



Open Pathway Quality Initiative Proposal

Institutional Template

The enclosed Quality Initiative Proposal represents the work that the institution will undertake to fulfill the quality improvement requirements of the Open Pathway.

Signature of Institution's President or Chancellor

8/31/2021

Date

Thomas W. Newsom, President

Printed/Typed Name and Title

Southeastern Oklahoma State University

Name of Institution

Durant, Oklahoma

City and State

The institution completes the Quality Initiative Proposal by responding to the questions in each category of the template. Proposals should be no more than 4,500 words. The institution may choose to submit a brief implementation plan or supplemental charts or graphs as appendices to the template. The Quality Initiative Proposal will be accepted beginning September 1 of Year 5. It is due no later than June 1 of Year 7.

Submit the proposal as a PDF file to hlcommission.org/upload. Select "Pathways/Quality Initiative" from the list of submission options to ensure the institution's materials are sent to the correct HLC staff member. Submission file names should utilize the following format: QIProposal[InstitutionName][State].pdf (e.g., QIProposalNoNameUniversityMN.pdf). The file name must include the institution's name (or an identifiable portion thereof) and state.

Overview of the Quality Initiative

1. Provide a title and brief description of the Quality Initiative. Explain whether the initiative will begin and be completed during the Quality Initiative period or if it is part of work already in progress or will achieve a key milestone in the work of a longer initiative.

Title: Southeastern Oklahoma State University, a Student Ready Institution

Southeastern Oklahoma State University (Southeastern) serves a variety of student populations that research suggests are at risk of not achieving college success through graduation, as they often find themselves temporarily stopping out, or permanently leaving higher education. These populations include first generation students, part-time students, Native American Students, students from rural communities, adult learners and students from low socio-economic backgrounds.

Southeastern's Quality Initiative (QI) is rooted in four guiding principles:

1. All Faculty and Staff at Southeastern are Educators.
2. Faculty and Staff are committed to preparing all students for the challenges that they will face in life, work, and citizenship.
3. Faculty and Staff are committed to ensuring that all students receive the appropriate amount of challenge and support to ensure their success.
4. Southeastern's belief in every student and their individual success is intentional and expected from everyone on campus.

Guided by these principles, Southeastern strives to become a student ready institution, the inverse of the label that has been placed on students as "college ready". Southeastern's goal is to work intentionally to make our university ready for students by implementing a new perspective, a new lens. To address the needs of students and meet those needs, we will emphasize the essential value of a positive view of all students, not focusing on past perceptions of student deficits.

"A student ready college is one that strategically and holistically advances student success, and works tirelessly in its pursuit to educate ALL students for civic and economic participation in an interconnected society"¹

This project further refines the work of the institution to address and identify barriers to retention and completion, and enhance initiatives directly related to student advising, quality of online instruction, student engagement, and immersive/experiential learning. This will be an ongoing effort, that will not be completed during the QI period, while progress will be measured by achieving key milestones.

The project will use mixed qualitative and quantitative methods to examine multiple variables that measure the use of existing and new touch points that provide a higher degree of institutional support and academic quality to meet students' personal needs for success.

The QI ultimately focuses on ensuring that Southeastern is an institution that can provide an enhanced degree of institutional support and academic quality tailored to individual student needs in order to improve enrollment, retention, and completion.

¹ McDonald, and Thomas Major. Becoming a Student-Ready College: A New Culture of Leadership for Student Success. Pg. 158, 2016.

Sufficiency of the Initiative's Scope and Significance

2. Explain why the proposed initiative is relevant and significant for the institution.

This QI is not only important in its focus but is more relevant given the challenges students are facing because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has exacerbated well-documented opportunity gaps that put at-risk students at a disadvantage relative to their peers. During this time, learning and social development have been disrupted and there is a need to refocus on nurturing the whole student and ensuring that students have access to the conditions and resources to enhance both learning and development.² Understanding that the recent challenges that we have faced have increased this gap, and the negative impact that it could have on student success makes it imperative that Southeastern become a student ready institution focusing on guiding principles that will intentionally address these gaps in order to ensure that students are retained, persist from year to year, and complete their educational experience with not only a degree, but the skills and competencies necessary to be successful in an interconnected society. This need is compounded because Southeastern has a large student population that is non-traditional and at risk. In many cases, these students are opting for online instruction to meet work and family demands; therefore, their route to a degree is long and stressful even during normal times.

