

# Communication Fluency Across the Curriculum: Integrating Writing, Speaking, and Technology

## I. The What: Definition of the QEP

Communication fluency, that is, the integration of writing, speaking, and use of technology across the curriculum, and over the Converse College student's four-year experience, is a conscious effort to enhance student learning by moving away from the compartmentalization of these valuable skills and toward refocusing them as an integral part of the entire curriculum.

By student learning within the context of our Quality Enhancement Plan we mean the ability to communicate effectively in written, oral, and technological form. Indeed, without effective use of each of these skills there is an inevitable breakdown in sharing ideas, insights, and information. Clarity, accuracy, and basic understanding are at stake.

We expect a degree of mastery of those skills and consider them an essential part of any course. Nevertheless, we also have the tendency to assume that they have been *taken care of* elsewhere rather than keeping them clearly in focus within each course taught. This is especially true when there are particular required courses like *English 101—Composition*, *Computer Science 101—Computer Literacy*, and *Theatre 120—Public Speaking*. It is all too easy to assume that simply by completing these classes, or by exempting them, that these skills need no further emphasis. Converse's choice for its QEP seeks to change that common perspective.

## II. The Why: The development of the QEP

In order to understand the genesis of the College's QEP it is useful to go back in time a few years.

The most recent significant adjustments to the College's General Education Program (GEP) went into effect in fall, 2000 (see **Appendix A. for an outline of the current GEP**). Among the changes made was the addition of *Computer Science 101: Computer Literacy* and *Theatre 120: Public Speaking* as required courses in *Category I: Competencies*. Although six credit hours were added to the GEP, this was seen as a quick, direct, and effective way of addressing perceived deficiencies in those skill areas. These courses also seemed to connect directly to stated goals 3—*demonstrate effective oral communication*—and 8—*experience and understand the role of technology in society*—of the GEP. In subsequent years an increasing number of incoming students began exempting one or both requirements, primarily by high school record or by exemption exams administered here. Consequently, over time we have offered fewer sections of these courses.

English composition has been a requirement in *Category I: Competencies* of the GEP for many years and relates particularly to stated goal 4—*demonstrate effective written communication*. The only ways of exempting this course are by Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, or by very high SAT/ACT scores. Generally, no more than a dozen students actually exempt in a given year. And since the majority does need the course to fulfill graduation

requirements, priority is given in the first semester to incoming students with lower test scores. Better prepared students have the option of taking the class whenever they choose.

Thus, while there has been clear recognition of the importance of these basic skills, we can say that there also has been an unfortunate tendency to assume that simply by taking that particular class or by exempting it, checking off a box as it were, the skill had been mastered. Further emphasis on them was not generally and actively considered.

### **National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) Results**

As the graphs presented in **Appendix B** indicate, Converse students tend to lag slightly behind those of other women's colleges in the three areas of communication. This difference is more apparent for first year students than for seniors, but indicates opportunities for improvement. The four NSSE questions used for comparison are:

1. *Made a class presentation.*
2. *Prepared two or more drafts of a paper or assignment before turning it in.*
3. *Worked on a paper or project that required integrating ideas or information from various sources.*
4. *Used an electronic medium (listserv, chat group, Internet, instant messaging, etc.) to discuss or complete an assignment.*

Although Converse first-year students tend to lag the other women's colleges, by the time they are seniors their results are closer to those of the benchmark group. The NSSE results indicate some possible avenues for improvement for Converse's General Education Program so that the College can meet and/or exceed the results for other women's colleges.

### **General Education Review**

Converse College faculty members began moving forward on a complete General Education Program review/revision in mid-2003. Since then the Curricular Programs Committee, augmented by faculty members not part of the Committee but particularly interested in the GEP review process, has met on a regular basis to discuss the goals of the GEP and plan for possible revisions.

In the first stage of the Committee's review, members were asked to put aside questions of which specific courses might be added to or deleted from the GEP and instead focus on the goals of general education at Converse. Committee members read a number of studies of general education programs, their review, revision, and assessment, including the series of essays, *Changing General Education Curriculum* (edited by Ratcliff, Johnson, and Gaff, 2004), using the experiences of other institutions as they considered possible revisions to Converse's program. GEP programs at both competitor and aspirant colleges and universities were compared with Converse's program. In several cases, detailed comparisons between our GEP and the programs of other institutions were made.

Committee members discussed various general education goals, at length and in detail, and interviewed fellow Converse faculty members regarding the GEP goals, reporting the results of the interviews back to the Committee. As a result of this first stage of strategic review, we concluded that our GEP should seek to improve:

1. **Oral and written communication**
2. **Critical thinking skills**
3. **Quantitative reasoning skills**
4. **Appreciation of creativity/creative expression**
5. **Understanding of international/global perspectives**
6. **Awareness of wellness and healthy lifestyles.**

The Committee also considered a number of goals as ways of approaching our general themes. These goals include including interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary approaches to learning, providing for experiential or service learning, considering ethical issues in the academic disciplines and in society, appreciating cultural diversity, and promoting leadership skills. This second set of goals reflects our current goals statement (in the *Converse College Catalog*) as well as the Committee's review of that statement.

In moving forward from the identification of GEP goals, the Committee was guided by the need for clarity, coherence, cognitive skill development, and content education in our GEP. We also sought to provide a relatively uniform experience for all of our students, create additional room for elective courses, and minimize the extent to which the GEP structure was justified by the promotion of "turf protection" for certain courses or areas. Instead of a menu approach that sought to satisfy desires for enrollment in certain courses or area, the Committee kept the following question at the center of every discussion: How does any proposed revision promote what *our students need* in general education?

During this review process, the College **initially** identified the GEP review process itself as the best subject for the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) required by our regional accreditor, SACS, as part of our upcoming accreditation review. We then considered the need for consultant help to allow us to combine the GEP review and QEP creation processes in a way that would meet the goals of our GEP and satisfy the requirements of SACS.

In September 2005, the Committee engaged the services of a general education consultant, Dr. David Gillespie, a long-time chief academic officer at Presbyterian College who had led that college's most recent general education revision. Dr. Gillespie reviewed our work to that point and visited campus in October 2005, meeting with the Committee and with many members of the faculty and with other members of the Converse community.

During the time that Dr. Gillespie was preparing his report, the SACS Leadership Team (Ms. Elizabeth A. Fleming, President of the College; Dr. Thomas R. McDaniel, Senior Vice President and SACS liaison; Dr. Jeffrey H. Barker, Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean of the College of Arts & Sciences; Mrs. Judy D. Folk, Director of I.T.S.; Dr. B. Brant Bynum, Associate Dean of Arts & Sciences; Ms. Ann M. Pletcher, Director of Institutional Research) made the trip to Atlanta to attend the Annual Meeting of the Commission on Colleges of the

Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. The trip was planned to allow team members to gain as much insight as possible regarding the requirements and expectations of SACS. Dr. Bynum was chosen to attend sessions specifically dealing with aspects of the QEP since he along with Dr. Barker had been leading the GEP deliberations of the Curriculum Committee.

