confident in their abilities to engage and learn in the college academic environment.
- **Establishing and Maintaining Interpersonal Relationships.** Students should have the ability to create platonic as well as romantic relationships.
- **Developing Identity.** Students should be exploring who they are and who they want to be. This may happen through coursework, campus clubs and organizations or through peer relationships and exploration.
- **Deciding on a Career and Lifestyle.** Students, through self-exploration, should explore and decide the type of career and lifestyle they wish to have after graduation.
- **Maintaining Personal Health and Wellness.** College is an important time for a student, where habits are created with lasting impact on his or her life. Students should be forming healthy habits and taking care of themselves.
- **Developing an Integrated Philosophy of Life.** Students are away from home for the first time and have the opportunity to re-examine beliefs they have always held true.

Betsy Barefoot's *The First Year and Beyond: Rethinking the Challenge of Collegiate Transition: New Directions for Higher Education, Number 144* (2008) discussed the transitioning process that students must navigate both prior to their freshman year and on into the sophomore year. Barefoot addressed such topics as college readiness, the helicopter parents, and how institutions must be "supportive of and accountable to" their student clientele.

Developing and Sustaining Successful First-Year Programs: A Guide for Practitioners by Gerald M. Greenfield, Jennifer R. Keup, and John N. Gardner (2013) provides much needed information on ways to effectively implement or improve first year programs. First Year Experience professionals have the National Resource Center for First Year Experience and Students in Transition which according to its website “serves as *the trusted expert, internationally recognized leader, and clearinghouse for scholarship, policy, and best practice for all postsecondary student transitions.*”

The center provides opportunities for the exchange of practical and scholarly information as well as the discussion of trends and issues in this field through the convening of conferences and other professional development events such as institutes, workshops, and online learning opportunities; publication of scholarly practice books, research reports, a peer-reviewed journal, electronic newsletters, and guides; generating, supporting, and disseminating research and scholarship; hosting visiting scholars; and maintaining several online channels for resource sharing and communication, including a dynamic website, listservs, and social media outlets.

First Year Programs/Seminars and Academic Performance/Achievement Outcomes

While the overarching goal of first year programs and first year seminars is that of student retention, the data are not all in agreement that the academic performance of students is systematically improved (Barefoot 2000) by first year programs. Yet, several campus-oriented studies support the premise that first year programs and particularly first year seminars can improve academic performance measured by a range of indicators. A list of studies and measured indicators is as follows.

- Cumulative GPA attained at the end of the first year (Wahalstron, 1993; House, 2005; Jackson, 2005; and Lang, 2007).
- Cumulative GPA attained beyond the first year of college (Wilkie & Kuckuck, 1989)
- GPA attained vs. GPA predicted (Wilkie & Kuckuck, 1989)
- Total number of first-year students in good academic standing (i.e., students not place on academic probation or academically dismissed) (Strumpf & Hunt, 1993; Soldner, 1998; VerDuin, 2005; Vinson, 1993)

- Total number of first year courses passed (versus dropped or failed) (Carolina Consortium, 1993)
- Total number of first-year courses completed with a grade of “C” or higher (Stupka, 1993)
- Percentage of students who qualify for the Dean’s List and Honors Program (Thomason, 1998)

The scholarly literature, therefore, makes clear linkages between the role of first year programs and specific measures of academic success of first year students.

c. **Learning Communities and Academic Success**

It is no secret that it appears that many colleges and universities struggle to meet the needs of growing numbers of students who attend college with limited academic skills. In many cases, students enter college with sixth grade level skills or (less) in the basic courses of reading, writing and mathematics, and the number of these “remedial” students has grown over the years so that today it is estimated that nearly 4 out of 10 students enter college with some form of developmental education needed (Tinto 1998). As a result, many institutions seem to spend an overwhelming amount of time and effort investing a substantial amount of resources and funds in programs designed to help these students develop the skills they need to academically excel. The majority of colleges and universities now offer some type of “remedial/developmental” coursework (Tinto 1998).

Therefore, many higher education institutions are actively pursuing different ways to address the academic needs of the “remedial education” student. One of those alternatives is the implementation of learning communities. The learning community “movement” was initiated partly because of the leadership and advocacy of the Washington Center for Undergraduate Education at Evergreen State College. Founded in 1985, the Washington Center expanded its support for learning communities nationally after 1996 with support from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) and the Pew Charitable Trusts. As of August 31, 2005, more than 245 learning communities were listed in the online directory of the National Learning Commons. In *The Powerful Potential of Learning Communities* (1999), Oscar Lenning and Larry Ebbers encourage the higher education community to “intentionally develop learning communities that promote and maximize student learning” (Lenning and Ebbers, 1999). They describe four basic categories of learning communities:

- Curricular
- Classroom
- Residential
- Student-type

In a speech made to the National Teaching and Learning Forum in May 1998, Vincent Tinto (1998) described learning communities as “co-registration or block scheduling that enable students to take courses together.” Moreover, they are described as a variety of curricular structures that link one or more courses together, restructuring the material or course content, so students have opportunities for deeper understanding and integration of the materials being taught, more peer-to-peer engagement, as well as more faculty/student engagement (Gabelnik, McGregor, Matthews, and Smith, 1990). This “community of learners” is also linked and organized around a central theme, which may link the courses. For example, one community may choose to focus on SADD, which is Students against Destructive Decisions (formally known as Students Against Drunk Driving), where they focus on the harmful effects of substance abuse. This theme, which focuses on healthy minds and bodies, can be linked to the sciences and relate to how use of these substances can play a major part in being physically healthy. This ensures that the courses provide students with a shared educational experience that promotes “critical thinking” and shared commonalities that may or may not be possible in “stand alone courses” (Gabelnik, McGregor, Matthews, and Smith, 1990). The learning community program is aimed at fostering a successful transition to college, which is expected to provide academic and social support as well as encouragement for students to become involved in campus as well as community learning.

The community is usually small in numbers from the same entering cohort, who are enrolled in common courses. Each learning community has a coordinator who is responsible for monitoring the educational progress, group activities, and in turn, provides academic and social support to the students.

Although learning communities vary in orientation, design and scope, all types appear to share several basic characteristics:

- The organizing of faculty and students into smaller groups
- Encouraging integration of the curriculum
- Assisting students with established academic and social support networks
- Providing a setting for students to be socialized and orientated to college expectations

- Building a camaraderie among faculty
- Opportunity for faculty and students to focus on learning outcomes
- Providing a community based academic support program
- Offering a more in-depth look at examining/measuring the freshman year experience (Shapiro and Levine 1999)

The purpose of the learning community is to promote a variety of benefits to the student by way of activities commonly associated with stressful educational experiences in the following ways:

- Improved student academic performance
- Increased student retention rates
- Student-to-student camaraderie/interaction and strong social support networks; a greater ability to bridge the gap between academic and social worlds
- Increased faculty/student engagement
- Smoother transition to college
- Expected higher levels of satisfaction with college experience
- Expected higher persistence rate from freshman to sophomore year
- Established academic support networks
- Improved quality of thinking(critically) and communicating
- A better understanding of self and others

Since the learning community is designed and based on consistent communication, support, faculty/student engagement, and the celebration of student success, some examples of planned activities that support this premise are:

- Counselor/faculty facilitated workshops
- Faculty coaching
- Peer mentoring
- Team building exercises
- Small group study sessions/ “study buddies”
- Specialized individual tutorial sessions
- Opportunities to participate in community contextual learning around particular and specific themes of interest, e.g., obesity awareness
- Opportunities for LC outings, field trips, and various cultural experiences
- Recognition and Awards Reception

The Role of Instructors and Course Linking/Pairing in Learning Communities

One of the main roles of instructors of learning communities is active participation in the intentionally grouped or pairing of courses. The goal is to connect the content of individual courses in order to make it more meaningful and cohesive to students. For example, if a “remedial” English class is linked with a history class, a writing assignment in the English class can shed light on the assignments in the history class, while the history instructor, in turn, makes use of a plethora of approaches in which writing supports the learning content. To make this happen, however, instructors in the two classes are expected to collaborate as they both prepare individual syllabi. This collaboration should apply both to curriculum and pedagogy with instructors keeping in touch with each other about student problems such as academic performance, unusual learning styles and attendance patterns. Collaboration is also important in order to keep heavy assignments from being due on the same day.

