

CMU to focus on the academic challenge of introductory, nonmajor courses for Higher Learning Commission 'Quality Initiative'

From Interim Vice Provost Claudia Douglass

A campuswide quality initiative required by the Higher Learning Commission as part of reaccreditation will begin this fall with widespread discussion leading to an action plan. The initiative allows CMU to choose a focus area for addressing the national call for continuous improvement at all universities.

CMU's three-year initiative starts with a review of the academic challenge of introductory and nonmajor courses. From there, the campus community will help shape a series of action steps. The academic challenge concept was submitted to the HLC April 30, following commission guidelines that were released in March.

CMU's proposal was developed with preliminary input from the Academic Senate Executive Board, the Teaching and Learning Collective, and leaders of the Student Government Association.

"We'll begin with a year of dialogue," said Interim Vice Provost Claudia Douglass. "The campus community will shape the project direction, building on past conversations about the "Academically Adrift" theories of Drs. Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa and about the critical thinking insights of Dr. Stanley Fish.

"We anticipate the last two years of the initiative may address issues such as academic rigor, standards across colleges, the role of liberal studies and academic practices that improve retention," Douglass said. "In the end, of course, our goal is to prepare students for success after graduation."

The Academic Senate will start an in-depth conversation about the quality initiative during one of its first meetings this fall, Chair Andrew Spencer said.

Campuswide discussion will cover factors such as freshmen's skill variance, latest theories in the science of learning, technology and CMU's strategic priorities, Douglass said. The project should result in the identification and implementation of best practices for improving rigor and student outcomes, Douglass said.

An executive summary and the full proposal submitted to the Higher Learning Commission are posted online.
[https://centrallink.cmich.edu/administration/provosts_office/AcademicAffairs/Accreditation/Pages/default.aspx]

As part of its upcoming accreditation process, CMU will write a self-study in 2014-15 and host an HLC visit in 2015-16.