### **QEP Decision**

It became increasingly clear during those sessions that Converse's choice of the GEP review for its QEP was far too broad, and indeed unacceptable. The QEP had to be much more narrowly focused. Fortunately, however, the careful work being done on the GEP and the direction the Curriculum Committee was heading provided several excellent possibilities for a new QEP. The Leadership Team came away from the conference with three strong ideas and sent them to Dr. Gillespie. In his final report, Dr. Gillespie commended the College on its work to that point and endorsed the idea of narrowing the focus on the QEP to one of the elements of the GEP review **(for the full report see Appendix C)**.

At its last meeting of the fall 2005, semester Dr. Bynum detailed the information gleaned from the conference and relayed the consultant's comments to the Curriculum Committee. It was decided that the committee was at the ideal place in the GEP revision process to allow the QEP proposal to branch off and, in a sense, take on a life of its own. The GEP review would continue while being closely paralleled by the development of the College's QEP. And of the three proposals there was a strong preference for *Communication Fluency* since it seemed to complement so well the committee's thoughts and decisions to that point.

A QEP proposing the enhancement of the basic skills of writing, speaking and use of technology across the curriculum firmly supported the general desire for less compartmentalization and more integration in the GEP. The speaking and technology components of the QEP proposal would address the idea of removing two courses—Computer Literacy and Public Speaking—as specific requirements of the old GEP. The writing element would also expand this skill beyond English 101—Composition. Thus, by the end of 2005, *Communication Fluency* was moving forward as a first choice for the QEP.

The SACS Steering Committee was organized in early 2006, along with three subcommittees including the QEP Review subcommittee (Dr. Brant Bynum, Associate Dean of Arts & Sciences, Chair; Dr. John Theilmann, Professor of History & Politics and Co-Director of the Nisbet Honors Program; Dr. Douglas Jensen, Assistant Professor of Biology and Chair of the Biology Department; Ms. Teresa Prater, Charles A. Dana Professor of Studio Art and Chair of the Department of Art & Design; Ms. Brianne Cross, student representative). And at its first meeting the subcommittee unanimously endorsed *Communication Fluency* for the College's Quality Enhancement Plan.

Throughout the spring term the proposed QEP was presented and subsequently applauded or endorsed by campus constituencies including the SACS Steering Committee, the Academic Dean's Council, the Faculty Senate, the Faculty, the Student Government Association Senate and both the Academic Affairs subcommittee of the Board of Trustees and the full Board of Trustees.

Additional meetings with students took place in the fall as well as a meeting with the division-wide student life staff. Obviously, with such positive support the QEP proposal was adopted.

### **III. The How: The GEP Proposal from the Curricular Programs Committee with the Quality Enhancement Plan integrated within**

The Curricular Programs Committee submitted a revised General Education Program for consideration by faculty members, students, and other members of the community in late spring 2006. Several meetings were held with faculty at that time and again in the fall, along with separate meetings with students to discuss the various aspects of the proposal. The proposal that incorporated revisions generated by those meetings was then brought to the Faculty Senate in early October. The Senate approved the proposal with minor changes on November 2, and sent it to the faculty as a whole for a vote on November 7, seeking implementation of the final GEP plan in fall 2007. All but three aspects of the proposal were approved at the meeting. A new GEP was thereby finalized.

The “new” GEP reduces the total number of courses required for the average student while structuring the program so as to meet the goals identified in our GEP review. Some major changes from former requirements include:

1. The Computer Literacy and Public Speaking requirements met under the former program by separate courses are integrated into other courses. (See I.A. 1,2, I.C. 2, III.A.,B., below)
2. Students will be required to take a course in the major that has been designated as *Writing Intensive*. This is not a requirement for a separate course but a graduation requirement that must be met within existing courses.
3. Our Course Management System (WebCT) will be encouraged in the required composition, intensive writing courses, and in one of the Quantitative Course requirements.
4. American Sign Language will be included as one way of meeting the *Language and Culture* requirement.
5. The *Language and Culture* requirement will require students to accomplish proficiency at the third semester (201 or equivalent) level rather than at the fourth semester level.
6. At least one course in the GEP must have a significant component that studies non-European or North American (excluding Mexican) content. As with the Writing Intensive requirement, this is not a requirement for a separate course but a graduation requirement that must be met within existing courses.
7. Students are required to take a new, 2-hour wellness course with a fitness component (adapted from current PE courses) and one 1- or 2-hour course from among PE and Dance options, rather than the current two-course physical activity requirement.

8. While the proposal envisioned a new First Year Seminar (FYS) program, replacing the Ideas and Culture (IDC) program, the faculty strongly reaffirmed its preference for and commitment to the two-course IDC program as the invaluable interdisciplinary core of a Converse education in general and of the GEP in particular. Therefore, the IDC program will now incorporate the three QEP elements in the course design. (See below for details.)
  
9. A Capstone course in the major will be required. Each Capstone course will incorporate the three QEP elements in the course design. We will assess progress on the three QEP elements in the first/second year, with IDC, and in the final year, with the Capstone course, allowing us to assess progress in the three areas of the QEP. As with the Writing Intensive and non-Western requirements, the Capstone experience is not a requirement for a separate course but a graduation requirement that must be met within existing courses.

Here are the three designated areas of the new GEP:

<u>Area</u>	<u>Requirement</u>	<u>Course Details/ Min-Max hours</u>	<u>Notes</u>
I. SKILLS (formerly “Competencies”)			
	A. <u>Written Communication</u>		
		1. ENG 101: Composition (exemption possible)/0-3	Now to include basic use of word processing and web-based research (could include WebCT), from old computer literacy requirement
		2. One Writing Intensive Course—graduation requirement, not separate course, completed in upper division course designated within major (to be approved by CPC)/0	Minimum criterion for Writing Intensive designation is some form of multiple draft/writing revision in course consistent with standards of the discipline. Must include computer use.