The literature that address the attributes of learning communities seem to support course linkage as a model that emphasizes student connections to various disciplines, particularly when involving linkage with basic skills courses (Heaney, 2006). In describing the “synergy program,” Heaney informs us that those students who are identified as basic writers (for any number of reasons) need a “context for thesis-research projects” that they find meaningful (2006). In the synergy program, two or more classes are linked by theme or by content and the students attend classes together. Faculty members plan the program collaboratively. Generally, the synergy program is operated in this manner:

- Students take College Composition along with Critical Thinking in Intellectual Communities, two university-required, credit-bearing classes.
- Curriculum helps students develop writing, reading and critical thinking skills.
- The year-long ethnographic research project allows faculty to include “more traditional reading and writing assignments” within a context that the students find “interesting and relevant.” (Heaney, 34)

Effective communication between learning community instructors about students, class syllabi changes and course content is equally important and can be very beneficial as well. In some cases, learning community instructors (faculty learning communities) have been known to hold joint classes, joint activities develop joint classroom assignments (e.g., writing) or even trade classes for a day or two, all in an effort to track student learning outcomes or gains. Other instructor expectations include, but are not limited to:

- Preparations for their learning communities before the module/semester begins;
- E-mails, text messaging and phone collaborations as well as face to face, one on one meetings with one another;
- Collaborative classroom assignments, activities and syllabi in an effort to make both curriculums more cohesive to one another;
- Early information to student participants that instructors will be working as a team.

Thus, according to Nancy Shapiro and Jodi Levine, the characteristics of a successful learning community are intended to “create an integrated teaching and learning experience for participants.” Vincent Tinto (1998), chair of the Higher Education Program at Syracuse University, says that this experience should be easily measured and should depict common student outcomes, such as course pass/fail rates, credit accumulation, grade point averages and student persistence to the second term or second year. Tinto (1998) goes on to say that learning communities are not “magic antidotes to successful student learning.” Just like various other strategies and class pedagogy, there are limits to effectiveness. However, there appears to be ample evidence to support the notion that application of student learning communities and persistence enriches the lives and satisfaction of both students and faculty. The bottom line seems to focus on student engagement in learning, faculty/student engagement, and classroom assessment.

Contextual Learning Communities

Having established a framework generally for the role of learning communities in higher education, what rises to the surface for the current analysis and efforts to establish sound practices with positive student outcomes is the concept of contextual learning. Hull (1993) defines contextual learning as learning that occurs when learners connect information to their own frame of reference:

"According to contextual learning theory, learning occurs only when students (learners) process new information or knowledge in such a way that it makes sense to them in their frame of reference (their own inner world of memory, experience, and response). This approach to learning and teaching assumes that the mind naturally seeks meaning in context—that is, in the environment where the person is located—and that it does so through searching for relationships that make sense and appear useful." (Hull, 1993, p. 41)

Karweit (1993) expresses a very similar line of thinking and defines contextual learning as learning that is designed so that students can carry out activities and solve problems in a way that reflects the nature of such tasks in the real world. Similarly, a number of scholars note that learning within meaningful contexts can be very effective (Carragher, Carragher and Schleimer, 1985; Lave, Smith and Butler, 1988). Resnick (1987) goes so far as to criticize traditional modes of instruction as “symbol manipulation” and “abstraction,” rather than that of contextualized learning, more frequently utilized in the world outside of school. The symbols, according to Resnick are detached from the real-world referents—and thus have no meaning for students.

While Resnick’s position might be considered the exception rather than the rule, generally the literature suggests there are multiple aspects of any learning environment. These environments can be diverse and widely varied—a classroom, a laboratory, a worksite, in the community, at city hall. They may incorporate many different types of experiences for students. The activities and experiences can be social, cultural, physical and psychological, working continually toward desired learning outcomes. Indeed, the greatest hindrance to exploring the richness of experiences that might be gained through contextual learning may be the very rigidity that creates the need for such pedagogies in the first place.

d. General Education in Higher Education and the Liberal Arts Tradition

A review of the professional research and related literature reveals an adequate treatment of the early markings of the progress of American education. Any recording of early education would reflect a serious omission without recognition of early educators such as Aristotle, Socrates and Plato. Indeed, Socrates is famously quoted as saying “Education is the kindling of a flame, not the filling of a vessel.” These men and others laid a strong foundation for American thought that paved the way for success in education today. Among the early leaders in American thought are Thomas Jefferson, President Abraham Lincoln and Dr. W.E.B. DuBois, who informs us “that of all citizens for which the world has struggled and fought for 5,000 years, the right to learn is undoubtedly the most fundamental...” (“What is Liberal Education?” <http://www.aacu.org/leap>). David Kearns (2002), a Xerox representative, stated, “The only education that prepares us for change is a liberal education.”

Thus, a liberal-oriented education has been linked to basic human rights and that which is essential for individuals to be prepared to negotiate change in the world. It might be added that, in periods of change, narrow specialization condemns us to inflexibility. Flexible intellectual tools are needed in order for us to be problem solvers and continuing learners over time” (“What is Liberal Education?” <http://www.aacu.org/leap>).

Definitions of General Education

Nichols and Nichols (2001) define general education in terms of “communication of a common body of knowledge, skills and perspectives/values regarding civilization from one generation to another.” They go on to say that general education is the “liberal arts” component of a curriculum encompassing all that each graduate of an institution should be able to think, know, or do (Nichols and Nichols, 2001, pg. 11).

Since its founding in 1915, the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) has aimed “to ensure that every undergraduate student experiences a relevant and challenging general education curriculum.” That curriculum would include general education not only for traditional learners, but for transfer and non-traditional students, embedding high expectations and meaningful assessment of student learning.

The AAC&U defines general education as, “[T]hat part of a liberal education curriculum that is shared by all students. It provides broad exposure to multiple disciplines and forms the basis for developing essential intellectual, civic, and practical capacities” (“What is Liberal Education?” <http://www.aacu.org/leap>).

General education can take many forms, and increasingly includes introductory, advanced, and integrative forms of learning. For example, one of the most inclusive and relevant descriptions of the concept of general education addresses cognitive skills. An early 20th century focus on this concept reflects concern for teaching people how to think and to learn (Toffler, 1928). It also stresses breadth of knowledge across a number of disciplines and is defined “as a curriculum (or part of a curriculum) aimed at imparting general knowledge and developing general intellectual capacities in contrast to a professional, vocational or technical curriculum” (Toffler 1928). If we follow this line of thinking today, in order to ensure a sound educational foundation, educators must:

- Take into account, their own economic, social, political, and institutional environment;

- Look for the common unifying themes that pull together a curriculum and make it more than an arbitrary combination of alternative elements; and
- Move beyond limits of traditional disciplinary boundaries to explore the relationships among different subjects and ways of thinking about the world.

Another approach to general education is expansive in that it suggests that “General education prepares students for lifelong learning, equips them for research skills, and builds competence in evaluating information and constructing knowledge in multiple ways. Fundamental to all these is the ability to think critically (“General Education: Purpose” (2013)). To this end, the general education program is designed to provide a foundation for the major curriculum, realize individual student potential, prepare for membership in the community and facilitate integration of knowledge.

The changing nature of general education, as noted by the AAC&U, can be seen in the chart below which also shows how important it is for faculty at colleges and universities to continually revisit general education goals. Educators charged with preparing young minds for tomorrow’s leadership roles must constantly assess and reassess the role of general education as part of today’s curriculum.

THE CHANGING NATURE OF LIBERAL/GENERAL EDUCATION

What?	Liberal Education in the 20th Century	Liberal Education in the 21st Century
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • intellectual and personal development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • intellectual and personal development
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an option for the fortunate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a necessity for all students
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • viewed as non-vocational 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • essential for success in a global economy and for informed citizenship
How?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • through studies in arts science disciplines (“the major”) and/or through general education in the initial years 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • through studies that emphasize the essential learning outcomes across the entire educational continuum-from school through college-at progressively higher levels of achievement
Where?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • liberal arts colleges or college of arts and sciences in larger institutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • all schools, community colleges, colleges, and universities, as well across all fields of studies

Adapted from College Learning for the New Global Century, Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2007, page 18, figure 5. Source: <http://www.aacu.org/leap>

e. Summary of the Literature Review

In summary, colleges and universities historically have implemented a wide range of techniques, programs and processes designed to strengthen the ability of first year students to be admitted into college and perform at college level, enhance the environment for learning, address myriad socio-cultural and personal needs that factor into student success, and ultimately for them to persist to the next academic level and obtain their degree.

While there clearly are pros and cons as to which approaches are more effective, patterns do exist that support the need for remedial/developmental programs for the underserved and under-prepared populations. The literature is relatively uniform in placing significance on the dynamics of the first year. At this juncture identities are formed, values are made, contextual impressions and long- and short-term relationships are initiated. Individual habits, relating both to personal as well as academic developmental, are established. First year programs and seminars are effective tools for retention and academic success, manifested in a range of ways in which to implement those programs. Contextual learning communities are effective examples of first year intervention strategies. Thus, the literature supports the approach that institutions of higher education can find success with first year students matriculating in the liberal arts tradition when these institutions implement programs that strengthen academic support and engage in contextual learning.

