QEP Impact Report

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1 Initial Goals and Intended Outcomes of the QEP

1.1 GOAL

The goal of East Carolina University's Quality Enhancement Plan, "Write Where You Belong," was to create a "vertical" writing curriculum in which writing instruction and writing supports are integrated, aligned, and reinforced within and across undergraduate programs. We ultimately hoped to see improvements in students' writing in advanced, major-specific writing-intensive (WI) courses. Major-specific writing-intensive (WI) courses are officially designated sites for students to develop their writing abilities beyond the required English composition sequence–ENGL 1100: Foundations of College Writing and ENGL 2201: Writing about the Disciplines. We used the Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) below, and the rubric included in Appendix A, to gauge students' progress in these WI courses.

1.2 OUTCOMES

The QEP document established the following SLOs:

At the conclusion of their undergraduate degree programs, East Carolina University graduates will be able to

SLO 1. Use writing to investigate complex, relevant topics and address significant questions through engagement with and effective use of credible sources.

SLO 2. Produce writing that reflects an awareness of context, purpose, and audience, particularly within the written genres (including genres that integrate writing with visuals, audio, or other multimodal components) of their major disciplines and/or career fields.

SLO 3. Demonstrate that they understand writing as a process that can be made more effective through drafting and revision.

SLO 4. Proofread and edit their own writing, avoiding grammatical and mechanical errors.

SLO 5. Assess and explain the major choices that they make in their writing.

2 Discussion of and Rationale for Changes Made to the QEP

Three action-areas, each involving multiple initiatives, were at the heart of the QEP:

1. **Student Support**, including the construction and full staffing of a 2,720-square-foot University Writing Center (UWC); an expansion of online writing support via an online writing lab (OWL) and a robust "Writing@ECU" website; and the establishment of a "Writing Mentors" program (described below). Together, these initiatives were intended to reinforce writing instruction throughout students' time at ECU by supporting more students in more courses than was possible before the QEP.

2. **Faculty Support**, including multiple professional development opportunities and the establishment of a "Writing Liaisons" program (described below). Through extensive discussion of and training in best practices in writing instruction, these initiatives helped to align and reinforce methods of teaching writing across disciplinary contexts and throughout students' undergraduate programs.

3. **Curriculum Enhancement**, including moving the university's second required writing course–formerly English 1200: Composition, now English 2201: Writing about the Disciplines–from the first year to the sophomore year and restructuring it as a transition to writing in the majors. Curriculum enhancement also included integrating a "Writing Self-analysis" assignment (described below) into all WI courses. These curricular initiatives were intended to align and reinforce writing instruction by connecting the curriculum of

ECU's required composition courses to writing done in major-area courses and by creating a recurring writing and learning practice (the "Writing Self-analysis") across undergraduate programs.

The initiatives in all three action-areas were implemented without major changes. Two noteworthy adjustments, however, were made to the plan to assess the QEP. First, in the process of developing and applying a rubric from the SLOs (see Appendix A), it became obvious that SLO 1 contained at least two distinct outcomes:

SLO 1A. Use writing to investigate complex, relevant topics and address significant questions, and

SLO 1B. Engage with and effectively use credible sources

Teasing out these two outcomes enabled QEP leadership and faculty to target instruction and student writing support more effectively.

The second assessment change involved ENGL 2201: Writing about the Disciplines (the new sophomore-level required course). The QEP document indicated that writing samples from the course would be assessed during years 3 and 5 of the QEP and that assessment would be course-embedded. Validity checks of scores from the year 3 assessment, however, revealed that ENGL 2201 instructors tended to score their students' writing significantly higher than outside assessors. As a result, beginning in academic year 2017–18, assessment of ENGL 2201 outcomes moved to a model whereby members of the English department's Writing Foundations Committee (a standing committee elected by members of the English department) are responsible for ENGL 2201 assessment.

3 Impact on Student Learning and the Environment Supporting Student Learning

The QEP team employed a number of different assessment measures–direct and indirect–to gain insight into the overall cumulative impact of the aforementioned QEP initiatives on students' progress toward the QEP SLOs and on the creation of a campus environment conducive to student learning in the area of writing.

3.1 IMPACT ON SLO ACHIEVEMENT

3.1.1 Direct Assessment of Student Writing from Writing-intensive (WI) Courses

During the QEP period, faculty from across the university participated in scoring randomly selected writing samples from writing-intensive courses in all colleges that offer undergraduate programs. The majority of these WI courses are at the 3000 and 4000 level, although a few programs maintain their majors' only required WI course at the 2000-level. Pre-QEP (2011–2013) WI assessment included 80 samples from 2000-level courses, 426 samples from 3000-level courses, and 406 samples from 4000-level courses. Post-QEP (2017 and 2018) WI assessment included 58 samples from 2000-level courses, 429 samples from 3000-level courses, and 404 samples from 4000-level courses.