<u>Area</u>	<u>Requirement</u>	<u>Course Details/ Min-Max hours</u>	<u>Notes</u>
	<u>B. Language and Culture</u>		
		1. Proficiency at third semester (201) level, satisfied by 101, 102, 201, OR 102, 201, OR 201 or equivalent, or exemption/0-9	Now to include ASL
		2. At least one non-European/Anglophone North American course—graduation requirement, not separate course.	All courses meeting this requirement to be approved by Curricular Programs Committee
	<u>C. Quantitative Reasoning</u>		
		1. Math 108 or higher-level Math course (exemption possible)/0-4	
		2. One course making substantial use of mathematical, logical, or computational reasoning in course(to be approved by CPC)/3-4	Could include courses in computer science, statistics, accounting, logic and critical thinking, physics, economics, finance, math or other courses as approved by the CPC. Must include use of relevant software, from old computer literacy requirement

<b><u>Area</u></b>	<b><u>Requirement</u></b>	<b><u>Course Details/ Min-Max hours</u></b>	<b><u>Notes</u></b>
	D. Health and Well-Being		
		One 2-hour wellness course plus One 1 or 2-hour activity course from among PE or Dance/0-4	New wellness courses to be designed, each with fitness component. Converse II students continue to be exempt from requirement. Activity course exemption for participation in intercollegiate sport to be maintained.
<b>II. PERSPECTIVES</b>			
	A. Humanities		
		Two courses, selected from two different disciplines/6-8	History, Religion, Philosophy, Women's Studies 200
	B. Literature	One course/3-4	
	C. Fine Arts		
		Two courses, selected from two different disciplines/6-8	Art, Theater, Music, Film, History of Dance
	C. Natural Sciences		
		Two courses, selected from two different disciplines (not including CSC). At least one course must be a lab science/7-8	Biology, Chemistry, Physics (Special requirements for students seeking teacher certification to be maintained)
	D. Social Sciences		
		Two courses, selected from two different disciplines/6-8	Politics, Economics, Psychology, Sociology

<u>Area</u>	<u>Requirement</u>	<u>Course Details/ Min-Max hours</u>	<u>Notes</u>
III. EXPLORATION AND INTEGRATION			
	A. Ideas and Culture Program		
		Two courses, to be completed by the end of the sophomore year/6	Each IDC course (150 & 151) must include the three QEP elements (writing, public speaking, technology) plus QEP assessment component (Exemption for transfers with 24 or more credit hours.)
	B. Capstone Experience		
		One course in major; grad requirement, not a separate course (senior seminar most likely course)/0 additional	Must include three QEP elements and QEP assessment component

**Absolute Minimum:** 31 hours, with all possible exemptions (current: 35) For advising purposes, the minimum, without exemptions, is **43**, with student placing at 201-level in foreign language (current: 52 if student is placed at 202 level in foreign language or 61 if student is placed at 101 level in foreign language).

**Maximum:** 66 hours with 4-credit courses used everywhere possible and 4 credits total in Health and Well-being; 50 with all 3-credit except lab science and 4 credits total in Health and Well-being (current: 67, with 4-credit courses wherever possible)

Several provisions of the current GEP will remain in place. For example, the requirement that at least two courses from Part II be at or above the 200 level will remain. We will also continue to allow students to count courses for both GEP credit and to satisfy requirements in their major(s), minor(s), or in a career preparation area.

### **Computer Literacy and Public Speaking**

The new GEP drops two general education courses: Computer Literacy and Public Speaking. As is indicated above we consider these to be important skills that are necessary for the success

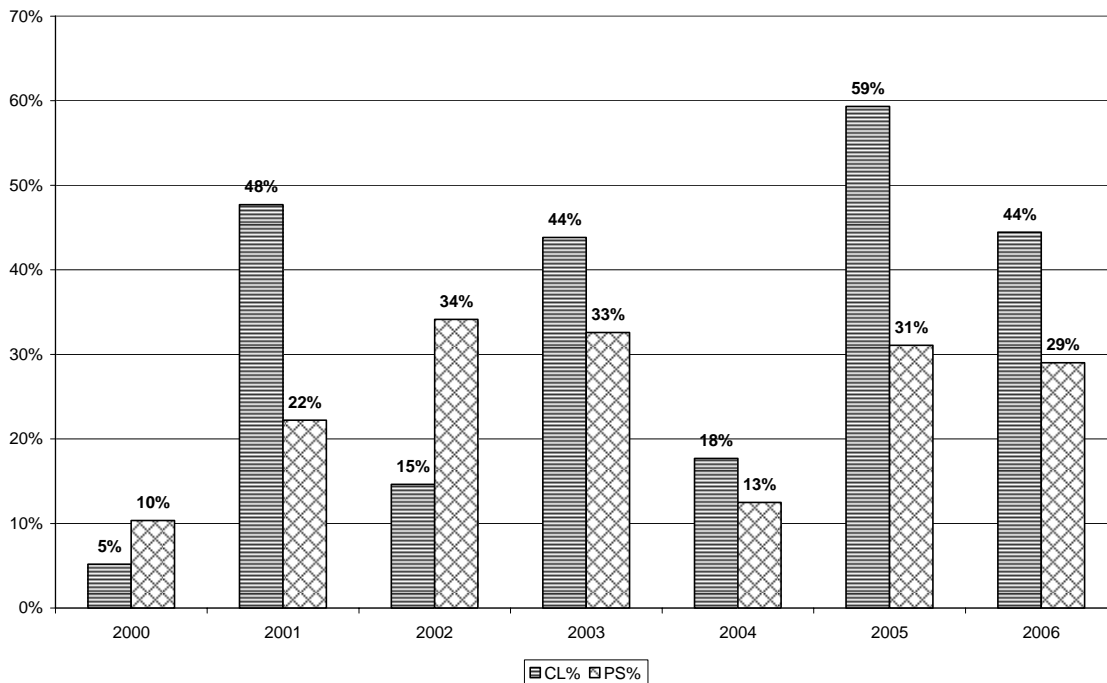
of our students, but the faculty believes that these skills can be better gained through a more applied and integrated approach.

The computer literacy and public speaking courses were instituted as general education requirements to fill a need for the development of these skills in our student body. The public speaking requirement involved a student's ability to express herself verbally in a variety of settings, while developing a measure of poise and self-assurance. The course helped to provide these skills but did not fully integrate them into the curriculum. The computer literacy requirement enabled students to develop skills in word processing, spreadsheets, PowerPoint presentations, and web searches. Again, the course developed useful skills, but they were not always integrated into other coursework.

As mentioned earlier, over time, more students have come to Converse already possessing a basic knowledge of these skills. We have always exempted some students from these classes based on high school coursework, by their passing exemption exams, or by evidence of skill development achieved in other venues such as participation the Converse Model League of Arab States or the South Carolina Student Legislature teams for public speaking. Over time more students have been able to demonstrate mastery without taking the specially designated courses.

The graph below indicates the percentage of entering classes gaining exemption via high school coursework. As the graph indicates, an increasing number of students are exempting the requirements, especially the computer literacy requirement.

**Computer Literacy and Public Speaking Exemptions at Entry**



Despite the generally increasing numbers of entering students with acknowledged experience in public speaking and computer literacy, the QEP seeks to further enhance effective communication. Continuing to focus on writing, speaking and use of technology can only serve to strengthen the student's ability to express, present, and organize material orally, visually, and on the written page.