VI. ACTIONS OF THE QEP TO BE IMPLEMENTED

The following action plan includes steps which are to be implemented over the five-year period of the QEP (Section VII).

1. Creation of Contextual Learning Communities

First year students who make up the contextual learning communities will be enrolled in both general education and Basic Math courses as a pilot. Activities and academic instructional design will be developed by a faculty think tank assigned to a particular learning community. Each year of the Plan, a new theme will be established for the contextual learning communities.

Contextual learning activities will emphasize real-world experiences, where mathematical concepts are vital:

- population growth
- polling
- sports statistics
- crime rates
- proportions of recipe ingredients

All events and activities will stress real-world Math concepts. Each learning community will have reading lists that reflect the focus of the learning community. Instructional modules for Math will be developed based on the content and experiences of the contextual learning, and will be designed within the context of Math skills development as well as an understanding of the real-world math experiences.

2. Creation of Faculty Think tanks and Building of Instructional Modules

A faculty think tank consisting of Math faculty members and other interested faculty will be identified to develop a contextual learning community. The role of the think tank will be to work with counselors and student mentors to design curricular and co-curricular activities for the communities. First year students will be required to engage in real-life activities where math concepts can be utilized.

Revision of instruction in Math courses should be geared to integration in both content as well as process related to the implementation of the QEP. Syllabi for Math courses will show outcomes related to the topic area of those communities and the Math skills to be assessed in relation to the contextual learning.

3. Review Developmental Placement Process.

Prior to implementation of the contextual learning pilots a detailed review of current procedures for testing first year students in developmental Math will be conducted. This would include:

- pre-testing environment, the extent to which first year students are adequately informed of the purpose of admissions testing; timeliness of scheduled tests; adequacy of space designated for testing; the length of time required; the availability of water and snacks, and other conditions related to the testing environment
- the accuracy of the TABE test in placing first year students in appropriate developmental courses
- the exploration of ACCUPLACER as an alternative instrument for testing and placement
- the level of consistency in instructional pedagogy across sections of the courses.
- the role of the Plato lab and consistency in how the lab is utilized as a resource for developmental Math instruction

Improvement in some or all of these areas may have a positive impact on student performance in basic skills Math courses and college readiness.

4. Grouping and the Criteria for Placement in Math Courses.

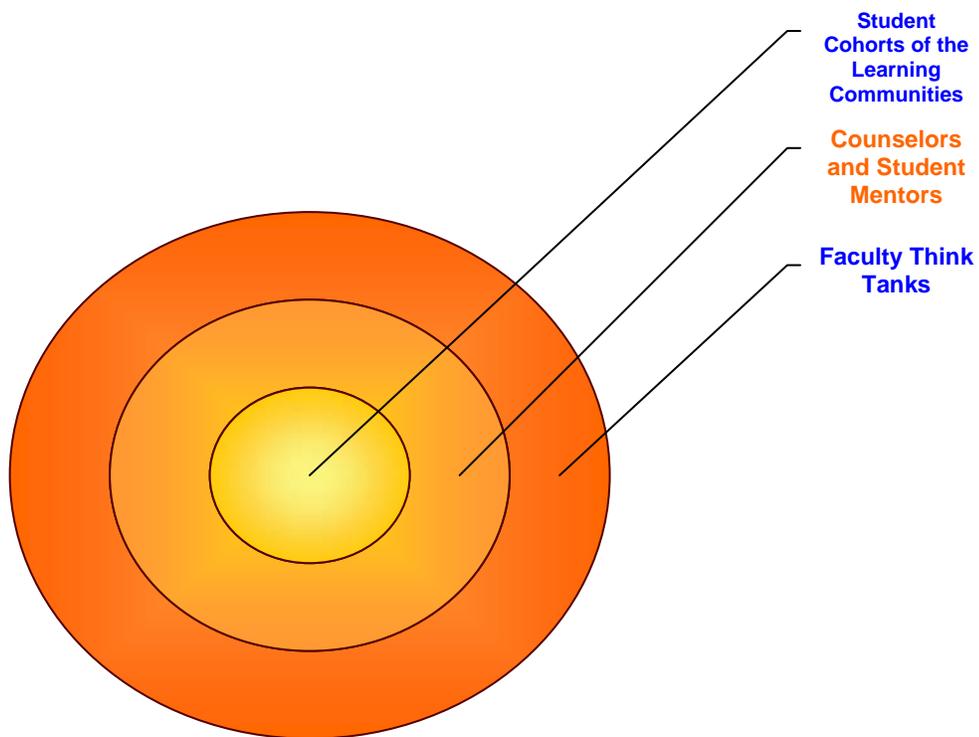
Following the assessment of the testing and placement process in the first year of the Plan, in year two of the Plan pilot groups will be formed in order to create baseline data for implementing the contextual learning communities. There are two types of exemptions from assignment in MAT 121 Basic Math: (1) any student with a score of 16 or above on the ACT and with a high school GPA of 2.7 or above is exempted from being placed in developmental courses; (2) any student with a passing score on the placement exam is exempted from being placed in developmental courses.

Students not exempted and assigned to Basic Math will also enroll in a General Education Math course. While enrolled in the two courses, the student will have opportunities to drop the basic math skills course and continue enrollment to qualify for enrollment only the General Education Math course, having met standards for Basic Math.

In year two, two study groups will be formed. A control pilot group will consist of students enrolled in Basic Math as well as students enrolled in a General Education Math course.

The control group in year two will not be exposed to the contextual learning environment. A second group, consisting of both MAT Basic Math 121 students as well as students enrolled in a General Education Math course will form the pilot contextual learning community and will be exposed to the experiences and skill development associated with contextual learning.

Collaborative Relationships of B-CATS²



5. Assignment of cohorts to learning communities. Initially, assignment to contextual learning communities will be incremental on a year-to-year basis, beginning with Year Two. But by the end of the full implementation of the QEP, all first year students will be assigned to a learning community.

6. Student mentors. Fifteen student mentors will be identified to work closely with students in those environments and having roles in creating co-curricular activities.

7. Campus Life. Increased attention will be given to the overall campus learning environment and linked to the contextual learning communities. Specific activities geared toward first year students will be scheduled and there will be periodic campus-wide activities that target service and service issues.

8. Student Support: First year students who are identified by GradesFirst as academically at risk will be required to schedule tutoring in the areas in which they are deficient. Close collaboration between general education faculty and first year counselors; periodic meetings to assess adherence to the QEP process.

9. Professional development. So that faculty will fully understand the expectations of the QEP, they will be engaged in a series of professional development activities. These training opportunities will focus on developing a spirit of cooperative instruction, sensitivity to transitional issues of new students and other factors that impact academic success. Through this focus, faculty will develop clearer understanding of demographic and other factors that impact first year students (e.g., first generation, aversion to basic skills courses, personal and family issues, financial literacy issues, etc).

VII. Five-Year Timeline for B-CATS²

Table 9. Timeline for B-CATS²

Time	Task/Activity
Year One 2014-15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appointment of the QEP team to implement the QEP; clarify job assignments and initiate the QEP process. (Fall 2014) • Administer half of incoming non-exempted first year students the TABE and half the ACCUPLACER test (Fall 2014) • Conduct thorough assessment of the developmental education admissions process, including testing, placement and basic skills instruction. (Fall 2014 and Spring 2015) • Conduct Faculty Development workshops on (a) Math in the Real World (August 2014); (b) roles of faculty think tanks (September 2014); (c) faculty-student relationships in building/nurturing the community (October 2014); (d) "Issues and Answers: Contextual Learning Environments" (November 2014). • Faculty think tanks for the initial pilot learning communities identified by the QEP Committee to begin in Year Two of the QEP (January 2015) • Think tanks submit suggested outcomes for Math courses; identify activities of the first learning communities (February 2015). • Professional Development: Role of the counselor in shepherding the learning community (March 2015) • Results of testing and placement process reported. Revision of strategies for testing and placement presented for approval by Academic Affairs and President's Cabinet (April 2015). • Student mentors selected for Year Two; meet with counselors to establish parameters for conducting learning community activities (April 2015) • Training the student mentor for peer leadership (Summer 2015) • Faculty identified for teaching Basic Math and General Education Math for the QEP (Summer 2015) • Assessment of faculty, counselor and student mentor training (August 2015)
Year Two 2015-16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administering of the placement tests to identify initial pilot groups (August 2015) • New strategies for testing and placement implemented • Placement of paired groups for pilot (Fall 2015) • Faculty Development Workshop – "Creating a Culture of Shared Learning." (October 2015) • Placement of students in pilot groups (Fall 2015) • Campus-wide contextual learning event. In collaboration with Office of Student Affairs, all students will take part in a week-long focus on service. Each academic division will identify the specific area of service to be highlighted and addressed (February 2016) • Assessment of modifications in testing and placement protocol. (May 2016) • End of Year assessment of Math skills and knowledge of real-world Math concepts of first year students (April 2016) • Assessment of impact of contextual learning on academic performance in the pilot groups (June 2016) • Training the student mentor for peer leadership (Summer 2016) • Faculty identified for Math courses in the next year (Summer 2016) • Assessment of faculty, counselor and student mentor training (August 2016)
Year Three 2016-17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full implementation of modifications in testing and placement (Fall 2016) • Placement of students in Math courses (Fall 2016) • Placement of all first year students in learning communities (Fall 2016) based on theme • Faculty Development Workshop – "Expanding Math Concepts through Course Pairing." (October 2016) • Campus-wide contextual learning event. (February 2017) • End of Year assessment of Math skills and knowledge of real-world Math concepts of first year students (April 2017) • Assessment of modifications in testing and placement protocol. (May 2017)