Following norming, assessors determined scores for SLOs 1A, 1B, 2, and 4 based on written projects that students composed for WI courses and uploaded to their electronic "University Writing Portfolio." SLOs 3 and 5 were assessed based on students' responses to the "Writing Self-analysis" questions below. Students uploaded a separate response for each writing sample:

1. What aspects of your writing in the project are effective and why do you think they are effective?
2. What do you think could be improved in your written project and how could it be improved?
3. Briefly describe the process you used to write the project. Do you think the process you used was effective? Why or why not?

As depicted in Figure 1, students' scores in their major-area WI courses following the full implementation of all QEP initiatives were higher than before in all SLO areas.

These improvements were statistically significant for all but SLO 4, which deals with proofreading, editing, and avoiding grammatical and mechanical errors. That students did not improve

Figure 1: Baseline and Post-QEP SLO Mean Scores

significantly in this particular outcome is not terribly surprising, given that, at the same time they were learning the writing expectations and conventions of their major fields, they were also trying to internalize advanced disciplinary knowledge. Research has shown that when learners are trying to process complex information through higher-order thinking, simpler skills previously learned often appear to regress (see Torrance and Galbraith, 2006).

Examining these direct assessment results by course-level reveals the importance of sequencing WI major-area courses at the 3000 or 4000 level so that students encounter them after completing ENGL 2201. While no statistically significant increases were noted in SLO achievement for 2000-level WI courses, 3000- and 4000-level courses saw significant increases in most areas (Table 1):

Table 1. Comparison of Pre- and Post-QEP Mean Scores by Class Level

Course Level		SLO 1A	SLO 1B	SLO 2	SLO 3	SLO 4	SLO 5
3000-level	PRE	2.66	2.35	2.54	2.10	2.62	2.07
	POST	2.80**	2.56**	2.62	2.28**	2.69	2.48**
4000-level	PRE	2.51	2.17	2.34	1.81	2.52	1.82
	POST	2.87**	2.63**	2.71**	2.37**	2.60	2.52**

** denotes a statistically significant increase

We anticipate that this assessment data will motivate the few programs that maintain their only major-specific WI courses at the 2000 level to reconsider that curricular choice.
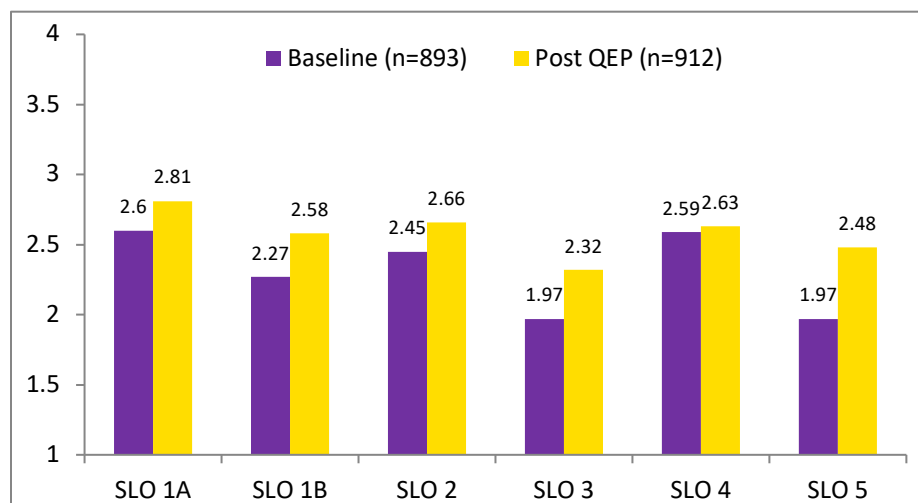
3.1.2   Direct Assessment of Student Writing from ENGL 2201

While many initiatives were part of the QEP and thus likely contributed to the improvements in student performance noted in the previous section, we provide here direct assessment results of student writing from ENGL 2201, a major curricular initiative.