Southeastern's mission is to "provide an environment of academic excellence that enables students to reach their highest potential. By having personal access to excellent teaching, challenging academic programs, and extracurricular experiences, students will develop skills and habits that promote values for career preparation, responsible citizenship, and lifelong learning."

By improving alignment with academic quality for personal support for growth outside the classroom, the University can better define individual student success and ensure that the mission of the institution is fulfilled in each individual student, especially those from at risk populations.

The QI, and its four guiding principles will also serve to inform the University's upcoming strategic planning process. The University recently underwent a leadership change with a new president arriving in the Spring of 2020. The new president has delayed the strategic planning process because of the challenges of ongoing operations during the pandemic, with an expectation that this strategic plan development will begin in the Fall of 2021. Preplanning during the 2020-21 academic year has determined the plan would establish a path to ensure the University holds true to the spirit of its mission to improve the lives of its students and the community.

Southeastern's QI will be the merging of academic and co-curricular activities that support student success through the mission of enabling students to reach their highest potential.

² <https://www.epi.org/publication/the-consequences-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-for-education-performance-and-equity-in-the-united-states-what-can-we-learn-from-pre-pandemic-research-to-inform-relief-recovery-and-rebuilding/>

3. Explain the intended impact of the initiative on the institution and its academic quality.

This QI will support institutional success through better understanding of individual definitions of student success. This project also has the potential to inform institutional growth through Southeastern's understanding of student and institutional needs in regards to academic programming and offerings, curriculum design and assessment, academic advisement, and delivery modalities. The Initiative will also have the capacity to inform the strategic planning process, to include periodic review of the university's mission and vision.

The four guiding principles of the QI will drive improvement in academic quality as the University has a better understanding of how to evaluate resources for student support systems such as advising, remediation, tutoring, early alerts, and career services.

Clarity of the Initiative's Purpose

4. Describe the purposes and goals for the initiative.

In the initial phase of the QI Project the University will focus on two aspects of becoming a student ready university.

1. Quality of Online Instruction
2. Academic and Student Advising

These specific initiatives will inform other initiatives on campus as the University's culture of continuous improvement becomes rooted in the philosophy of a student ready university. This initiative was introduced campus-wide, prior to the Fall 2021 semester, at the all faculty and staff luncheon and meeting on August 12.

Quality of Online Instruction

At the 2021 Symposium, the Center of Instructional Development and Technology (CIDT) announced that the University will be initiating a "Post-Covid Review Plan" to assess online courses in order to ensure academic quality. This initiative will begin with October 2021 courses and faculty will have the following options for course review. Further timelines will be established to extend this review to courses offered in later semesters.

Option 1: Review of a Fully Developed Course - This option is recommended for experienced faculty. Those who select this option will use a web form to set a goal date by which their course will be fully developed and ready for review. CIDT will provide suggested milestones and a sample timeline to help faculty reach this goal and will set a specific date for course review. To ensure that feedback can be applied before Preview Week, all reviews will ideally take place by the end of September. CIDT will follow up with faculty a week after the review in order to assess the process.

- **Asynchronous** – With this option, a faculty member will have the opportunity for their course to be reviewed by a specified date by a CIDT instructional designer with feedback sent to the faculty member by email.
- **Synchronous** – With this option a CIDT Instructional Designer will meet faculty to complete an interactive review. Faculty mentors are welcome to participate in this meeting also.

Option 2: Guided Development + Review - This option is recommended for those teaching online for fewer than four years. It is also available to faculty of any experience level if preferred. Faculty will meet with a CIDT instructional designer three times, one week apart. The meetings would be for the following purposes.

- Meeting 1: Review and discuss goals for the course, what has been done, and what development needs to take place. This discussion will include how CIDT can help.
- Meeting 2: Check-in regarding progress and use the review criteria to determine focus areas to set new goals.
- Meeting 3: Review the course with the criteria and determine whether the course is finished.
- Meeting 4+: If the course was not completed or if additional assistance is needed.