Time	Task/Activity
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report of assessment of Math skills of first year students in all cohorts. (June 2017) • Report of assessment of knowledge of real-world Math experiences in all cohorts (June 2017) • Training the student mentors for peer leadership (Summer 2017) • Faculty identified for the paired courses for the Fall 2017 (Summer 2017) • Assessment of faculty, counselor and student mentor training (August 2017)
Year Four 2017-18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administering of the placement tests to identify paired course assignments. (Fall 2017) • Placement of students in Math courses and contextual learning communities (Fall 2017) • Faculty Development Workshop – “Emerging Think Tanks: Creating Faculty Learning Communities.” (October 2017) • Campus-wide contextual learning event. (February 2018) • End of Year assessment of Math skills and knowledge of real-world Math concepts of first year students (April 2018) • Report of assessment of Math skills of first year students in all cohorts. (June 2018) • Report of assessment of knowledge of real-world Math experiences in all cohorts (June 2018) • Training the student mentor for peer leadership (Summer 2018) • Faculty identified for the paired courses for the Fall 2018 (Summer 2018) • Assessment of faculty, counselor and student mentor training (August 2018)
Year Five 2018-19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administering of the placement tests to identify paired course assignments. (Fall 2018) • Placement of students in Math courses and contextual learning communities (Fall 2018) • Faculty Development Workshop – “Assessing Faculty Effectiveness in Total Student Success” (October 2018) • Campus-wide contextual learning event. (February 2019) • End of Year assessment of Math skills and knowledge of real-world Math experiences of first year students (April 2019) • Report of assessment of Math skills of first year students in all cohorts. (June 2019) • Report of assessment of knowledge of real-world Math experiences in all cohorts (June 2019) • External Evaluation • Creation and Reporting of the Five-Year Assessment Grid (July 2019) • Final Report of the Quality Enhancement Plan (August 2019)

VIII. Organization and Structure through First Year Experience Program

B-CATS² will be administered as part of the College's program designed to ensure first year students have the maximum opportunity to achieve academic success, persist to the next level of their academic studies and ultimately to complete their academic degree. FYEP collaborates with the Office of Student Affairs/Dean of Students, and faculty and staff who are part of the retention team to prepare for incoming freshman. Orientation activities include:

(a) One-Week Training of Orientation Workshop Leaders (OWLS) and Peer Advisors

(b) Orientation Week (Early Arrival of First Year Students) –

- Check In
- Rites of Passage
- First Year Student Workshops
- Orientation to Freshman Seminar
- Parents Seminar
- Parent Dinner

These activities transition the first year students into the initial testing and placement process that formally begins at the start of the academic year. Thus, the full college community mobilizes to prepare for the incoming freshman class.

First Year Experience Program

All first year students enter Rust College through the First Year Experience Program (FYEP). The purpose of the FYEP is to provide a quality program of general education and general support for first year students who are at different levels of ability and academic preparation.

The FYEP offers Rust students academic learning experiences that prepare them for successful undergraduate careers culminate in the baccalaureate degree. All first year students must complete a minimum number of core requirements in the humanities, natural sciences, and social science areas.

The Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) examination is used to conduct initial assessment of students' academic skills in writing, reading and mathematics. Students may be exempted from taking the TABE test in those areas if they have a minimum 2.7 GPA from high school and a minimum 16 ACT score.

Rust College's remedial education program is referred to as the Academic Skills Program (ASP), which consists of a set of courses designed to help students prepare for mathematics, writing and reading on the college level. Assignment to ASP courses (Basic MAT Math 121, ENG Basic Writing 121 and REA Basic Reading 121) is based on results from the TABE pre-test administered upon admission. Students are required to attend all ASP classes, labs and tutorial sessions.

All first year students are assigned to a FYEP counselor whose responsibility is to assist each student at every step of the academic process. First Year Experience counselors advise students during registration and course enrollment, interact with instructors to assist in monitoring students' performance in class, teach the Freshman Orientation course (Freshman Seminar) and serve generally as guides for the students throughout the first year. The following is an example of activities that inform the quality of interaction between FYEP counselors and first year students.

- Freshman Orientation Week
- Rites of Passage
- Assisting with TABE Testing
- Registration and General Education Course Scheduling
- Teaching Freshman Orientation Courses (ORT 111 and ORT 112)
- Monitoring instructor data in Grades First
- Inputting summary data on student activities into Grades First
- Scheduling counseling sessions with advisees
- Communicating with instructors about student performance and behavior
- Interacting with parents

The College uses GradesFirst, a computer-based early warning system to track first year students' absences, tardiness, and completion of assignments in general education on a daily basis. When students fall short in these areas, the system flags them and alerts FYEP counselors of the students' status. The system allows counselors to communicate with students via email or texting to schedule counseling sessions. In severe situations, FYEP counselors will contact parents or guardians of students who have signed FERPA forms, giving the College permission to discuss with them their child's academic performance.

First Year Experience/Freshman Orientation Objectives

In accordance with the mission of the College, that is, “...*teaching with a well-rounded program designed to acquaint students with cultural, moral, and spiritual values, both in theory and in practice,*” the objectives of the First Year Experience Program and its orientation process is to:

1. Instill in first year students a connection with and knowledge of the history of Rust College, the alma mater, the College’s mission and purpose;
2. Introduce first year students to resources that assist them in funding their higher education;
3. Provide first year students access to and knowledge of resources within the College that help them to achieve their personal and academic goals;
4. Help first year students develop the ability to outline the steps involved in applying for financial aid, managing student loan funds, and becoming responsible student loan borrowers;
5. Prepare and provide testing and accurate placement of first year students who need developmental assistance in order to persist through the College curriculum;
6. Assess and monitor first year student progress and offer experiences designed to address student needs throughout the academic year.

B-CATS² Organizational Chart

The organizational structure of the QEP shows key personnel with responsibility for oversight and day-to-day operation. The structure reflects existing support units that are already part of the college’s organizational structure and are also integrated aspects of the QEP.