In reviewing results, it should be kept in mind that, because the Writing Foundations courses have their own course objectives (objectives that are necessarily more detailed than the QEP SLOs), the rubric used to score the samples differed from that used for other WI courses. Nevertheless, many parallels exist between the SLOs for ENGL 2201 and the QEP SLOs, as indicated in Table 2 below. It is also important to note that the ENGL 2201 rubric, constructed by the English Department's Writing Foundations Committee, uses a five-point scale (the QEP/WI rubric uses a four-point scale). On the ENGL 2201 rubric, 1=insufficient, 2=developing, 3=adequate, 4=very good, and 5=excellent.

As noted above in section 2, the initial plan to use course-embedded assessments was dropped after it became clear that instructors tend to score samples from their own classes higher than outside scorers. The table below thus includes assessment results from the final year of QEP only (2017–18). Results are based on 280 writing samples randomly selected from across ENGL 2201 sections.

Table 2. 2017–18 ENGL 2201 SLO Mean Scores (1–5 scale), with Corresponding QEP SLOs

ENGL 2201 SLO	Corresponding QEP SLO	Mean Score
SLO 1: Inquiry	QEP SLO 1A	2.93
SLO 2: Critical Engagement with Evidence	QEP SLO 1B	2.67
SLO 3: Purpose, Audience, Context	QEP SLO 2	2.89
SLO 4: Disciplinary Conventions	QEP SLO 2	2.65
SLO 5: Formatting and Citation	QEP SLOs 1B and 2	2.37
SLO 6: Expression and Organization	QEP SLO 4	2.97
SLO 7: Self-analytical	QEP SLOs 3 and 5	2.74

These results indicate that, as sophomores, many student writers are between "developing" (a score of "2" on the ENGL 2201 rubric) and "adequate" (a score of 3 on the ENGL 2201 rubric), a not unexpected result for students only halfway through the "vertical curriculum" as created and reinforced through the many QEP initiatives.

3.1.3   Indirect Assessment of SLO Achievement–Student Survey of Writing Experiences

Prior to the start of the QEP and again in year five, a link to a "Student Survey of Writing Experiences" was circulated via email. The pre-QEP survey was distributed to sophomores, juniors, and seniors via email lists for each class level, resulting in a total of 838 completed surveys. In year five, a post-QEP survey was distributed to a smaller, representative sample of students at each of these class levels, resulting in a total of 354 completed surveys.

Two statistically significant differences between the survey responses merit mention here:

- On the post-QEP survey, juniors reported a statistically significant increase in their confidence with "Paraphrasing sources effectively"
- On the post-QEP survey, seniors reported a statistically significant increase in their confidence with "Integrating the ideas and opinions of others into [their] own writing."

These increases suggest that QEP initiatives–ENGL 2201 in particular, which juniors and seniors would have completed by the time they took the survey–have contributed to upper-level students' achievement in SLO 1B: Engagement with and effective use of credible sources. These self-reported impacts align with statistically significant increases seen in the post-QEP direct assessment of student writing (see 3.1.1).

Results from the post-QEP survey suggest that the combination of ENGL 1100 and ENGL 2201 is more effective than the pre-QEP curriculum of ENGL 1100 and ENGL 1200 in preparing students to succeed in other SLO areas as well. As Figure 2 illustrates, seniors responding to the 2018 survey rated the effectiveness of the two-course required writing sequence (also known as the "Writing Foundations" courses) significantly higher in several areas than did their 2013 counterparts.
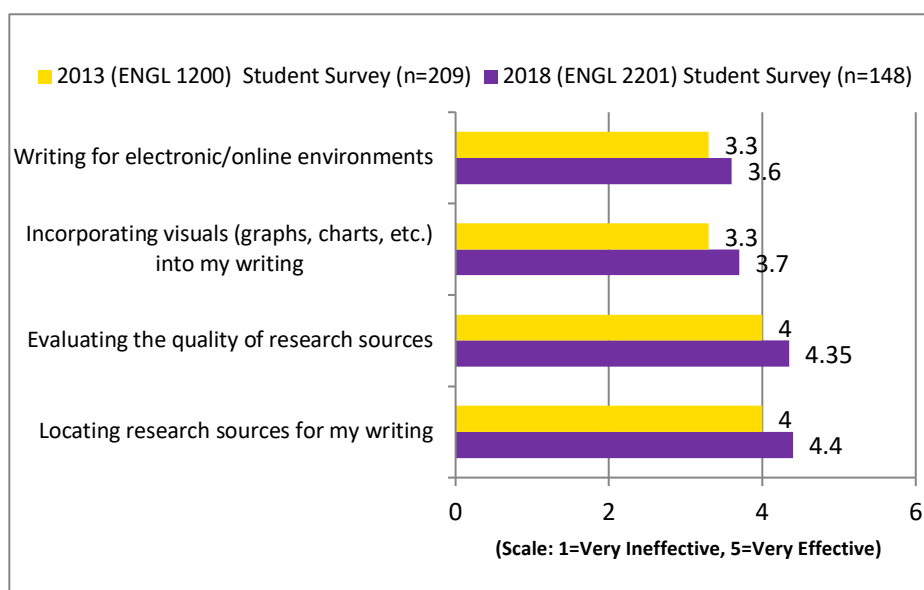

