

Focus on Undergraduate Research



2. Why Undergraduate Research?

2.1 QEP Topic Selection

In September 2006, a broadly representative QEP Topic Selection Committee was appointed to recommend a topic for the University's Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP). Throughout that fall, the UH community shared their ideas online about areas that would enhance student learning. The Committee developed a list of topics through discussions with colleges, academic committees, and student groups. Ideas were also discussed in both the Faculty Senate and Deans' annual retreats. Using the SACS guidelines as a framework, the Committee reviewed suggested topics and explored their feasibility and applicability at UH. Based on feedback from the university community, the Committee recommended that we pursue *undergraduate research* as our QEP topic, and further recommended that mentoring and writing in the disciplines be addressed within the context of undergraduate research. In January 2007, the UH SACS Leadership Team accepted the Committee's recommendation and began planning to develop, implement, and assess the QEP. The work of the QEP Topic Selection Committee is further described in Appendix B.

2.2 QEP Planning

The QEP Planning Committee also represented a broad cross-section of the University community including administrators, faculty, staff, and students. During the data gathering phase, constituencies shared their ideas on how to integrate research into the undergraduate experience, using channels including online surveys (generating several hundred responses), 16 open student forums, numerous faculty and staff meetings, and 145 preliminary faculty plans. Subcommittees were formed to review the community input within the framework of four broad categories:

1. Course-Based Research
2. Mentored Research
3. Resources and Workshops for Students and Faculty
4. Other Co-Curricular Activities

Best practices from other institutions were also considered. Appendix C further describes the work of the QEP Planning Committee, various subcommittees, and the involvement of the UH community in producing our plan.

In their own words...

"Integrating research into the undergraduate experience is an important topic if UH is to achieve its goal of becoming a top-tier research institution....UH students are fortunate to be surrounded by a wealth of opportunity in the medical, scientific, arts, and government fields."

*Nakia T. Alexander, Staff, Academic Advising
"Call for Ideas" Online QEP Survey*

2.3 Transforming the Undergraduate Experience through Research

The mission of the University of Houston is to discover and disseminate knowledge through the education of a diverse population of traditional and non-traditional students, and through research, artistic and scholarly endeavors, as it becomes the nation's premier public university in an urban setting.

Drawn to UH by its strengths as a diverse metropolitan research university, or tied to the area by social or economic factors, our students seek above all else a useful education – one that will prepare them for today's workplace and serve as a cornerstone for professional growth throughout their careers. In order for UH to secure our students' full commitment to the learning process, they must believe that what they are learning can be applied in the real world. Our student-centered Quality Enhancement Plan, the **Discovery-Based Learning Initiative**, will provide opportunities for students to develop the research-related skills they need in order to adapt and succeed – and to equip them to do so at their fullest potential.

In their own words...

"I have only one condition in making this gift. The University of Houston must always be a college for working men and women and their sons and daughters. If it were to be another rich man's college, I would not be interested."

*Philanthropist Hugh Roy Cullen,
on the occasion of the first of many Cullen
family contributions to the University*

Whether through course-based assignments or mentored projects, our plan to expand undergraduate research experiences includes a robust interdisciplinary approach to study and inquiry, beginning early in our students' academic careers and continuing throughout, so that upon graduation they are equipped with the broad range of skills necessary to compete in an unpredictable world. The research experiences that our QEP fosters will enhance student learning by challenging them to think critically, creatively, and ethically; to explore topics that interest them; to manage projects; to work collaboratively; and to communicate using a variety of media to diverse audiences. Our QEP facilitates the practice and refining of these skills by encouraging faculty to engage students in research projects on and off campus. By their very nature, research projects require students to familiarize themselves with university resources through interaction with faculty, fellow students, and institutional resources in a way that fosters engagement, camaraderie, and a sense of belonging – the very elements that are often cited by transfer students as missing in their university experience.

Our QEP connects the education and research missions of our university. In keeping with our mission, the QEP provides resources and opportunities for all students – traditional and non-traditional – regardless of academic background or social circumstances. Moreover, our QEP reinforces the link between UH and our dynamic and vibrant metropolitan city, connecting students to Houston's many resources while engaging corporate and community organizations. By renewing our commitment to student learning and increasing student engagement with faculty and the community, our QEP will help us deliver the education students seek and employers value.