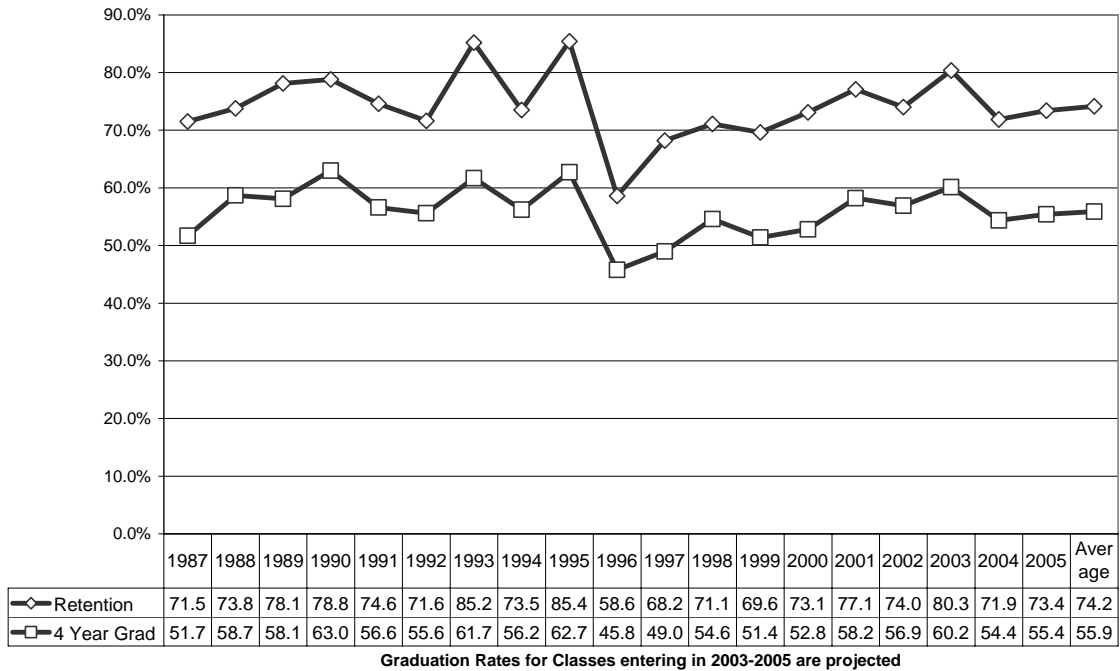
### **Retention and Graduation**

An important aspect of enhancing student learning is for students to complete the full Converse experience. Improving student persistence as measured by retention and graduation rates has several benefits for our students and for the institution.

As will be detailed below, the development of the new Ideas and Culture sequence enables Converse to implement an academic "first year experience." Research has shown that students who undertake first year experiences tend to bond to the institution and have higher retention and graduation rates than those who do not. Although improving persistence rates is a subsidiary goal, it is clearly one that flows from the academic goals encompassed in the QEP.

The following graph compares the freshman-sophomore and four- year graduation rates over time. Although Converse retention and graduation rates are respectable in comparison with our benchmark groups as the following two graphs indicate, we should be able to do better. Converse's first to second year retention rate for 2003-4 is comparable to the average rate for its two benchmark groups (the southeastern women's college group and the larger group that includes the women's colleges as well as eight additional schools). The six-year graduation rate for the cohort entering in fall 1999 is 57% for Converse, 60% for the overall benchmark group, and 59% for the southeastern women's college group.

### Retention & Graduation Rates



Students do not return for their sophomore year or fail to graduate for a variety of reasons. One of those reasons is a failure to identify with the institution. We have explored several components of these decisions over time. In addition, discussion has often centered on enhancing first-year experiences.

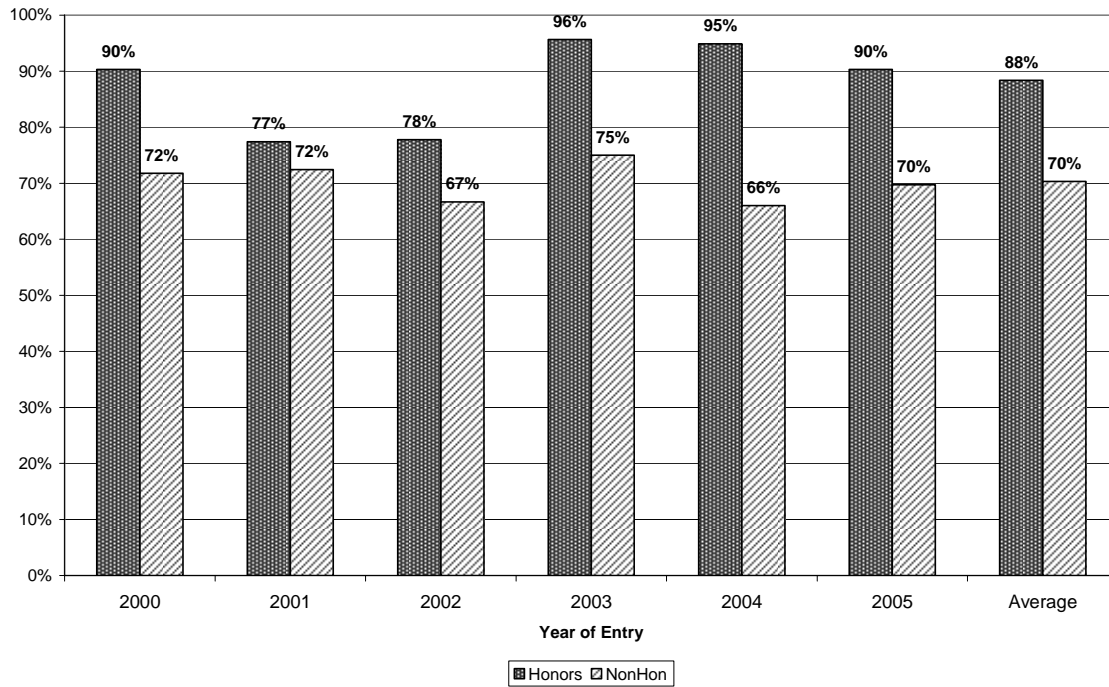
One analysis compared the retention and graduation rates of students in our relatively new Nisbet Honors Program with those of students not in the honors program. The comparison, found in the graph below, of the freshman-sophomore retention rates of honors and non-honors students indicates that honors students have a markedly higher retention rate than non-honors students. The difference in the average retention rates is eighteen percent, a substantial difference. The next graph compares the four-year graduation rates of honors and non-honors students and again shows a substantial difference.

There are a variety of reasons for the differences in retention and graduation rates indicated on the graphs below. One important difference in how the College interacts with the students is that all honors students take a freshman honors seminar with limited enrollment. In addition to promoting intellectual achievement these seminars encourage honor students, through both in-class and out-of-class interactions, to bond with each other and with the College.