Figure 2: Seniors' Evaluation of How Well the Writing Foundations Sequence (ENGL 1100 and ENGL 1200 or 2201) Prepared Them for Various Aspects of Writing

While the increases in the final two areas in Figure 2 reinforce the conclusion noted above that ENGL 2201 has had a positive impact on student achievement relative to QEP SLO 1B, the first two increases suggest that ENGL 2201 has also had a positive impact on students' abilities to write for different audiences and contexts and to employ different genre conventions (charts, graphs, and electronic media tools) that they encounter in major-specific WI courses (QEP SLO 2).

3.2   IMPACT ON ENVIRONMENT SUPPORTING STUDENT LEARNING
Ensuring that students and faculty feel supported in efforts to improve writing was critical to the success of the QEP. To this end, the QEP included a number of "student support initiatives" and "faculty support initiatives" to provide assistance with writing and the teaching of writing.

3.2.1   Student Support Initiatives

UNIVERSITY WRITING CENTER
The construction and staffing of a substantial University Writing Center (UWC) has had the most visible impact on the environment supporting student writers at ECU. In fact, the number of writing consultations has grown steadily and substantially over the duration of the QEP, with an appointment total in the QEP's final year that was more than 3.5 times the total from the year before QEP implementation (Figure 3):
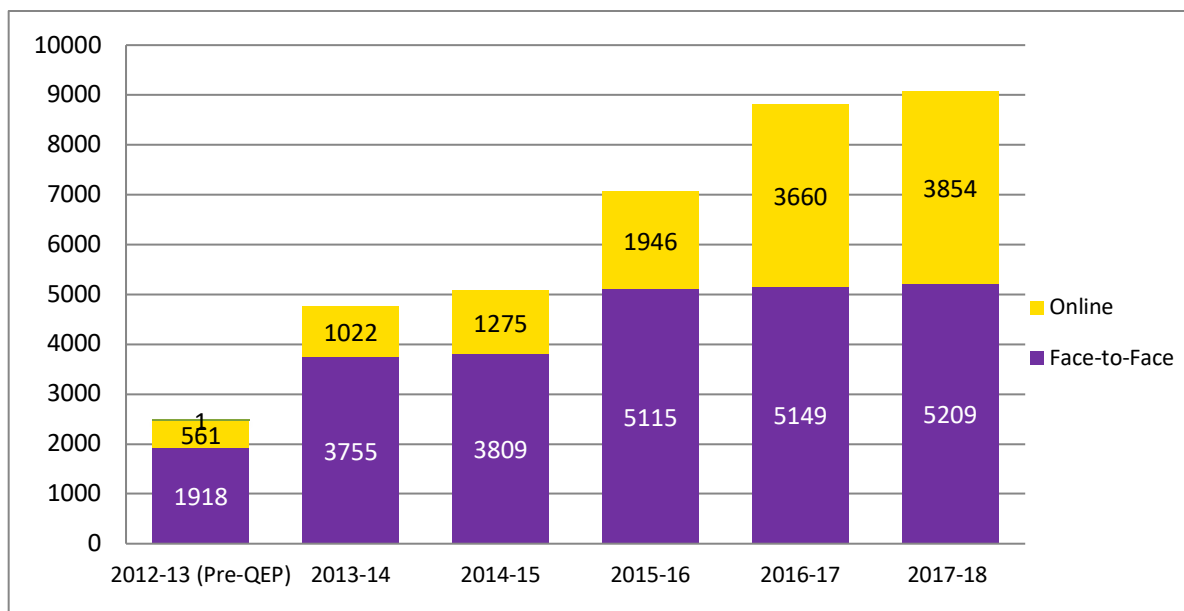
Figure 3: University Writing Center Appointments by Year of QEP

At the same time, students have been pleased with the assistance received from the UWC, with the highest levels of satisfaction being reported in the QEP's final semester: in spring 2018, 87% of students reported that they were "very satisfied" with their experiences, while the remaining 13% reported that they were "satisfied."

