QEP and Collaborative Learning FAQ’s

What is a Quality Enhancement Plan?

The Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) is a five-year plan of action related to “enhancing student learning and/or the environment supporting student learning and accomplishing the mission of the institution. The plan launches a process that can move the institution into a future characterized by creative, engaging, and meaningful learning experiences for students.” (SACSCOC Handbook, 2011 edition, p.39-40).

How did we select Collaborative Learning as the Quality Enhancement Plan for UAH?

Our QEP was developed during the past year and one-half by a committee of faculty and staff who sought substantial input from current and former students. Through surveys, focus groups, and collaborative problem solving sessions, our QEP committee sought to understand why students leave UAH. During a focus group with students, one student captured the essence of the problem by saying, “You can’t do UAH alone.” Our QEP committee recognized this statement as both an insightful statement and a plea.

Successful UAH students told the QEP committee that they felt connections with other students helped them succeed. They stated that they need to study with other students to understand the material fully and to have the support system to help them when the “going gets tough”. Students who almost left UAH said they felt alone and prior to making a connection with other students did not think they would stay.

Why Collaborative Learning?

Students tell us that “You can’t do UAH alone.” Successful UAH students told the QEP committee that they felt connections with other students helped them succeed. They stated that they need to study with other students to understand the material fully and to have the support system to help them when the “going gets tough”. Students who almost left UAH said they felt alone and prior to making a connection with other students did not think they would stay.

Collaborative learning works because it

- Increases student engagement in the classroom.
- Enhances creativity, cooperation, inquiry-based learning, and understanding.
- Connects students to each other and to UAH through academics, replacing isolated students with collaborative learners.

What is Collaborative Learning?

Collaborative learning at UAH entails *UAH students and faculty working together to explore options and create solutions in pursuit of knowledge*. The Principles of Collaborative Learning are

1. **Egalitarian**: everyone contributes bringing different knowledge, perspectives, and skills to the collaboration.
2. **Discursive**: requires interaction and communication, exposing students to new ideas and creating connections.
3. **Inquiry:** encourages students to ask questions and to consider multiple approaches to problem solving.

**What are the goals of the QEP and Collaborative Learning?**

The Goals of the QEP are
1. Instruct students on the principles of Collaborative Learning.
2. Teach students how to collaborate through applications in their classes.
3. Encourage students to value and appreciate collaboration.
4. Improve student learning through Collaborative Learning.
5. Make Collaborative Learning a central feature of UAH's educational aims and academic culture.

**What are Student Learning Outcomes?**

A student learning outcome (SLO) in the context of the QEP is described as “a statement that describes what students will be able to do as a result of the implementation of the QEP” (SACSCOC Handbook, p. 44). In our Collaborative Learning initiative, we identify four dimensions to our SLOs: the knowledge, skills, abilities, and perspectives that students acquire and can demonstrate after they have completed Collaborative Learning courses." The SLOs expected to improve over the five year implementation of the QEP are:

- **SLO #1: Recognize:** UAH students know and can differentiate the principles of Collaborative Learning.
- **SLO #2: Apply:** UAH students collaborate effectively.
- **SLO #3: Value:** UAH students recognize the merit of Collaborative Learning.
- **SLO #4: Enhance:** UAH students having had Collaborative Learning courses will demonstrate evidence of better generalized learning.

**What are Learning Environment Outcomes?**

Learning environment outcomes (LEOs) indicate the degree to which the institution is allocating sufficient energy and resources to the QEP to meet the SLOs, and whether the CLC (Collaborative Learning Center) is implementing the QEP as planned. In other words, when combined with the assessment of the SLOs, assessment of these LEOs will ensure that the QEP is meeting its goals. The LEOs to be pursued are:

- **LEO #1:** The number of faculty and staff who complete the Collaborative Learning development program will increase annually.
- **LEO #2:** The number of courses across the curriculum at all levels of instruction that engage students in Collaborative Learning activities will increase annually.
- **LEO #3:** The number of student PASS leaders, student mentors, and tutors completing the Collaborative Learning development program will increase annually.

**How will the QEP/Collaborative Learning be implemented?**

Our plan for quality enhancement includes detailed definitions and principles of Collaborative Learning and a fully developed path to implement Collaborative Learning in the classroom. This
plan includes the creation of an oversight committee called the Collaborative Learning Advisory Council (CLAC). The CLAC is chaired by Dr. Laurel Bollinger. In addition, a Collaborative Learning Center (CLC) will be created to serve as a resource for faculty, students, and staff. The CLC will be lead by Dr. Dan Rochowiak. This institutional structure will have responsibility for ensuring that our proposed implementation deadlines are met. In addition, the CLC and CLAC will also ensure that we carefully assess our students’ knowledge of Collaborative Learning principles, the extent to which Collaborative Learning improves learning across the campus, and the degree to which Collaborative Learning principles have been put into place across the curriculum and the University.

**Will I have to change the way I teach?**

No. Faculty are responsible for selecting the instructional approaches and pedagogy that they utilize in their courses, with the oversight of their program/department. Many faculty already utilize collaborative learning approaches in their classrooms. The QEP can offer you some resources to make what you are doing even better and will provide support for instructors who would like to use some of the collaborative learning-based approaches to teaching, but will neither mandate a specific methodology nor require anyone to adopt one of them. Faculty, as always, are encouraged to utilize the approaches that maximize student learning.