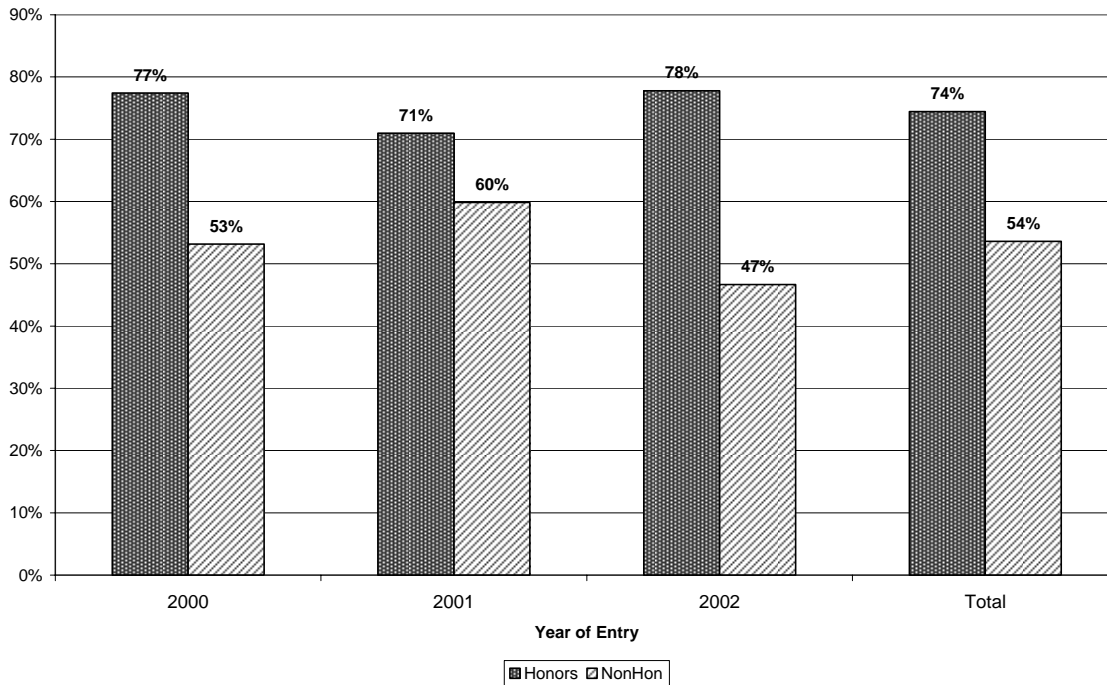
The bonding experience of the freshman honors seminars is not by itself an explanation of the differences in retention and graduation rates. It is, however, indicative of an important difference between honors and non-honors students. We believe that the freshman honors experience can be modified so as to provide something similar for non-honors students by requiring the Ideas and Culture sequence that incorporates the QEP to be completed within the student's first two years.

The newly revised Ideas and Culture sequence will include components designed to enhance the first-year experience of Converse students with the goal of improving retention and graduation rates so as to near the levels of honors students.

**Freshman-Sophomore Retention Rate, Honors and Non Honors Students**



### Four Year Graduation Rate



In summary, the newly revised General Education Program will incorporate the following goals related to the QEP that move beyond course subject content:

1. Enhance student ability to communicate in written form.
2. Enhance student ability to communicate in oral fashion.
3. Enhance student ability to use computer technology.
4. Integrate these skills into all coursework.
5. Improve student persistence as measured by retention and graduation rates.

#### **IV. The Who: Target groups for QEP assessment.**

There are three target groups for assessment. 1) The traditional-age freshmen to senior cohort that makes up the largest percentage of the Converse student population. 2) Transfer students who may or may not be classified as freshmen depending on the total number of transfer credit hours awarded. 3) Converse II students who are those 24 years of age or older who are either beginning or returning to college. Each of these student populations will be required to take both the IDC sequence and capstone experience in their major thus making it possible to assess their mastery of the QEP skills accurately.

## **V. The Where:**

### **A. Beginning: The “New” Ideas and Culture Program**

The Ideas and Culture program seeks to help students tie together the different parts of their education at Converse. It examines great ideas that have shaped human life in their historical and cultural contexts. The study of these ideas constitutes the basis for the liberal arts and involves approaches from all the major disciplines: philosophy, religion, history, economics, science and mathematics, music and art. These ideas are studied not only to gain insight into the minds and civilizations that articulated them, but also because they form the fundamental alternatives upon which any reflective person must ground his or her life. IDC 150 examines the scriptural, literary, and philosophic foundations of our world through the Middle Ages. IDC 151 examines the movements of revolution and reform in religion, science, philosophy, music and art, literature and politics that have shaped the modern world since the Renaissance and Protestant Reformation.

In both IDC 150 and 151 specific content objectives and student outcomes are expected. They include the ability to:

1. Demonstrate a basic grasp of history, geography, and chronology of events.
2. Demonstrate a general understanding of the great philosophic, religious, and cultural ideas that have shaped our world.
3. Demonstrate an understanding of the connections across the major disciplines of the liberal arts and sciences.
4. Demonstrate enhanced critical thinking skills in cultivating open-minded and mature reflection about one’s own life and the world in which we live.

This two-course sequence has been reaffirmed as the core of a Converse College education, experienced by virtually all students. Too, it is required to be completed by the end of the sophomore year. As such it is also the ideal place to incorporate the QEP plan both deliberately and effectively at the beginning of what will be a longitudinal assessment of oral, written, and technological communication skills (related to GEP goal #1). By including specific assessment-related assignments (to be determined) along with an outside assessment instrument (to be determined) we will be able to have a clear picture of student’s abilities in these areas at or near the beginning of their college careers.

As part of the “new” IDC program there will be a number of administrative changes:

Effective spring 2007:

1. IDC curriculum and policy will be established by a newly-created IDC Committee, which has been appointed by the Vice President of Academic Affairs, working with the Faculty Senate. This committee will work with the IDC Director to set the common curriculum

for the courses, review the curriculum on a periodic basis, make any changes to the courses and assist in the assessment of the program as a whole. The committee will provide guidance to the IDC director and the Vice President for Academic Affairs on the selection of IDC faculty. All decisions of the committee will be made by simple majority vote.

Effective fall 2007:

1. All IDC sections will be taught by full-time members of the regular faculty in their regular course load. Generally, there will be no adjunct or overload funds provided for IDC instruction.

*Rationale:* In the past IDC operated with a significant percentage of adjunct and overload support. This deprived our students of the experience and knowledge of some of our best faculty. This also contributed to uneven quality among IDC sections and to the sense on the part of some faculty and students that full-time Converse faculty were not willing to give the program real support.

2. All IDC sections will be limited to no more than 15 students each.

*Rationale:* Close attention must be given to IDC students in order to generate the type of discussion and activities merited by a program that has been argued to be a key part of our liberal arts experience.