Goals of the Review

The purpose is to ensure quality and provide faculty with resources to help reach identified course goals. This process will rely heavily on the Quality Matters (QM) Rubric, while ensuring the effective

use of the Southeastern Course Template. This will also include a screen for issues that might create technical problems in the course. While the review will be centered primarily around QM principles, this is not a formal QM Review. This will be an *informal* review with CIDT to identify issues, set goals, and make improvements. It is anticipated that adjuncts will also be added to this review.

Preparation for the Review

Objective 2 of Basic Lessons for University Education (“BLUE” in Blackboard) has information that will be helpful to faculty in advance of the review. Faculty will also have an opportunity to familiarize themselves with the QM Matrix and conduct a mock review of their course using the matrix prior to the meeting. The focus will be on the essential standards.

Result

Information (deidentified) will be collected as to the success of the initiative. Since this a developmental initiative, data will include: success in scheduling (numbers of faculty and courses reviewed), amount of time needed by staff to conduct reviews, success rates (goals developed and timelines followed), and lessons learned. This information will be reviewed by stakeholders including the Distance Education Council for future proposals and assessment of whether the current processes/policies on campus should be updated. Ideas for pilot programs will also be developed. Below is a pilot plan to begin implementation after the completion of reviews in the Spring of 2022. Any others developed may phase into this current proposed plan.

Pilot Plan

Goals: 1) To develop a stronger culture of continuous improvement of online instruction. 2) Develop leaders and mentors on campus to champion quality of online teaching.

Recruit a cohort of 10+ faculty for an opportunity to enroll in the QM Teaching Online Certificate (TOC) course, beginning in the Summer/Fall semester of 2022. The TOC course requires that participants complete seven QM workshops that contain competencies with associated outcomes mapped to the Teaching Online portion of the Online Instructor Skill Set (OISS). Successful completion means an instructor has demonstrated the skills, ability, and knowledge for the six areas of competency from the OISS. The areas of competency are:

- I. Institutional Context: The instructor understands the institutional context in which they teach
- II. Technologies: The instructor is knowledgeable about the technologies used in the online classroom
- III. Instructional Design: The instructor understands the instructional design requirements of an online course
- IV. Pedagogy: The instructor understands the pedagogical components of the online teaching and learning process
- V. Assessment: The instructor is knowledgeable about various methods of measuring the success of the teaching and learning process in the online classroom
- VI. Social Presence: The instructor establishes a social presence and communicates effectively through writing and/or audio/video

The timeline would be to complete the TOC during 2022. After completion, faculty will complete a reflective statement regarding how the instructor’s courses, both implementation and design, have improved based on information received from the workshops. The instructor will address all areas of competency in the reflective statement. This focused-review statement addresses implementation and will have an impact on the intentional design of elements needed to meet the competencies.

Academic and Student Advising

Southeastern is striving to adopt a Concierge model of academic and student advising and has already moved to a more centralized advising model for the 2021-2022 academic year. However, this has been reactionary to student needs rather than a clearly charted path to a new model of advising. This Concierge model/philosophy will be further developed and implemented during the QI period with a timeline developed based on budget and staffing capacity. The Assistant Vice President for Academic Affairs (AVPAA) and a new position of Dean of Undergraduate Studies, working with faculty and staff, in collaboration with the Dean of Graduate Studies under the Direction of the Vice President for Academic Affairs (VPAA), will be responsible for further developing the model and implementing it at Southeastern.

The Concierge Advising Philosophy

The following is a holistic framework of a Concierge Advising model. This will be a work in progress as the University uses this framework to adopt a more student ready approach to both academic and non-academic advising. This model will be flexible in its implementation as the University better understands its relationship to process, policy, and applicability serving a unique student demographic, as discussed above. Transition is much easier when built on current structures. Before launching into this new initiative we need to understand what we are currently doing and how it meets goals outlined in a student ready model.

The following outlines the framework for a student advising model rooted in the philosophy of becoming a student ready university. This concept revolves around developing a Student Success Center that houses a student success team that will work with students from matriculation to graduation, educating and empowering students to take ownership of their degree path. These teams will ultimately consist of four individuals; an Academic Advisor, Academic success coach, Career Specialist, and Financial Aid Advisor. Students will be assigned to these teams based on their major and will remain with the same teams until they graduate.