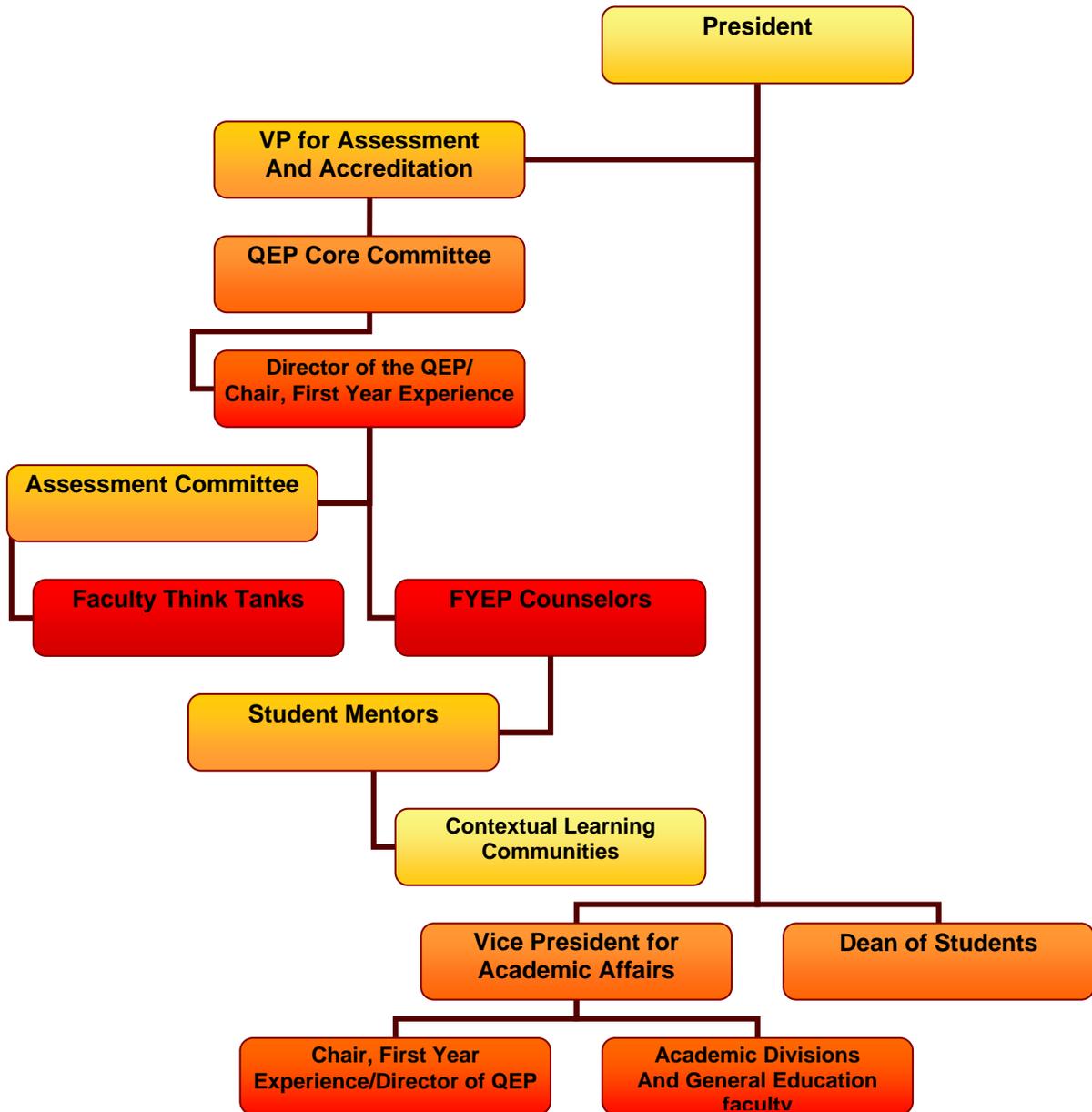


Table 10. Description of Personnel and Responsibilities for B-CATS²

QEP Role	Responsibilities
<p>Director</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manages the Quality Enhancement Plan • Directs all activities of persons working on the plan • Creates opportunities for faculty development and counselor and student mentor training • Provides advice and support to VP of Academic Affairs on matters such as pairing of courses and assignment of instructors for paired courses

QEP Role	Responsibilities
Faculty Think Tanks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consist of one Math faculty person and other faculty members at large • Collaborate with First Year Counselors to create the activities of the learning communities • Build study modules into Math courses centered on the activities of the learning communities • Engage in ongoing assessment of Math student outcomes associated with the activities of the learning communities
Counselors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement the activities of the learning communities • Collaborate with faculty think tanks to create the activities of the learning communities
Student Mentors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Model positive behavior for first year students • Provide support to counselors in implementing the activities of the learning communities • Assist faculty think tanks as needed

Table 11: Roles and Impact of B-CATS² for the College Community

Segment of the College Community	Roles	Impact
Faculty and Staff at Large	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage in ongoing faculty and staff development activities designed to foster positive better relationships with students • Help facilitate the future creation of faculty wide think tanks, leading to future faculty learning communities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding of student issues and improved communication with student • More collegial, cohesive relationship with fellow faculty members
Student Population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supports student mentors in their leadership roles • Serves as positive role models for first year students • Serves as participants in the annual campus wide contextual learning events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student culture essential for learning • Strong campus wide commitment to the values of contextual learning
College Administration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensures sufficient financial and logistical support for the QEP • Ensures adequate release time for QEP personnel • Fosters partnerships with the community resulting in positive outcomes for the QEP 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective operation of the QEP • Engaged and energized faculty, staff and students who are confident of administrative support • A receptive, supportive community at large.
Outside Stakeholders (city, county citizens and agencies at large, alumni and friends of the college)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foster an environment for the contextual learning communities to engage and learn beyond the physical structure of the institution. • Provide access to students to acquire real-world Math experiences. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive attitudes about the college in general • A sense of involvement and connectedness with the goals and mission of the institution • Stronger interaction with students and understanding of their goals and concerns

IX. Budget for B-CATS²

The budget (Table 12) for B-CATS² is designed to provide direct and indirect support for all phases of the implementation of the Quality Enhancement Plan. The budget addresses salaries and benefits for personnel directly involved in the day-to-day operation of the Plan. It also addresses administrative support, including office supplies, computers and software. The budget supports travel of QEP staff, as well as that associated with the activities of the contextual learning environment. Expenses for consultants invited for professional development leadership are addressed.

Table 12. Budget for the Quality Enhancement Plan

Budget Category	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
PERSONNEL	2014-15 (half year)	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19
QEP/FYEP Director Salary and Benefits (base \$60,000+.21) 2% annual increase	36,300	74,052	75,533	77,044	78,585
Administrative Support (base 25,000+.21) 2% annual increase	15,125	25,500	26,010	26,530	27,061
Student Mentors 15@\$100/month/9-months	13,500	13,500	13,500	13,500	13,500
Total PERSONNEL	64,925	113,052	115,043	117,074	119,146
OTHER BUDGETARY EXPENSES					
Faculty Development/Student Mentor Training	10000	12500	12500	10000	10000
Computers/Software	30,000	0	15,000	0	15,000
Assessment/Testing	5,000	7,500	7,500	7,500	7,500
Office supplies	2,500	2,500	2,500	2,500	2,500
Printing	300	600	650	700	750
Staff Travel	2000	2500	2500	3000	2000
Student Travel	1000	1000	1000	1000	1000
Consultants Fees	2500	2500	2500	2500	2500
Consultants Travel	2000	2000	2000	2000	2000
Promotion and Media	1250	1500	900	800	850
Learning Communities Support	1250	1250	1250	1250	1250
TOTAL BUDGET	122,725	146,902	163,343	148,324	164,496

X. Assessment Plan

A QEP Assessment Committee will be established to perform assessments associated with the goals of the QEP. The Assessment Committee will consist of faculty and staff experienced in curricula and program assessment on the instructional and institutional levels. The work of the Assessment Committee will be under the leadership of the Director of the QEP. There will be two levels of assessment: (1) assessment to support the overall goal of B-CATS² and (2) assessment of the student learning outcomes of B-CATS².

Setting Benchmarks for the Student Learning Outcomes

QEP SLO 1: First year students will be able to increase basic math skills through contextual learning communities.

First year students who complete the basic math skills course within the contextual learning community will be able to perform operations on sets; the basic principles of logic; solve basic algebraic problems; and represent math information using appropriate technology.

Rationale for benchmark: This B-CATS² Plan has reported that 60-65% of all incoming first year students annually are placed in developmental courses. Thus, on average, only 35% to 40% of first year students are exempted from developmental placement. The most recent data show that 91% of students in the incoming 2012 freshman class were placed in Basic Math (developmental Math). This means that in that year, only 9% of first year students were exempted from developmental Math.

The percentage of first year students passing the Praxis I freshman assessment in Math ranged from 18% to 28% between 2011 and 2013. These percentages are significantly low. Yet, the percentage of first year students passing developmental as well as general education courses in the 2012-2013 academic year on average is 75%. Math skills performance of first year students on the external Praxis I assessment is unacceptable. It is reasonable to expect, therefore, that a benchmark for the assessment of math skills of first year students under SLO 1 is one that would see first year students perform math skills on the Praxis I assessment on a level consistent with performance in developmental and general education courses. Thus, the benchmark for SLO 1 is 75% of all first year students will perform at a passing level of "C" or 70% or above in general

education and basic skills courses?, as well as the Praxis I freshman assessment test in Math.

QEP SLO 2: First year students who complete the basic math skills course within the contextual learning community will be able to describe/explain math concepts using examples from the real world.

First year students will show knowledge of math experiences expressed in the real world through specialized activities consistent with a contextual learning community theme and creation of instructional modules around those activities and experiences emphasizing math as a context.

The percentage of first year students passing the Praxis I freshman assessment in Math ranged from 18% to 28% between 2011 and 2013—significantly low. Yet, the percentage of first year students passing developmental as well as general education courses in the 2012-2013 academic year on average is 75%. It is reasonable to expect, therefore, that a benchmark for the assessment of the ability of first year students to describe/explain real-world Math experiences under SLO 2 is one that would see first year students perform on the assessment of such knowledge on a level consistent with performance in developmental and general education courses. Thus, the benchmark for SLO 2 is 75% of all first year students will perform at a passing level of “C” or 70% or above in assessment of knowledge of real-world Math concepts in Math instruction.