3. Each IDC section will receive a small supplemental budget (\$250 per section) to fund curricular and related activities within that section. The funds may be used for low-cost trips, guest speakers, lunches, coffeehouse gatherings, etc., that enhance the learning environment. The IDC program as a whole will continue to receive administrative support for development activities.

*Rationale:* Again, IDC must be given as much support as possible in order that it fulfill the mission assigned to it in the GEP.

4. The three QEP elements—writing, public speaking, use of technology—will be incorporated into each section of IDC. The new IDC committee must design (by February 15, 2007) common IDC assignments that provide assessable experiences in each area. In the area of public speaking, this will include classroom presentations by students. Limiting sections to no more than fifteen students each will allow students to make classroom presentations.

5. Students must complete both GEP courses by the end of their sophomore year.

*Rationale for 4&5:* The QEP elements must be put in a place where they will have a demonstrable effect on the experiences of our students. Further, we need to be able to assess the QEP elements near the beginning of our student's college experience and near the end.

With very few exceptions, IDC is a common experience for our students and the only truly common experience for the vast majority of those students. Thus, IDC is the logical place to focus our QEP, and the first two years is the logical time.

In summary the “new” IDC program will:

1. Have a part-time faculty director to coordinate the program.
2. Enroll no more than 15 students in each section in order to focus on the special academic experience of a small seminar-style course.
3. **Include the three elements of the QEP (writing, public speaking, and use of technology) in a way that meets the academic needs of the course and in a way that can be assessed for comparison with accomplishments in the senior Capstone course.**
4. Give professors access to a small budget for co-curricular and extracurricular activities, lunches or coffee house visits, or other activities that enrich the learning experience.
5. Be required of all students with either their freshman (preferred) or sophomore (logistically necessary) year, except transfer students with twenty-four or more transfer credit hours.
6. Preserve from the IDC structure a common meeting time once each term, with special speakers, performers, etc., providing material for such events.
7. Include women’s studies elements wherever appropriate.  
(see **Appendix D. for a course template**)

In addition to the academic experience of IDC, there is recognition of the need to structure this common GEP experience so as to promote strong retention at both the freshman and sophomore level. By requiring all students to complete the sequence by the end of the sophomore year IDC will have the opportunity to help students focus on becoming part of the Converse community through the smaller community they build with faculty members and their fellow IDC students. Both in the classroom and in the possible experiences outside of the classroom, students will have the chance to see academic role models and form bonds with fellow students.

### **B. Middle: Intentionally including the QEP elements throughout the curriculum**

Faculty will be encouraged to be more intentional in incorporating the skills encompassed within the QEP into the broad spectrum of courses offered in the GEP and in the major programs. Clarity of expression through writing, speaking, and use of technology should be a fundamental component of every course, coupled with the rationale that any and all focus on these skills moves students toward improvement. A new program in bibliographic instruction, integrated into

the College's required composition course beginning in fall 2007, will place a special emphasis on key elements of writing and computer-based research skills.

In addition, there is great potential for incorporating these skills in a meaningful way within a number of co-curricular areas and activities. In particular, the Julia Jones Daniel Center for Leadership and Service is an ideal program for this effort. Indeed, Converse has recently received a grant from the Teagle Foundation in support of value-added assessment directly connected with the activities of the Daniel Center.

### **C. Ending/Completion: The Senior Capstone Experience**

The QEP will be incorporated within the newly required senior capstone experience within the major. A number of senior seminars in the College's majors are already in place, with the goal of synthesizing and/or analyzing the knowledge gained within a particular discipline. However, every major will need to require a capstone course beginning in fall 2007. Embedding the Quality Enhancement Plan within the senior capstone will allow for the longitudinal assessment of the QEP as we determine the success of integrating these skills within the curriculum. Needless to say, a complete longitudinal assessment of the Quality Enhancement Plan cannot be implemented until the 2010/2011 academic year when the students who enter in fall 2007, graduate.

### **D. Resources**

The integration of the elements of the Quality Enhancement Plan within the curriculum will require a moderate funding commitment. We will need and have made a commitment to provide the following:

<u>Resources</u>	<u>Funding Level and Interval</u>	<u>Funding Sources</u>
1. Internal and external assessment instruments to evaluate student learning outcomes at each point in the QEP cycle, to include <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. The administration of NSSE</li> <li>b. Internally developed QEP assessment surveys for students, faculty, and departments</li> <li>c. Focus groups</li> <li>d. A Senior Survey</li> </ul>	\$ 6,000 per year	a) Converse College operating funds, including Institutional Research Office budget; b) funds from Teagle Consortium Grant, "Revealing the Value Added of Liberal Arts: Assessing the Institutional Culture of Creativity and Collaboration and its Impact on Learning Outcomes" (2006-2009)

<b><u>Resources</u></b>	<b><u>Funding Level and Interval</u></b>	<b><u>Funding Sources</u></b>
2. Professional development, to include <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. On-site workshops with outside facilitators to develop instructional and assessment expertise in faculty and administrative support staff</li> <li>b. Support for off-site professional development conferences and workshops</li> </ul>	\$ 4,000 per year	a) Converse College operating funds, including Faculty Development Fund, Faculty Excellence Fund, and Faculty Travel Fund; b) funds from Teagle Consortium Grant, “Revealing the Value Added of Liberal Arts: Assessing the Institutional Culture of Creativity and Collaboration and its Impact on Learning Outcomes” (2006-2009)
3. Budget for each Ideas and Culture class section for class activities	\$ 5,000-5,500 per year (20-22 sections per year, funded at \$250 per section)	Converse College operating budget (funds recovered from reduction of adjunct usage in Ideas and Culture program)
4. Technology support for QEP elements in courses, including <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Digital video cameras to record presentations</li> <li>b. Peripheral equipment and technology consumables to support classroom technology</li> </ul>	\$ 3,000 per year in equipment acquisition, peripheral and consumable support	Converse College operating budget
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$18,000-18,500 per year</b>	<b>Existing and supplemented internal operating budgets and grant support</b>

## **VI. The Nitty Gritty: Assessment and Evaluation**

Evaluation is part of a dynamic process of planning, implementation, assessment, and feedback. This process is a continuous one designed to improve initiatives dedicated to enhancing student learning and achievement at Converse.

The accomplishment of the five goals of the revised IDC seminars and senior capstone experiences will be evaluated on a regular basis and, when necessary, program modifications will be made. As detailed above, the five goals are:

1. Enhance student written communication.
2. Enhance student ability to communicate in oral fashion
3. Enhance student ability to use computer technology.
4. Integrate these skills into major coursework.
5. Improve student persistence as measured by retention and graduation rates.

Planning is currently underway by the Ideas and Culture Committee for the first stage for the accomplishment of these goals: the revision of Ideas and Culture courses (IDC 150, IDC 151). The revised IDC 150 and IDC 151 will be taught during the 2007-08 academic year and may be modified based on assessment carried out for these classes. Goals for both of these courses will include means for measuring the accomplishment of goals 1-3. Students in both courses will be expected to complete projects in which they demonstrate competence in writing ability, oral communication, and computer technology. The courses will be designed so as to integrate these skills into the process of content mastery.