Academic Advisor –

The Academic Advisor, as a member of the Student Success Team, serves as the student's academic connection to the institution, through the embedded Student Success Center. Working collaboratively with the academic success coach, financial aid advisor, and career specialist, the advisor works with students on program and course selection; discusses academic requirements; supports enrollment management initiatives; coordinates the preparation for and participates in new student orientations; supports retention initiatives; and provides information on and refers students to resources.

Goals

- Provide responsive, accessible, student-centered advising
- Advises students on program and course selection
- Encourages students to become self-aware, proactive, and intentional decision-makers
- Mentor students to embrace personal success, failures, and growth to create a unique narrative of their past, present, and future

Academic Success Coach –

This Coach, as a member of the Student Success Team, serves as a student's connection to the institution, through the embedded Student Success Center. Working collaboratively with academic

advising, career specialist and financial aid advisor, the Academic Success Coach is responsible for providing an unparalleled level of service and support to students that promotes student success. The Coach facilitates an interactive process that empowers students to meet academic goals and identify and overcome challenges, both inside and outside the classroom, to create a path to success at the university.

Goals

- Assisting to identify and resolve barriers related to student retention, persistence and graduation
- Educate students and advisors about campus policies, procedures, and program requirements
- Providing support and resources to students (Campus resources, Knowledge of all academic and administrative processes)
- Data and reporting (Tracking non-registered students, using predictive analytics to determine barriers to persistence and retention, creating initiatives to meet students where they are)
- Outreach and assistance for new and current students
- Clearing holds
- Early intervention for non-payment issues
- Academic early intervention efforts
- Outreach to resolve pre-enrollment barriers

Financial Aid Advisor -

The Financial Aid Advisor, under direction of the financial aid office, work with students in order to determine and provide financial assistance through the awarding of a financial aid package that promotes retention, persistence and completing while complying with all Title IV regulations as well as state and university policies. Working collaboratively with academic advising, career specialist and academic success coaches, the financial aid advisor develops initiatives to address issues identified through student needs assessments that improve student access and success.

Goals

- Ongoing financial aid advisement for continuing students
- Assistance with documentation renewal (FAFSA, ongoing scholarships and aid)
- Early intervention for non-payment issues
- Early intervention for financial compliance issues
- Identification of ongoing financial aid (Scholarships, Aid, Work Study, etc.)

Career Specialist –

Serving as a collaborative member of the student success team, the Career Specialist, provides career counseling and career readiness programs that support student success. Working collaboratively with academic advising, academic success coaches, and financial aid advisors, the Specialist develops initiatives to promote timely degree completion and career readiness, as well as increasing placement rates of graduates in a profession within their field of study.

Goals

- Enhance career development of students specific to school of study
- Support student placement by developing individual career goals for students
- Ensure that a student's major aligns with career goals

- Develop relationships with employers in order to increase placement rates
- Conduct ongoing presentations and seminars to keep students on track with career goals

Current Approaches to Academic Advising and Student Success

Southeastern currently utilizes both faculty and professional staff advisors to provide advising and concierge-type services to students. Before moving to a full success team model we need to review the current advising process to determine what is working, what isn't, and best practices that may work for one set of students and not others. There are two distinctive advising models currently being used: (1) a blended model that was developed and implemented in 2003 where students are initially assigned to a professional advisor and are then transitioned to a faculty advisor and (2) a concierge-type model developed and implemented in 2016 where students enrolled at the outreach sites and fully online are assigned to a professional advisor that provides holistic support from admission through graduation. The success "team" is typically one advising staff member who may reach out to others to serve the students. Both advising models seek to achieve the goals for each of the four roles in the student success team listed above, but there has been no systematic evaluation of the current advising models to determine how effective they are at achieving the proposed goals.

Historically, Southeastern has seen the value in providing concierge services for students and has made some positive steps towards this model. In 2013, a working group that included directors from the (former) division of enrollment management outlined a plan based on the services provided by advisors at outreach locations, that would seek to restructure departmental operations and staffing to support the development of a concierge model that included the concepts of the support team model (even with limited staffing). This plan was developed and implemented by the staff that would become the Online and Distance Advising Center.