Table 12 shows the QEP goal, learning outcomes, metrics for the outcomes and benchmarks

Table 12. QEP Goal, Learning Outcomes, Metrics and Benchmarks

QEP Goal	Student Learning Outcomes	Metrics	Benchmark
<p><i>To improve first year student academic performance in Math through contextual learning communities.</i></p>	<p><i>I. First year students will be able to demonstrate an increase in basic math skills through contextual learning communities.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to perform operations on sets. • Knowledge of the basic principles of logic. • Ability to solve basic algebraic problems. • Ability to represent mathematical information using appropriate technology <p><i>Assessment tools:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Post-TABE test</i> • <i>Post-ACCUPLACER test</i> • <i>Gen Ed Math assessment</i> • <i>Praxis I</i> 	<p>75% of all first year students will perform at a passing level of “C” or 70% or above in general education and basic skills courses, as well as the Praxis I freshman assessment test in Math.</p>
	<p><i>II. First year students who complete the basic math skills course within the contextual learning community will be able to describe/explain math concepts using examples from the real world.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Ability to describe/explain real-world math concepts as experienced in the contextual learning environment.</i> <p><i>Assessment tools:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Rubrics for exams/tests administered in first year Math courses.</i> 	<p>75% of all first year students will perform at a passing level of “C” or 70% or above in assessment of ability to describe/explain real-world Math concepts in Math instruction.</p>

QEP Goal: To improve first year student academic performance in Math through contextual learning communities.

ASSESSMENT TO SUPPORT THE GOAL

Assessment of Placement Tests

Currently, all first year students scoring below 16 on the ACT and whose high school GPA is below 2.7 are required to take the TABE test for placement in Math. These are

“Non-Exempt” students. Those scoring 16 and above on the ACT and whose high school GPA is 2.7 and higher are exempted from placement testing. B-CATS² calls for administering only the “Advanced” portion of the TABE. Students not passing the “Advanced” test will be assigned to Basic Math. In year one of the Plan, half of the students tested will be administered the ACCUPLACER test, and half administered the TABE. Both tests evaluate students’ basic skills in Math, among other skills. Students will be placed in developmental and regular general education courses based on the results of both tests. Assessment of student performance in first year courses will occur each semester with a composite score at the end of Year One. Statistical differences in student scores from the TABE group and the ACCUPLACER group will be determined by using comparative data from test scores and performances in Math courses to determine which is the best predictor for student placement in Math.

Assessment Method for Placement Tests

Assessment Method	Responsibility	Group(s)	Beginning Cycle	Ending Cycle	Base Line
TABE (Advanced)	First Year Counselors	Control	Fall - Year One	End of Year One	Non-exempted status
ACCUPLACER	First Year Counselors	Experimental	Fall Year One	End of Year One	Non-exempted status

Assessment of Testing Environment

There are currently two settings in which first year students are administered tests. First year students not exempted from developmental testing are required to write an essay, usually done on the evening on the second day of new student orientation. First year students then are administered the placement test on the third day of new student orientation, usually 8 a.m. through noon. The students are separated into groups and tested in different class rooms. Some classrooms may be at temperatures warmer or cooler than others. Some accommodations, such as desks and distance to restrooms also may be different. To assess the testing environment, a short post-placement-test survey will be administered to assess student attitudes on the variables: (a) scheduling of tests, (b) adequacy of space for testing, (c) adequacy of time for testing (d) need for snacks/breaks.

Assessment Method for Testing Environment

Assessment Method	Responsibility	Group(s)	Beginning Cycle	Ending Cycle	Base Line
Post-placement test survey. <u>Variables:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scheduling • Space adequacy • Time adequacy • Snacks/breaks 	First Year Counselors	All First Year Students	Fall – Year One	Fall – Year One	Completion of Placement Testing – Year One

Assessment of Pedagogy and Basic Skills Lab in Developmental Courses

Assessment of the consistency of instruction in developmental courses will be conducted by the QEP Director and based on the following variables.

- (a) Extent to which developmental faculty collaborate on course content [number of meetings and number of General Education faculty in attendance]
- (b) Level of Consistency of syllabi in developmental courses [based on rubric]
- (c) Level of Consistency in student assignments and skills modules taught [based on number and percentage of total potential assignments and skills modules]
- (d) Extent of student utilization of Basic Skills lab [based on lab use reported in percentages.]

Assessment Method for Pedagogy and Basic Skills Lab Use

Assessment Method	Responsibility	Group(s)	Beginning Cycle	Ending Cycle	Base Line
Faculty participation in Basic Skills meetings	QEP Director and Assessment Committee	Basic Reading, Writing and Science instructors	Fall – Year One	End of Year One	Fall Year One Pre-Conference
Consistency of syllabi [Rubric]	QEP Director and Assessment Committee	Basic Reading, Writing and Science instructors	Fall – Year One	End of Year One	Common Syllabi
Assignments Instructional Modules [number of assignments and modules]	QEP Director And Assessment Committee	Basic Reading, Writing and Science instructors	Fall-Year One	End of Year One	Fall Year One Pre-Plan numbers of assignments and modules.
Percentage of utilization of skills lab	QEP Director and Assessment Committee	Basic Reading, Writing and Science first year students	Fall – Year One	End of Year One	Pre-Plan Use percentage

ASSESSMENT OF THE STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

QEP SLO 1: First year students will be able to demonstrate an increase in basic math skills through contextual learning communities.

Assessment of Math Skills

In year two of the Plan pilot groups will be formed in order to create baseline data for implementing the contextual learning communities. Students not exempted from developmental testing and assigned to Basic Math will also enroll in a General Education Math course. While enrolled in the two courses, the student will have a second opportunity to score high enough on the placement exam, allowing the student to qualify for enrollment only in the General Education Math course, having met standards for Basic Math.

Two study groups will be formed. Both will consist of students enrolled in Basic Math as well as students enrolled in a General Education Math course. However, the control group in Year Two will not be exposed to the contextual learning environment.

A second, experimental group, consisting of both MAT Basic Math 121 students as well as students enrolled in a General Education Math course will form the pilot contextual learning community and will be exposed to the experiences and skill development associated with contextual learning. Beyond Year Two, students will have the opportunity to re-test during the module enabling them to drop the Basic Math course. As reported earlier, the following are specific Math skills assessed:

- Ability to perform operations on sets.
- Knowledge of the basic principles of logic.
- Ability to solve basic algebraic problems.
- Ability to represent mathematical information using appropriate technology

Assessment tools are:

- Post-TABE test
- Post-ACCUPLACER test
- Gen Ed Math assignments [rubrics]
- Praxis I

Assessment Methods for Skills Proficiencies

Assessment Method	Responsibility	Group(s)	Beginning Cycle	Ending Cycle	Base Line
Final Grades: Pilot Math assignments [rubrics]	Math Instructors	First Year Math students - Pilot [Control-No Contextual Learning Community]	Annual – Beginning Year Two	End of Modules	Pilot data
Final Grades: Pilot Math assignments [rubrics]	Math Instructors	First Year Math students - Pilot [Experimental-Contextual Learning Community]	Annual – Beginning Year Two	End of Modules	Pilot data
Post-TABE Test	First Year Counselors	All Pilot Groups (If TABE selected)	Year Two (and potentially annually)	End of Year One	TABE Test placement score
Post-ACCUPLACER Test	First Year Counselors	All Pilot Groups (If ACCUPLACER selected)	Year Two (and potentially annually)	End of Year One	ACCUPLACER placement score
Praxis I	First Year Counselors	All Pilot Groups	Annual – Beginning Year One	End of Year	First Year status

QEP SLO 2: First year students who complete the basic math skills course within the contextual learning community will be able to describe/explain math concepts using examples from the real world.

Assessment of SLO 2 will be reflected in students’ ability to describe/explain math concepts using examples from the real world Math experiences through contextual learning communities. Assessment will occur in exams administered in general education courses based on rubrics.

Method of Assessing Student Knowledge of real-world Math experiences

Assessment Method	Responsibility	Group(s)	Beginning Cycle	Ending Cycle	Base Line
Rubrics for exams/tests administered in first year Math courses.	General Education Faculty	All cohorts	Annually	End of Year	End of Year Two

TRACKING ASSESSMENT OF THE OVERALL QEP

B-CATS² requires annual assessments of each component of the plan, culminating with a five-year assessment at the completion of the QEP.