WRITING MENTORS PROGRAM

Writing Mentors are writing consultants who work with students in specific WI courses. Mentors act as facilitators of good writing both inside and outside the classroom by offering suggestions for revision and discussing strategies that will enable students to communicate their thoughts and ideas for course assignments effectively. Data from across the QEP period reflects that the majority of students in courses that involved a Writing Mentor believed that the Mentor had a positive impact on their performance in the QEP SLO areas (Figure 4):
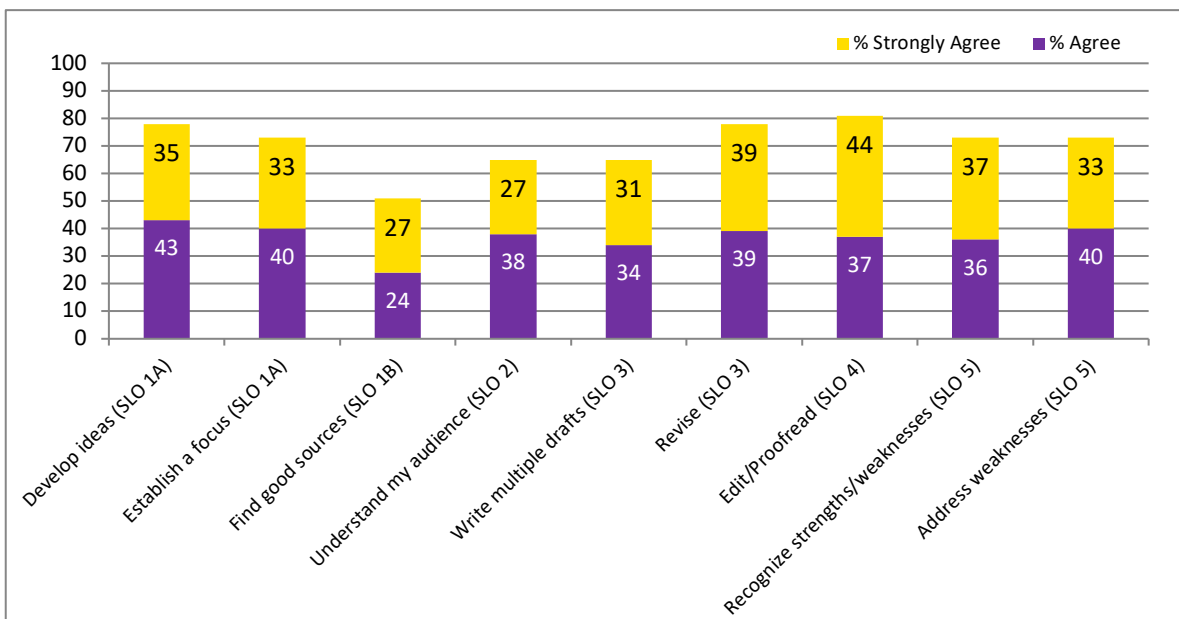

Figure 4: Student Agreement with Statement "The Writing Mentor in my class helped me to..." (n=390)

WRITING@ECU WEBSITE

Given the importance of distance education at ECU, and given students' need to access writing assistance when they are not able to schedule an appointment with the UWC, the QEP also aimed to increase the number and use of resources on the Writing@ECU website (www.ecu.edu/writing). QEP leaders and University Writing Center consultants spent many hours each semester creating new digital resources to help students with myriad aspects of writing. The "Web Coordinator"–a position created as part of the QEP–organized and publicized these resources. Despite staff turnover in the Web Coordinator position and a university-level overhaul of web platforms during the QEP period, graduating seniors in 2018 reported using resources on the Writing@ECU site significantly more times than did their counterparts in 2013 (Table 3).

Table 3. Graduating Senior Responses to "In your last two years on this campus, how often have you used writing tips/information available on the University Writing Center/Program website?"

Year	Never	Once	2-9 Times	10 or more Times
2012-13 (n=1588)	72.4%	16.0%	10.5%	1.1%
2017-18 (n=965)	49.1%	20.5%	27.4%	3.0%

Data gathered through Google Analytics from the final two years of the QEP suggest that usage of the site's resources will continue upward in the future: Academic year 2017–18 saw a total of 8,096 visits to the Writing@ECU website, a 58% increase over the number (5,119) of visits in 2016–17.

3.2.2 Faculty Support Initiatives

WRITING LIAISONS PROGRAM

Writing Liaisons are faculty members–one from each department or college that offers an undergraduate major–who facilitate communication between the academic programs, where WI major-area courses are created and offered, and the University Writing Program, University Writing Center, and Writing Foundations Program. Liaisons meet three times per semester with the leaders of these campus entities.