In 2018, due to increased enrollment, the professional advising staff was formally organized into a division- the Center for Student Success. This brought together staff from the Academic Advising and Outreach Center (AAOC), the Native American Institute (NAI), the Online and Distance Advising Center (ODAC), and the Learning (Remediation and Academic Support) Center (LC). The division is overseen by an executive director and operates using a matrix-style organizational structure that has allowed cross-trained staff to meet the increased advising and holistic support needs of each department without having to hire additional staff. This structure has also allowed students to receive almost uninterrupted advising services when the pandemic forced the university into a fully remote status. The Career Management Center currently reports to the same VP as the Center for Student Success which has allowed for additional cross-training and support to a small department that provides career support to students. In 2021, due to explosive growth in online graduate programs, the Center for Student Success was further expanded to include a newly organized group of professional graduate advisors. Currently, the Center also provides weekly advisement and concierge training for professional advisors both in the Center for Student Success and in other departments across campus (such as TRiO).

Since 2018, the division has continued to implement changes in an attempt to transition to a more robust and proactive holistic concierge model. First, the use of the matrix organizational structure has provided access to enough staff to allow for implementation of more of the model. Second, each advisor has a known group of students assigned to them. Third, the division implemented an online scheduling software that allows students to schedule advising appointments online or on their phones. Lastly, the university has a new Student Information System (SiS) that provides a streamlined integration with financial aid. This allows the advisors to see student needs without having to send the student to a financial aid counselor.

These changes have allowed us to be more proactive, but there is a limit to the number of students that we can serve proactively. The transition to the student ready campus “team” approach will allow us to advance once we determine a path to the final campus model.

The Project

Over the next year, the university plans to assess current advising models and processes. We will utilize the success team model as a framework to assess the current concierge-type services being provided through:

- (1) Qualitative evaluation of the blended model and the concierge model; how each functions and what each achieves. This is a reflective review from faculty and staff.
- (2) Quantitative survey of students about how they acquire the services provided, as defined by the goals of the four success team positions. It will also address if there are specific groups of students with unique preferences.
- (3) Evaluate the faculty, staff, student, and administrative perceptions of the faculty advisors vs. the professional advisors, financial aid counselors, and career management staff on how each group achieves the goals of the success team model.
- (4) Identify technology needs/cost to fully implement a concierge centered model to scale based on enrollment trends, for example, a platform that utilizes predictive analytics to support student retention.

These surveys and evaluations are under development as part of the first phase. Once the assessment has been completed we will evaluate how much of the concierge model we are achieving to determine next steps towards our goal.

5. Select up to three main topics that will be addressed by the initiative.

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|--|---|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Advising | <input type="checkbox"/> Leadership | <input type="checkbox"/> Retention |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Assessment | <input type="checkbox"/> Learning Environment | <input type="checkbox"/> Strategic Planning |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Civic Engagement | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Online Learning | <input type="checkbox"/> Student Learning |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Curriculum | <input type="checkbox"/> Persistence and Completion | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Student Success |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Diversity | <input type="checkbox"/> Professional Development | <input type="checkbox"/> Teaching/Pedagogy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Engagement | <input type="checkbox"/> Program Development | <input type="checkbox"/> Underserved Populations |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Faculty Development | <input type="checkbox"/> Program Evaluation | <input type="checkbox"/> Workforce |
| <input type="checkbox"/> First-Year Programs | <input type="checkbox"/> Quality Improvement | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: |
| <input type="checkbox"/> General Education | | |

6. Describe how the institution will evaluate progress, make adjustments and determine what has been accomplished.

Southeastern is working towards becoming a Student Ready Institution. The scope of this vision brought forward by the President, that at heart is an underlying attitude on campus, is a broad long-term

initiative. Bringing focus and making intentional steps towards this goal is the basis of this initiative. This proposal outlines timelines (section 10) in two areas of focus. While the proposal begins in the Academic Affairs division, the long-term vision will eventually incorporate all divisions of the university. The VPAA will be charged with monitoring progress in partnership with the AVPAA and the Deans in the Academic Affairs. The VPAA will request regular progress updates and provide feedback to those working on initiatives. Additionally, Southeastern has six HLC peer reviewers (including the VPAA and President) who will work as a committee to evaluate progress as reported to the VPAA. The President holds weekly Executive Team meetings where other division leaders will be engaged in reviewing progress and possible partnerships. Presentations will be made to students, faculty, staff and stakeholders such as alumni as the plans develop.