### **Evaluation Process**

The Ideas and Culture committee will develop standards for evaluating student performance that will be incorporated into the design of IDC 150 and IDC 151. Furthermore, the committee will consult with appropriate faculty representing the three areas of the QEP to ensure the development of effective evaluation measures. The first stage of assessment follows the completion of IDC 151. At that point an evaluation of the accomplishment of goals 1-3 will be undertaken.

Instructors will collect work from students that is indicative of student mastery of the first three goals. After students complete both courses in the sequence a representative sample of their work and instructor evaluations from both courses will be compared by the QEP committee. At least eighty percent of the students who complete the projects in both courses will be expected to show improvement in oral communication, use of computer technology, and written communication from the first to the second course. Instructors teaching IDC 150 and IDC 151 will prepare summaries of student progress in accomplishing goals 1-3. These reports will be submitted in timely fashion to the Associate Dean of Arts and Sciences.

Starting with the 2010/11 academic year all traditional-age Converse undergraduate students will be expected to complete a capstone experience in their major. This experience will vary depending on the disciplines involved. In many cases it will be a capstone senior seminar, but may also involve a performance, or the creation of a body of artwork. Based on their IDC courses, major courses, and the senior capstone experience, students will be expected to be able to show their ability to integrate aspects of Goals 1-3 into their major with the senior capstone experience. In all cases the senior experience will involve the assessment of student learning for the first four goals detailed above.

Because of scheduling issues, not all students will be able to take the IDC sequence in their first year at Converse. This situation will pose a challenge to fully evaluating the accomplishment of goal 5. However, it will be possible to compare the freshman-sophomore retention rates of

students who complete the IDC sequence during their first year with those students who do not do so.

Student retention is motivated by a variety of factors and it is postulated that completion of the IDC classes is only one part of student retention. Nonetheless, starting in Fall 2009, it will be possible to compare freshman-sophomore retention of those first year students who entered in Fall 2007 and who took the IDC sequence during the 2007-08 school with those who took the course during the 2008-09 academic year. Comparisons will also be made with past retention data and benchmark groups. This will be an ongoing comparative process.

The QEP committee in consultation with major departments will establish overall rubrics for evaluating goals 1-4 in the senior major capstone experiences. Individual departments will devise means to measure the accomplishment of these goals as they reflect the goals of their disciplines. In particular, departments will devise measures for assessing the success of their students in integrating computer skills and oral communication skills into the competencies required for the majors.

Different disciplines will undertake the process of evaluation in different fashions. In some fields a student will be expected to complete a seminar paper that indicates her mastery of the discipline and indicates mastery of computer skills such as web searches, word processing and spreadsheets use. In this case she would be expected to present her findings orally, perhaps using a software presentation package. In art, on the other hand, a student might prepare a gallery talk and paper, based partially on internet research. In sum, the student will be expected to integrate the skills developed in earlier coursework into her major. Although different majors make use of computer technology in differing fashions, students will be expected to demonstrate mastery of technology skills that are appropriate to her major.

Department chairs will collect examples of student work in capstone experiences, and the QEP committee will compare a sample of student accomplishments in regard to the first three goals with those from the IDC classes. Departments will also devise appropriate measures of student integration of the first three goals as a measure of goal 4. Department chairs will submit reports regarding student accomplishment of goals 1-4 in timely fashion to the Associate Dean for Arts and Sciences. The first comparison of freshman-senior accomplishment will be made during the 2010-11 academic year.

During the spring term of the 2010-11 academic year, the director of institutional research will survey seniors regarding their perceptions of their abilities to integrate computer technology, oral communication, and written communication skills in their majors. These data will be used to supplement the results obtained using comparisons of student achievement in IDC courses and the senior capstone experience. NSSE results will also be used to evaluate student perceptions of the accomplishment of Goals 1-4.

During the 2007/08 academic year the QEP committee will consider various standardized test options for evaluating writing and computer literacy skills. The chosen instrument will be administered to seniors during the 2010/11 academic year.

The QEP committee will develop expected improvement standards for comparing Converse and the women's college benchmark groups. As a general rule the initial expectation is that results for Converse students will equal those for the women's college benchmark group. As more data become available, the QEP committee will develop performance improvement standards for first year to senior results.

After the completion of the 2010/11 academic year comparisons will be made concerning the graduation rates of students who took the IDC seminars during their first year at Converse and those who took it during their second year. In addition, these four-year graduation rates will be compared with past graduation rates and results for benchmark groups.

As is the case with freshman-sophomore retention, graduation is affected by a variety of factors. Because it is expected that the common early experience of the IDC seminars will have a positive impact on student retention and graduation rates, the impact of these courses will be evaluated. In addition, the graduation and retention rates of honors and non-honors students will continue to be evaluated and comparisons made with past data.

The Retention Committee (a college-wide standing committee established by the President) will set appropriate goals for improvement of retention and graduation rates with the understanding that completion of the IDC seminars is only part of the potential motivation.

Because of the multiplicity of factors motivating student retention and graduation, it is impossible to have a pure research design in which all factors save the successful completion of the IDC seminars are excluded from consideration.

The following table summarizes the various means of assessment that will be used. Some of the assessment strategies involve the learning of individual students while others are program oriented. Some strategies are quantitative and others qualitative, and some provide internal comparisons and others provide comparisons with outside institutions.

These strategies will allow us to align assessment measures with each of the objectives of the QEP so that we can determine with confidence—if not complete precision—how effective our QEP strategies have been, over time, in promoting communication fluency across the curriculum and over the four-year college experience. Assessment data will be evaluated by our Institutional Research Director in cooperation with the various college offices, committees, and individual faculty involved in this process. The QEP Committee will have primary responsibility for implementing and evaluating the assessment measures below:

<b>Summary of QEP Evaluation Measures</b>						
<b>Goals</b>						
<b>Assessment Measures</b>	Oral Communication	Technology Skills	Written Communication	Integrate Goals 1-3 with Major Requirements	Improve Retention Rate	Improve Graduation Rate
Performance in IDC 150	X	X	X			
Performance in IDC 151	X	X	X			
Performance in Capstone Experience	X	X	X	X		
Faculty Reports	X	X	X	X		
Standardized Tests		X	X			
Student Survey	X	X	X	X		
NSSE	X	X	X	X		
Retention Rate Comparison					X	
Graduation Rate Comparison						X
Benchmark Group Comparison					X	X
Compare Honors & Non-Honors Students					X	X

## **Feedback**

Based on evaluation of student progress in accomplishing goals 1-3 from IDC 150 to IDC 151, the Ideas and Culture committee may find it necessary to modify the general requirements for computer technology, oral communication, and written communication projects in the two courses. In addition, based on faculty evaluations of student work in the senior capstone experiences it may be necessary for the Ideas and Culture committee to modify requirements for students in IDC 150 and IDC 151 or in major capstone experiences.