Assessment Method for the Overall QEP

Year	Assessments	Responsibility	Baseline	Benchmark for Action	Action
2015	Testing and Placement Process.	Assessment Committee/ Director of the QEP	TABE Existing process for testing and placement.	Significant difference in TABE and ACCU-PLACER results. Results of student surveys assessing scheduling, space and time adequacy, and need for snacks/ breaks	Selection of either the TABE or ACCU-PLACER for testing Modifications designed to strengthen testing and placement.
2016 SLO1 SLO2	1. Modifications in testing and placement protocol. 2. Math skills and knowledge of real-world Math concepts of first year students 3. Faculty, counselor and student mentor training	1. Assessment Committee/Director of the QEP 2. Math faculty 3. Assessment Committee/Director of the QEP	1. Assessment results from Year One 2. Beginning Year Two	1. Consistency in testing results from Year One modifications. 2. 75% of all first year students perform at a passing level of "C" or 70% or above on Math skills rubric and rubric for knowledge of real world Math concepts.	Maintain or modify protocol for testing and placement. Make adjustments in contextual learning activities related to skills development and real-world Math concepts.
2017 SLO1 SLO2	1. Modifications in testing and placement protocol. 2. Math skills and knowledge of real-world Math concepts of first year students 3. Faculty, counselor and student mentor	1. Assessment Committee/Director of the QEP 2. Math faculty 3. Assessment Committee/Director of the QEP	1. Assessment results from Year Two 2. Beginning Year Three	1. Consistency in testing results from Year One modifications. 2. 75% of all first year students perform at a passing level of "C" or 70% or above on Math skills rubric and rubric for knowledge of	Maintain or modify protocol for testing and placement. Make adjustments in contextual learning activities related to skills development and real-

Year	Assessments	Responsibility	Baseline	Benchmark for Action	Action
	training			real world Math concepts.	world Math concepts.
2018	1. Modifications in testing and placement protocol. 2. Math skills and knowledge of real-world Math concepts of first year students 3. Faculty, counselor and student mentor training	1. Assessment Committee/Director of the QEP 2. Math faculty 3. Assessment Committee/Director of the QEP	1. Assessment results from Year Three 2. Beginning Year Four	1. Consistency in testing results from Year One modifications. 2. 75% of all first year students perform at a passing level of "C" or 70% or above on Rubric Math skills rubric and rubric for knowledge of real world Math concepts.	Maintain or modify protocol for testing and placement. Make adjustments in contextual learning activities related to skills development and real-world Math concepts.
2019	1. Modifications in testing and placement protocol. 2. Math skills and knowledge of real-world Math concepts of first year students 3. Faculty, counselor and student mentor training	1. Assessment Committee/Director of the QEP 2. Math faculty 3. Assessment Committee/Director of the QEP	1. Assessment results from Year Four 2. Beginning Year Five	1. Consistency in testing results from Year One modifications. 2. 75% of all first year students perform at a passing level of "C" or 70% or above on Rubric Math skills rubric and rubric for knowledge of real world Math concepts.	Inform final Report of the QEP Inform final Report of the QEP
QEP Goal: <i>To improve first year student academic performance in Math through contextual learning communities</i> SLO1	1. Annual assessments of testing and placement protocol 2. Annual assessment of Math skills development	Assessment Committee/Director of the QEP	Pre-QEP	Average of annual results with benchmark of 75% of all first year students performing at a passing level of	Final Report of the QEP indicating whether the goal of the QEP was met.

Year	Assessments	Responsibility	Baseline	Benchmark for Action	Action
SLO2	3. Annual assessment of knowledge of math concepts in the contextual learning community.			"C" or 70% or above on rubric for Math skills and rubric for knowledge of real world Math concepts.	

IMPACT MODEL OF B-CATS²



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XII. Appendices

Appendix A:

Faculty and Staff Attitudinal Survey (August 9, 2012)

QEP Topic: 'Creating Learning Communities that Strengthen the Academic Performance of First-Year Students'

At the Pre-Planning Conference held on campus, August 9-10, 2012, 102 college professionals (staff and faculty) were asked to respond to a survey designed to assess their attitudes on the meaning of learning communities, the feasibility of implementing learning communities within a college-wide setting, and their level of commitment to the idea of making learning communities part of the college's formula for academic success. Generally, the findings were as follows.

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements by circling 1 through 5, where 1=strongly disagree; 2=disagree; 3=neutral; 4=agree and 5=strongly agree.

1. A learning community groups students as cohorts or partners and provides them structured, uniform curricular and co-curricular experiences with the goal of achieving positive learning outcomes.
85% agreed or strongly agreed
2. At Rust College, we should be able to create learning communities around a range of subject matter, programs or disciplines.
90% agreed or strongly agreed
3. First-year students who study together and have shared goals and academic experiences can demonstrate improved basic learning skills.
91% agreed or strongly agreed
4. Student mentors, faculty advisors, instructors, administrators and staff can be important contributors to an effective first-year learning community.
93 % agreed or strongly agreed
5. I'm not sure I am motivated enough to help fist-year learning communities at Rust College be successful.
71% strongly disagreed or disagreed
6. The only reason I would support first-year learning communities for improved academic performance of freshmen is because of SACS reaffirmation of accreditation.
74% strongly disagree or disagreed
7. For me, better academic performance by first-year students should mean they should transfer to their major programs more easily.
80% agreed or strongly agreed.
8. As an employee at Rust College, my personal input into the success of learning communities that strengthen academic performance is key.
85% agreed or strongly agreed
9. General Education courses and all programs for first-year students can be restructured to ensure the success of first-year learning communities at Rust College.
79% agreed or strongly agreed.

Appendix B.

Open Student QEP Survey 1

In February of 2013, 203 students responded to a campus wide survey assessing attitudes about learning communities and first year success. The following is a summary of the responses (represented by percentages).

On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1=strongly disagree and 5=strongly agree, check answers for the following.

1. Students do well in the first year if they take classes, study and do activities with other students they see and talk to every day.
82% agreed or strongly agreed
2. If I am part of a group that studies and learns together, I have a better chance of passing my courses.
86% agreed or strongly agreed
3. Freshmen students can do better in their courses when they include outside class activities and events.
79% agreed or strongly agreed
4. A learning community has students studying and learning together with similar academic goals and interests.
90% agreed or strongly agreed
5. Faculty, staff and students can work together to help freshmen students have academic success.
90% agreed or strongly agreed

Appendix C.

Professional Development Morning
Dr. Paul Lampley, Vice President of Academic Affairs
 March 20, 2013 at 8:30 a.m.
 Quality Enhancement Plan Focus Groups
Quality Enhancement Plan Core Committee Members
 Dr. Kenneth Jones, Chair, First Year Experience
 Dr. Marco Robinson-Division of Social Science
 Dr. Sharron Sarthou – Division of Humanities
 Dr. Rhonda Kuykindoll-Division of Math and Science
 Mrs. Shelley Jackson- Retention Coordinator
 Mrs. Chiquita Walls-Director of Student Support Services
 Mrs. Martha Stovall-Division of Education
 Mr. Alfred Worthy – Division of Business
 Mr. Chase Carr- Student Government Association

Focus Group Assignments

| Group Leader |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Dr. Hilda Williams | Dr. James Herod | Dr. Alisea McLeod | Mr. Micheal McCoy | Dr. Gemma Beckley | Dr. Helen Oliver |
| <u>GROUP 1</u>
Room | <u>GROUP 2</u>
Room | <u>GROUP 3</u>
Room | <u>GROUP 4</u>
Room | <u>GROUP 5</u>
Room | <u>GROUP 6</u>
Room |
| Dr. A.J Stovall | Dr. Chung | Dr. Charles Williams | Mr. John House | Dr. William Scott | Dr. San Wu Pan |
| Dr. Wonso Hayes | Ms. Debra Butler | Dr. Nellie Smith | Mr. Tim Rich | Mr. Chad Chilsom | Ms. Meghann Oglesby |
| Ms Dorothy Jones | Dr. Mian Ashraf | Dr. Frank Yeh | Dr. Norman Chapman | Mr. Zebedee Jones | Dr. Zahir Qureshi |
| Dr. Jiaquian Zhu | Mr. Rodney Stennis | Mr. Ebou Sowe | Ms. LaTanya Foreman | Mr. Sana Sise | Ms. Sharon Goodman-Hill |
| Dr. Mehdi Mohgbel | Dr. Leon Howard | Dr. Wai-Ying Chung | Mr. Maurice Weatherall | Mr. Alfred Worthy | Dr. V.T. Samuels |
| Dr. Debayo Moyo | Dr. Margaret Delashmit | Ms. Jacqueline Slater | Dr. Yao Fali Modey | Mr. Chandra Tummalaipalli | Dr. Sandra Vaughn |
| Dr. Sujata Sinha | Mrs. Ana Torres | Dr. Drustella Neely | Mrs. Chiquita Walls | Mr. Richard Frederick | Mr. Mark Ridge |
| Dr. Sharron Sarthou | Dr. Marco Robinson | Dr. Rhonda Kuykindoll | | Dr. Kenneth Jones | Mrs. Martha Stovall |
| | Mrs. Shelley Jackson | | | | |