The increasing effectiveness of the Liaisons Program in enriching writing instruction and support across campus is reflected in the frequency with which they have communicated to their departmental colleagues about student writing and writing instruction at ECU (Figure 5). By the second year of the QEP, the majority of Liaisons communicated with colleagues once per month or even more often. The percentage of Liaisons communicating this frequently increased in each subsequent year of the QEP.
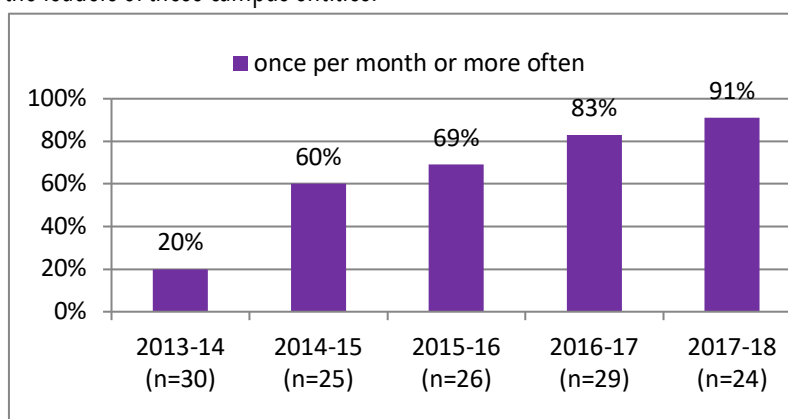

Figure 5: Writing Liaisons Survey Responses: How frequently during your time as a Writing Liaison have you talked with colleagues in your program, department, or college about issues related to the QEP, the University Writing Program, the University Writ

WRITING AND METACOGNITION WORKSHOP SERIES FEEDBACK

To foster faculty members' ability to assist students with SLO 5–Assess and explain the major choices that they make in their writing–the QEP included the "Writing and Metacognition Workshop Series" initiative. Each semester, a three-session program was offered for faculty from across the university. The sessions introduced the concept of metacognition ("thinking about thinking"); reviewed the importance of metacognition in the context of complex tasks such as writing; and provided participants the opportunity to create and receive feedback on assignments that integrate metacognition.

During the QEP period, 50 faculty members from various academic programs completed the series and a feedback survey about it. Results of the survey showed that 76% of respondents felt chances were "excellent" that they would integrate metacognition into future teaching, and the remaining 24% of respondents felt that chances were "good" that they would do so. Additionally, to gauge long-term impact, a follow-up survey was distributed to workshop participants several semesters after they completed the workshops. All 24 respondents indicated that their teaching practices had changed as a result of the workshops, with 4 respondents indicating "a little" change, 14 respondents indicating "some" change, and 6 respondents indicating "a lot" of change.

FACULTY WRITING AND LEARNING COMMUNITIES

Each academic year, one or two small groups of faculty (3-5 people–numbers were kept low to enable interaction and collaboration) from across the university investigated an SLO-related area of writing instruction: they located and read relevant literature, designed teaching resources in the chosen area, and shared their knowledge with the campus community at a professional development event and via the Writing@ECU website. Of the 31 participating faculty members who responded to a feedback survey, 23 (74%) said it was "very likely" that their experience would influence their teaching, while an additional six (19%) said it was "likely." The two neutral ("undecided") or negative ("very unlikely") responses came during the first year of the QEP and were accompanied by suggestions for improvement, which were subsequently implemented. Additionally, 11 of 12 respondents to a survey of past participants after the conclusion of the QEP said that their time in a WLC had changed their teaching practices either "some" (6) or "a lot" (5).

BIENNIAL EASTERN NC WRITING SYMPOSIUM

Implementing a "vertical" writing curriculum, QEP leadership recognized, would be most effective if QEP initiatives included teachers in area secondary schools and community colleges, primary locations from which students enter undergraduate programs at ECU. Thus, the Director of Writing Foundations, with the assistance of the QEP Director and ECU's Office of Academic Outreach, Continuing and Distance Education, held symposia in August of 2015 and 2017 that brought these groups to ECU to discuss two key aspects of writing instruction: "Introducing Students to Writing Across the Curriculum" (2015) and "Promoting Critical Thinking Through Writing" (2017). Participant surveys indicate that the symposia provided valuable pedagogical insights, with 92% (n=40) of 2015 respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement "I learned a lot on the topic presented," and 75% (n=45) of 2017 respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing as well.

