



Central Michigan University
Quality Initiative Institutional Proposal
Executive Summary

Higher Learning Commission Open Pathway

Promoting Academic Challenge: Taking Stock and Moving Forward

Central Michigan University will continue to engage the campus community in a conversation to assess our current efforts to promote academic quality and, building on past efforts, to move forward in developing innovative strategies for producing an academically challenging environment for all students throughout their entire undergraduate experience. Many faculty committee reports, including *Raising Academic Performance*, *Academic Standards*, and *Foundations of Excellence*, have outlined steps toward greater academic challenge. Another document titled *Shared Expectations* identified the expectations for students, faculty and the administration in the pursuit of academic excellence. Many students have expressed their desire for more challenging academics through their responses on the NSSE, end-of-semester Student Opinion Surveys, and elsewhere. Unfortunately, we have failed to consistently implement these recommendations. In addition, various campus units and committees have proposed and have implemented plans to improve key aspects of the undergraduate experience, such as general education, academic advising, student engagement, and the assessment of student learning. This quality initiative presents a framework for exploring and implementing further best practices that provide our students with the key academic tools for both productive careers and meaningful lives. It is now time to pull all of these initiatives, reports, and recommendations together into a cohesive strategic plan to advance academic excellence that includes greater focus on academic challenge across undergraduate education. It will allow us to recognize both where we have made advances and where we need to focus additional energy and resources. The purpose of this Quality Initiative is to build upon past efforts, utilize current research on best-practices, and engage in a campus conversation that will result in a plan to promote a challenging academic environment for our undergraduates.

The Provost and Vice Provost for Academic Affairs will provide administrative leadership for this Quality Initiative. A Core Team will include three faculty leaders, an Academic Senate Representative, the Director of the Faculty Center for Innovative Teaching, one Associate Dean, two students (one must be from the Student Government Association Academic Affairs Committee), and the Vice Provost for Academic Affairs. Dr. Debra Poole, Psychology, will lead the QI Core Team. Dr. Merlyn Mowery, Philosophy and Religion, and Dr. Mary Senter, Sociology, Anthropology, and Social Work, also have been very active in the Teaching and Learning Collective, implementing the annual speaker and workshop series and will provide leadership to this Quality Initiative. Other faculty will provide leadership as it matches their expertise and as time allows around their professional responsibilities. Every effort will be made to diversify the Core Team with representation from all colleges. Each academic college and the Global Campus will participate in implementing the recommendations of the Quality Initiative. The Provost has committed funding for reassigned time for the team leadership, the speaker series of the Teaching and Learning Collective, and faculty workshops. In addition, we will have support from University Communications and Institutional Technology. As appropriate, colleges might choose to fund specific activities with regard to program enhancement and development.

This is a three-year project beginning fall 2013 and continuing through the spring of 2016. The timeline that follows is proposed and will most likely change as we move through the process. This initial proposal will provide a starting point for broad campus discussion. We will use the first year of the Quality

Initiative (2013-2014) to build upon the progress we have made, review earlier documents, identify gaps, and determine next steps with faculty and student input. The benchmark to be achieved during the first year will be to identify one or two areas of focus that will directly improve the level of academic challenge at CMU. The second year of the Quality Initiative (2014-2015) will accomplish a concrete set of activities identified in year one as critical to enhancing the academic challenge for CMU students. One natural focus may be the exploration of the opportunity for educational excellence through general education. An ideal outcome of the second year would be to develop a common set of expectations beyond content for all 100 and 200-level courses to include the development of habits of the mind (e.g., reasoning, critical and higher order thinking skills, problem-solving skills, research skills), and communication skills (e.g., advanced listening and comprehension skills, analytic writing, and persuasive speaking), including advanced communication via technology. The third year of the Quality Initiative (2015-2016) could focus on improved student success, retention and time to graduation resulting from improved academic advising and the use of learning analytics. The discussions of year one will shape the ensuing efforts, but year three will utilize diagnostic tools to maximize the student experience. Any discussion of retention and time to graduation must be grounded in the quality academic experience of the students while at the same time guarding against lowering academic standards to increase graduation rates. The ideal outcome of the third year would be increased retention and decreased time to graduation for successful, well-educated students.

The development of CMU's vision and mission statements, shared governance expectations, and committee reports complement the university's strategic planning efforts and affords us the opportunity for significant impact in the way that CMU achieves its educational mission. Central Michigan University has put student success at the forefront of its strategic plan. The time is right to build upon the efforts and products of the past to articulate a sustainable vision for extraordinary academic excellence.