Faculty Focus Group Topics and Questions

I. Course Pairing

- 1. What would be the impact of course pairing on the First Year Experience and the success of students?**
- 2. What might be the best ways to pair courses? (For example, linking competencies with content; competencies with competencies; basic skills instructor observes instruction in second linked course; team-taught courses, etc.)**
- 3. What courses could or should be paired to ensure academic success for Basic Skills and General Education students?**

II. Pre-Admissions Testing and Placement

- 1. Based on your knowledge of our process for testing and placement of new students for basic skills courses, how might pre-admissions testing be improved?**
- 2. Based on your knowledge, is the TABE test a reliable measurement for placement of students in the first year experience?**
- 3. How should/could the curriculum (course content) for Basic Skills be modified for first year Experience? Or, what *should* be included in the Basic Skills courses.**

III. Learning Communities

- 1. Discuss relevant topics for contextual learning communities as they have been discussed in connection with the work of the Quality Enhancement Committee. For example, communities center on issues such as:**
 - Obesity**
 - Drugs**
 - Teen pregnancy**
 - Other social/cultural/civic, etc. issues**
 -
- 2. How can the activities of learning communities be incorporated and measured as part of the General Education curriculum?**
- 3. How might learning communities improve the success of the academic performance of first year students? How might it be measured?**

IV. Role of counselors, advisors, and peer advisors in the context of learning communities.

- 1. What might the role be the role of first year counselors, faculty advisors, and student mentors in affecting positive outcomes of first year students in the context of learning communities?**
- 2. How do you see college staff, administrators, and members of the student body at-large contributing to the success of first-year student learning communities?**

V. Faculty Think Tanks

- 1. If faculty “think tanks” were asked to advise counselors who might lead learning communities, what ways might they carry out their roles in the success of first year students?**
- 2. What ways might the think tanks create meaningful activities for learning communities? Who should constitute the think tanks? How might faculty think tank time be effectively utilized?**
- 3. What curriculum modifications in first year courses could reflect outcomes related to activities of the learning communities?**

VI. Campus and Learning Environment Enhanced

- 1. How can learning communities stimulate positive interaction between first year students and faculty on campus?**
- 2. What campus events and activities might be added to our schedule of activities that could make campus life more energetic and appealing?**
- 3. What professional development opportunities might emerge to help faculty and first year students have like-minded goals?**

Summary of faculty development morning focus groups

To gain support and facilitate an understanding of the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) the QEP Committee engaged the faculty at Rust College in six focus group sessions. This was conducted during a Professional Development Morning Workshop that allowed the QEP Committee to disseminate information about the QEP, explain Student Learning Outcomes for the Plan, and engage the faculty in the process. The following information is a brief report of the six groups' input and suggestions.

Focus Groups Suggestions

Group I – Topic for this Focus Group was **Course Pairing** the group expressed three main concerns to improve student progress. There were three main points suggested to improve the First Year Experience for students.

- Consistency in linking courses.
- Collaboration of instructors to present subject matter for both courses.

- Cooperation from students and instructors for materials presented.

Group II- topic for this Focus Group was **Testing and Placement** and the reliability of the TABE test. The general consensus of the group was that the TABE test is a reliable test, however they did provide suggestions.

- Administer tests on separate days
- Rearrange scheduling of the test.
- TABE test should be computerized

Group III – topic for this Focus Group was the **Learning Communities**. The groups included service learning topics; obesity, literacy, high school drop out rates, and incarceration. Contextual learning and community service could increase the level of engagement for students.

- Learning community service
- Reading assignments to increase engagement “The New Jim Crow”
- Linking courses Composition –Introduction to Social Science/African Diaspora
- Campus wide Reading

Group IV- Topic for this focus Group was **Interaction between Professors and the FYE** personnel. The group only presented two suggestions for this topic—being very consistent with the language (terminology). If you make a suggestion in one document and give it a name, then don’t mention the same concept in another document and give it another name. The second suggestion was in reference to freshmen advisors. The lines of demarcation should be drawn for separation of their power. For example, if a student needs an excuse from class, it is only the Instructor/Professor that can issue the formal excuse.

Group V- The topic for this Focus Group was **Think Tanks and the Learning Communities**. The group consensus was that the definition of learning communities should be definitive and then related to the concept of a think tank. Moreover, there could be several think tanks on the micro-level and then incorporated into a larger model. Furthermore, the models could initiate on the divisional level connecting the pedagogy and move to the larger college curriculum. The concept of learning communities could be cultural and quantitative and should be clarified.

Group VI- topic for this Focus Group was **Campus and Learning Environment Enhanced**. The groups suggested that we review the mission of the College; second to consider the type of student faculty envisioned; and third, what are students learning and what are you teaching?

- Teaching Research and Community Service
- Pairing Courses
- Division Professional Week
- Honor Housing (dorm)
- Define our Students
- Faculty Seminars

Group I	Group II	Group III	Group IV	Group V	Group VI
consistency	Pre-admission	Contextual learning – mentoring program	Consistent language	Inter-connection of teaching	Teaching Research Community service
collaboration	Summer testing	Engagement of students in social issues	Freshman advisors are not Instructors	Develop a model – Division current events	British Model
cooperation	TABE – reliable	Literary-reading		Learning communities-cultural and quantitative	Pairing courses
	Computerized testing	Community involvement		Requirements	Seminars
	Common syllabus	Linking courses			Honor Housing

QEP Student Survey Tabulations And Findings

Total Number of Respondents: 180

Respondent's Classification Breakdown

Senior	Junior	Sophomore	Freshman
20 (11%)	30 (17%)	40 (22%)	90 (50%)

Enrollment Status

Fulltime	Part time
179 (99.4%)	1 (.6%)

Type of Learning Experience Preference

Independent	Group	In Class
101 (56%)	40 (22.2%)	39 (21.8%)

Level of Performance in Group Learning Situations

Well	Average	Failed
100 (55.5%)	60 (33.3%)	20 (11.2%)

Importance of group collaboration and relationship with peers in learning:

Very Important	Important	Not Important
30 (16.7%)	100 (55.5%)	50 (27.8%)

Majors and State of Residence

Major	State
Mass Communications	39 (21.6%) Mississippi 110 (61.1%)
Political Science	15 (8.3%) Tennessee 25 (13.9%)
Social Work	15 (8.3%) Illinois 30 (16.7%)

Major		State	
Business related	5 (2.8%)	Arkansas	5 (2.8%)
English	5 (2.8%)	Georgia	5 (2.8%)
Education	10 (5.6%)	Washington	1 (.5)
Music	1 (.5%)	California	2 (1%)
Science related	30 (16.7%)	New York	1 (.5%)
Undecided	60 (33.4%)	New Jersey	1 (.5%)

Freshman Year Experience

Experiences	Positive	Negative
	115 (64%)	65 (36%)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advisors were available and willing to help 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Instructors were not willing to go above and beyond to help in and outside of the class.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Instructors were understanding and helped them work through difficulties 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Academic programs (major) were not available
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The first experience staff was significant in helping with their transition to college 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not enough academic related programming or activities

Advising Experiences

Experiences	Positive	Negative
	85 (47.2%)	95 (52.8%)

Why do students leave Rust? (In order of reasons why)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disciplinary problems Lack of programs in which to major Family problems Academic probation Bad advising Lack of student activities Dormitories and campus amenities Food services Lack of available computer labs and printing services
--

Summary of Results

At least 20% of the student body responded to the Quality Enhancement Plan Student Survey. The majority of the respondents were freshmen students who were taking general education courses. Ninety nine percent of the persons surveyed were full-time students. The majority of students reported that they preferred independent learning more than group or in-class instruction. Somewhat below half of the students reported they excelled in group learning situations. Over half the students reported that group collaboration and peer relationships were important to them. A majority of the respondents are from the state of Mississippi and had not decided on a major. Over half the students reported they had a positive experience as a freshman at Rust College but had negative advising experiences. The majority of the respondents reported they were prepared for college work but a large number did not feel their courses prepared them for the others. Finally, the top three reported reasons for students leaving Rust College were academic probation, disciplinary problems, and dormitories/amenities.