ADVANCED WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM (WAC) ACADEMY

Each summer during the QEP, groups of five faculty members (numbers were kept low to enable interaction and collaboration) participated in a weeklong, intensive study of how writing skills and knowledge transfer across courses and across disciplinary contexts. Faculty participants created projects to help other instructors promote transfer, and these projects were made available on the Writing@ECU website. Feedback indicates that the Advanced WAC Academy was successful in engaging faculty in the promotion of a vertical writing curriculum: 95% (18/19) of participants strongly agreed that "I will use the knowledge and materials gained in the Academy

in my classroom." A post-QEP survey suggests that participants actually did make changes: respondents indicated that their teaching practices had changed "some" (6/9) or "a lot" (3/9).

<u>OVERALL IMPACT OF FACULTY SUPPORT INITIATIVES ON SLO 3 AND SLO 5</u>
The cumulative impact of faculty support initiatives on teaching practices, particularly with regard to SLOs 3 and 5–the SLOs with the lowest pre-QEP mean scores in assessments of student writing from WI courses (see 3.1.1 above)–can be seen in some notable differences between responses to the pre– and post-QEP administrations of ECU's "Faculty Survey about Student Writing." Post-QEP survey responses revealed significant increases in the frequency with which faculty engage in pedagogical practices that promote SLO 3 and SLO 5 (Figure 6). These increases likely contributed to the observed post-QEP improvements in student writing in these areas.
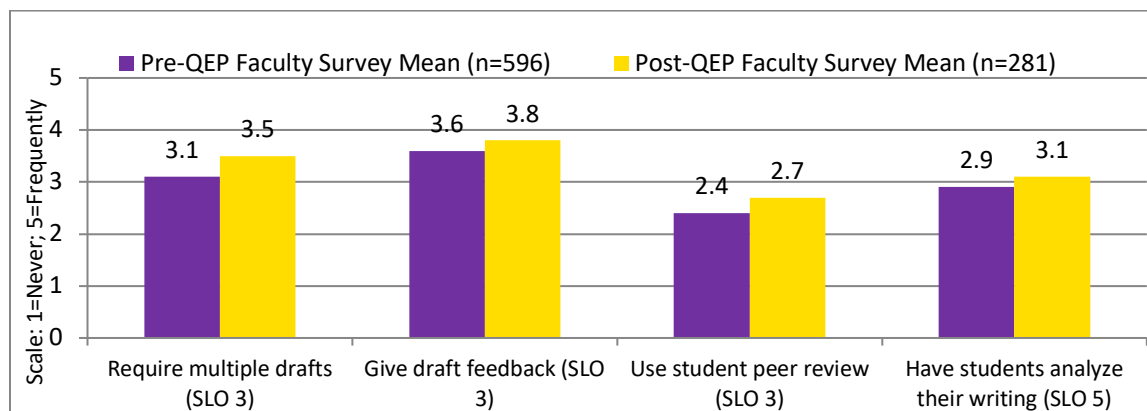

Figure 6: Faculty Frequency of Engagement in Instructional Practices

4   What ECU Has Learned From Its QEP Experience

Analysis of assessment data indicates that ECU's QEP has had a notably positive impact on student achievement in all but one SLO and has greatly improved the environment supporting student writing. The benefits of the institution-wide, cross-curricular endeavors of "Write Where You Belong" will continue to accrue as future students and faculty participate in and make use of the now-permanent programs and practices established through the QEP. The biggest lesson learned has been that a QEP is a tremendous opportunity to make far-reaching and lasting improvements that will affect student learning for years to come.

It takes a very long time, and requires difficult, recursive work, for students to develop the abilities needed to write effectively. The statistically significant increase in SLO scores noted above suggest that QEP initiatives have moved our faculty and our students in a positive direction. It is worth noting, however, that while mean scores have moved closer to 3 (or "good" as indicated on the rubric), they remained below that that threshold at the conclusion of the QEP. As the QEP initiatives continue, we anticipate that scores in all SLO areas will rise, but this will be a very gradual process. In many cases, scores of 3 or higher will only be attainable for students after they have completed advanced study or gained career experience. Our QEP thus confirms what Ann Beaufort notes in her 2007 study of undergraduate writing: "We know that writing is a complex cognitive and social activity and that the mental processes involved as well as the contextual knowledge bases that must be tapped are enormous. Writing skill is honed over a lifetime" (6).