Evidence of Commitment to and Capacity for Accomplishing the Initiative

7. Describe the level of support for the initiative by internal or external stakeholders.

There is broad support for this initiative. Discussions regarding the QI started in 2019 when the Associate Vice President for Assessment and Accreditation (now the VPAA) made presentations to Faculty Senate, and Student Government, and had conversations with staff seeking input into the direction for this initiative. Faculty Senate formally proposed evaluation of online learning as a topic while students and staff brought forward questions related to advising/student support. These topics were proposed on the backdrop of increasing online course options and new faculty-led proposals for online programs which continue to spur enrollment growth. Since that initial discovery process several things have happened including administrative personnel changes and the pandemic. Our current President joined the University mid-pandemic and has provided focus to the need for a Student Ready Campus.

Currently, leaders from the faculty, staff of CIDT, and staff from professional advising have contributed to writing and reviewing this proposal. Under the President's leadership the enrollment growth has led to budgeting for new faculty and staff lines. The university plans to prioritize funding the faculty and staff lines associated with this initiative with the income from our ongoing enrollment growth.

8. Identify the groups and individuals that will lead or be directly involved in implementing the initiative.

The QI will be integrated across the university through existing structures and additional student support services. While the proposed initiative starts with this implementation, it will lead to a broader scope and require buy-in and feedback from all of the University stakeholders to reach Student Ready goals. The following is a list of committees and groups that will have a direct role.

- Executive Team
- Faculty Senate
- Staff Senate
- Academic Council
- On-campus HLC peer reviewers VPAA ad-hoc committee
- CIDT
- Center for Student Success
 - Academic Advising & Outreach (AAOC)

- Online and Distance Advising Center (ODAC)
- Distance Education Council
- Academic Affairs
- Student Affairs
- Admissions and Recruitment
- Financial Aid

9. List the human, financial, technological and other resources that the institution has committed to this initiative.

Quality of Online Instruction

Human: Director and the Assistant Director for CIDT, faculty and instructors of online courses (59 in the initial review for October class starts, total will be determined once adjuncts are included).

Financial: CIDT personnel will be allowed time to work on the project. The pilot program will require costs of access to the QM training (estimated to be \$1,000 per cohort member) and a salary or release time incentive to participate.

Technological: New SiS and Blackboard system.

Academic Advising

Human: Center for Student Success employees: 17. Faculty advisors: 94.

Financial: No additional costs to initiate; staff allowed time and support to work on the initiative.

Technological (current): New SiS, New CRM, independent scheduling software, new phone system.

Appropriateness of the Timeline for the Initiative

(The institution may include a brief implementation or action plan.)

10. Describe the primary activities of the initiative and timeline for implementing them.

Quality of Online Instruction

Post-COVID Review:

- Fall 2021: Implementation of scheduling and reviews for online courses starting in October.
- Spring 2022: Continue reviews, collect data, disseminate final data to the Distance Education Council, Faculty Senate, and others such as the VPAA. Consider policy updates if needed.

Pilot:

- Summer/Fall 2022: Seek out faculty cohort, facilitate enrollment in QM TOC course.
- Spring 2023 (January): Faculty complete a reflective statement about how the instructor's courses, both implementation and design, have improved based on the information received from

the workshops. The instructor will address the six areas of competency. These statements will be shared with stakeholders.

- Spring 2023 (March-May): This cohort will meet to discuss mentorship of other faculty and propose ideas to the Distance Education Council and the VPAA.

Academic Advising

- Fall 2021- Develop and begin the assessments (quantitative and qualitative).
- Spring 2022- Complete the assessment and evaluate results.
- Summer 2022- Complete evaluation of results and assemble working group to develop framework for implementation of success team/concierge model.

Institutional Contact for Quality Initiative Proposal

Include the name(s) of the primary contact(s) for the Quality Initiative.

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