Assessment is an exceptional venue for faculty professional development. Direct assessment of pre- and post-QEP writing samples involved 83 faculty members from 50 different undergraduate programs. In an

anonymous feedback survey completed at the end of the assessment process, many faculty reported benefiting from the experience in ways that will impact their teaching and potentially lead to curricular and/or course design changes within their programs: 67% of respondents indicated that the assessment helped them gained insight into assignment and/or curriculum design, particularly in terms of gathering assignment ideas from other academic areas and recognizing course and assignment variations, disparities, and gaps within their own areas. Three participants found the experience so beneficial that they suggested all faculty assigned to teach WI courses should participate in the assessment at least once. The QEP process for WI assessment is time consuming, but it is reflective of the actual work students do in their courses and it is beneficial to faculty who teach those courses. As a result, ECU will continue with this model for the foreseeable future.

Establishing lines of communication is essential for cross-curricular, institution-wide endeavors to succeed. Furthermore, having "champions" in strategic locations across the university is critical. Faculty efforts, such as those as made by the Writing Liaisons and by faculty who shared ideas from QEP professional development events, to educate colleagues greatly affected the success of our QEP. Writing specialists–such as the Director of Writing Foundations, the Director of the University Writing Program, and the QEP Director–can provide resources for improving writing instruction, but those resources must be embraced by faculty in order to have a notable impact. We are fortunate that many faculty at ECU embraced the QEP initiatives.

References

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Appendix A: QEP SLO Rubric for Writing-intensive Course Samples

	QEP SLO 1a	QEP SLO 1b	QEP SLO 2	QEP SLO 3	QEP SLO 4	QEP SLO 5
	Uses writing to investigate complex, relevant topics and address significant questions through engagement with and effective use of credible sources.	**Uses writing to investigate complex, relevant topics and address significant questions through engagement with and effective use of credible sources.**	**Produces writing that reflects awareness of audience, genre, and conventions of their major disciplines and/or career fields.**	**Demonstrates an understanding of writing as a process that can be made more effective through drafting and revision.**	**Proofreads and edits writing, avoiding grammatical and mechanical errors.**	**Assesses and explains the major choices made in writing.**
4 **Excellent**	Projects demonstrate the writer's ability to identify and fully engage significant questions relevant to the course. Writing maintains a consistent focus of inquiry.	Projects consistently draw on credible sources to support the points the writer makes and to help the writer achieve his or her purpose.	Projects consistently demonstrate a keen awareness of audience, genre, and conventions of the discipline/course.	The analysis clearly reflects that the writer has planned the project in multiple steps and revised thoroughly and carefully between each draft.	Projects consistently display careful proofreading and are largely free of surface-level errors.	The analysis clearly demonstrates the writer's ability to identify and explain writing choices and strategies used in projects.
3 **Good**	Projects largely demonstrate the writer's ability to engage meaningful questions relevant to the course, and the writing maintains a focus with only occasional lapses.	Projects draw on credible sources to support the writer's points and purposes, with only occasional lapses.	Projects demonstrate an awareness of audience, genre, and conventions of the discipline/course with only occasional lapses.	The analysis suggests that the writer recognizes the importance of planning and revising and has engaged to some degree in these processes, making some substantive revisions between drafts.	Projects reflect the proofreading efforts of the writer and include only occasional surface-level errors.	The analysis demonstrates the writer's ability to identify and explain writing strategies used in the projects, with only occasional areas that are confusing or incomplete.
2 **Fair (Shows promise)**	Projects demonstrate the writer's ability to engage questions relevant to the course, but in limited ways. There is a focus of inquiry, but the writing strays from that focus on several occasions.	Projects draw on credible sources to support the writer's points and purposes but do so inconsistently.	Projects demonstrate an uneven awareness of audience, genre, and conventions of the discipline/course.	The analysis suggests that the writer recognizes some benefits to planning and revising but that she/he has not fully engaged in these processes.	Projects evidence some proofreading and editing, but several surface-level errors remain.	The analysis demonstrates that the writer is sometimes able to identify and/or explain writing strategies used in the projects, but there are several areas that are confusing or incomplete.
1 **Poor**	Projects largely fail to demonstrate engagement with questions relevant to the course. The writing appears to have little focus.	Projects largely fail to draw on credible sources to support the writer's points and purposes.	Projects largely fail to demonstrate an awareness of audience, genre, and conventions of the discipline/course.	The analysis suggests that the writer composed the work largely in one draft, dedicating little, if any, time to planning or revising.	Projects reflect minimal or ineffective proofreading and editing strategies. Numerous surface-level errors remain.	The analysis largely fails to demonstrate an ability to identify and explain writing strategies in the projects.