After comparison of retention and graduation rates is made, it may be necessary to modify aspects of IDC 150 and IDC 151 so as to further enhance the first year experience.

The dynamic process of planning, evaluation, feedback, and program modification will continue to improve student learning in an overall setting. It will help to enhance both general education and major coursework as it integrates the two aspects of a Converse education.

## **VII. The When: Developing the QEP Project: Timeline**

### **PHASE I: Gestation--**

**\*Mid-2003:** Begin reviewing/considering the current General Education Program with an eye toward possible revision.

**\*April 2005:** Vice President McDaniel establishes the SACS Leadership Team.

**\*October 11/12, 2005:** Dr. David Gillespie, invited GEP consultant visits.

**\*December 4-5, 2005:** SACS Leadership Team attends the Annual Meeting of the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools in Atlanta, Georgia. Dr. Bynum attends sessions specifically considering the Quality Enhancement Plan. He realizes that the GEP work of the Curriculum Committee has come to the point from which a more narrowly focused QEP can be developed. Ideas also surface among the other Leadership Team members. A brainstorming session among the members of the group produces three possible topics, *Communication Fluency* being the front runner.

**\*December 7, 2005:** Final Curriculum Committee meeting of the year. Dr. Bynum presents the outcome of the annual meeting and suggests to the committee that it has come to the place in its deliberations in which the QEP can and must branch off from the ongoing GEP discussion. The committee agrees.

**\*December 9, 2005:** The three possible QEP topics are sent to Dr. Gillespie, GEP consultant.

**\*December 15, 2005:** Consultant sends report to Vice President Barker and the Curriculum Committee. In it he evaluates the three potential QEP topics and also suggests *Communication Fluency* as the top choice for the projected QEP.

**\*January 5, 2006:** SACS Steering Committee is established by Senior Vice President Tom McDaniel, institutional liaison with SACS.

**\*January 25, 2006:** QEP endorsed by Dean's Council.

**\*February 10, 2006:** First meeting of the Steering Committee that divides the workload in preparation for SACS visit into three subcommittees, one of which is the QEP Subcommittee.

**\*February 17, 2006:** The first meeting of the QEP Subcommittee which unanimously endorses *Communication Fluency* as the College's Quality Enhancement Plan topic.

**\*March 9, 2006:** Present the proposed QEP topic to the Faculty Senate and receive the Senate's endorsement (only one dissenting vote).

**\*March 17, 2006:** The meeting of the SACS Steering Committee receives the report of the Faculty Senate's approval of the QEP proposal.

**\*March 28, 2006:** The proposed QEP is presented to the faculty for endorsement.

**\*March 30, 2006:** Visit the Student Government Association Senate to present the QEP proposal.

**\*September 2006:** QEP presented first to the Academic Affairs Subcommittee of the Board of Trustees, and then to the Board as a whole.

**\*November 2, 2006:** Faculty Senate votes to pass the proposed General Education Program revision on to the general faculty. Senate determines that each line item in the proposal is to be voted on individually by paper ballot.

**\*November 6, 2006:** General faculty votes on the General Education Program revision. The proposal passes with three changes:

1. The GEP will retain two courses in the humanities from different disciplines and a separate course requirement in literature.
2. The GEP will retain two courses in fine arts from different disciplines.
3. The GEP will retain Ideas and Cultures—IDC 150 and 151—as the College's two semester core requirement.

**\*November 16, 2006:** Meet with the division-wide Student Life Staff to discuss the SACS evaluation/accreditation process, including the QEP.

**\*November 21, 2006:** Curriculum Committee unanimously votes to integrate the QEP into IDC.

**\*December 2006:** Formation of the new IDC Committee.

**\*February 15, 2007:** IDC committee's deadline for designing common IDC assignments that provide assessable experiences in each area of the QEP.

**\*Spring, 2007 (or Fall):** Survey all departments asking—

1. what they are currently doing with regard to incorporating the QEP elements into courses in the majors?
2. how many already have a senior capstone experience which can incorporate the QEP?
3. how many will need to create that experience?

**PHASE II: Introduction, Year 1**—Transitioning, Experimenting, Planning, Preparing. The freshmen who begin in fall 2007, will be the first to benefit from the integrated QEP.

**\*August 2007:** Offer a *Writing Across the Curriculum* workshop for faculty in preparation for the launching of the QEP within the IDC program, the Capstone experience, and potentially other course offerings.

**\*Fall 2007:** Initial implementation of revised GEP that integrates the QEP.

**\*Spring 2008:** Initial QEP assessment of the IDC 150/151 sequence.

**PHASE III: Moving toward full implementation, 2-4 years and beyond**—Logistically the complete plan cannot be fully implemented until the 2010/2011 academic year when then incoming freshmen become graduating seniors.

**\*Periodic:** Faculty surveys to assess how students are using these skills.

**\*Ongoing:** Adjustment of senior seminars currently in place to become the senior capstone experience that includes the QEP elements. Creation of senior capstone experiences in those disciplines without a modifiable course already in place.

**\*Fall, 2010/Spring, 2011:**

- Senior Survey
- Focus Groups

## Bibliography: A short list for initial consultation

1. General education curriculum
  - *Changing General Education Curriculum*, edited by Ratcliff, Johnson, & Gaff, 2004
  - *Integrative Learning*, Peer Review, VOL. 7, NO.4, Summer/Fall\_2005
  - *Why Is It So Hard to Change the Curriculum?* Peer Review, VOL.2, NO. 4, Summer 2000
  
2. First-year experience
  - <http://www.uncc.edu/stuaffairs/research.htm>
  - <http://www.uncc.edu/stuaffairs/aahe2000/index.html>
  - *Successful Transitions to College through First-Year Programs*, Peer Review, VOL. 8, NO.3, Summer 2006
  - <http://www.brevard.edu/fyc/>
  
3. QEP Components/Assessment
  - *Writing and the New Academy*, Peer Review, VOL.6, NO.1, Fall 2003
  - *Beyond Computer Literacy*, Liberal Education, VOL. 90, NO.4, Fall 2004
  - *Learning and Technology*, Peer Review, VOL. 8, NO.4, Fall 2006
  - [http://www.aacu.org/issues/assessment/oral\\_communication.cfm](http://www.aacu.org/issues/assessment/oral_communication.cfm)
  - <http://www.ets.org/ictliteracy>
  - *Creating Shared Responsibility for General Education and Assessment*, Peer Review, VOL. 7, NO.1, Fall 2004
  - <http://faculty.normandale.edu/~cco/COMM/COMM%201101.htm>
  - White, Edward M. *Teaching and Assessing Writing* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers 1994

## Appendices:

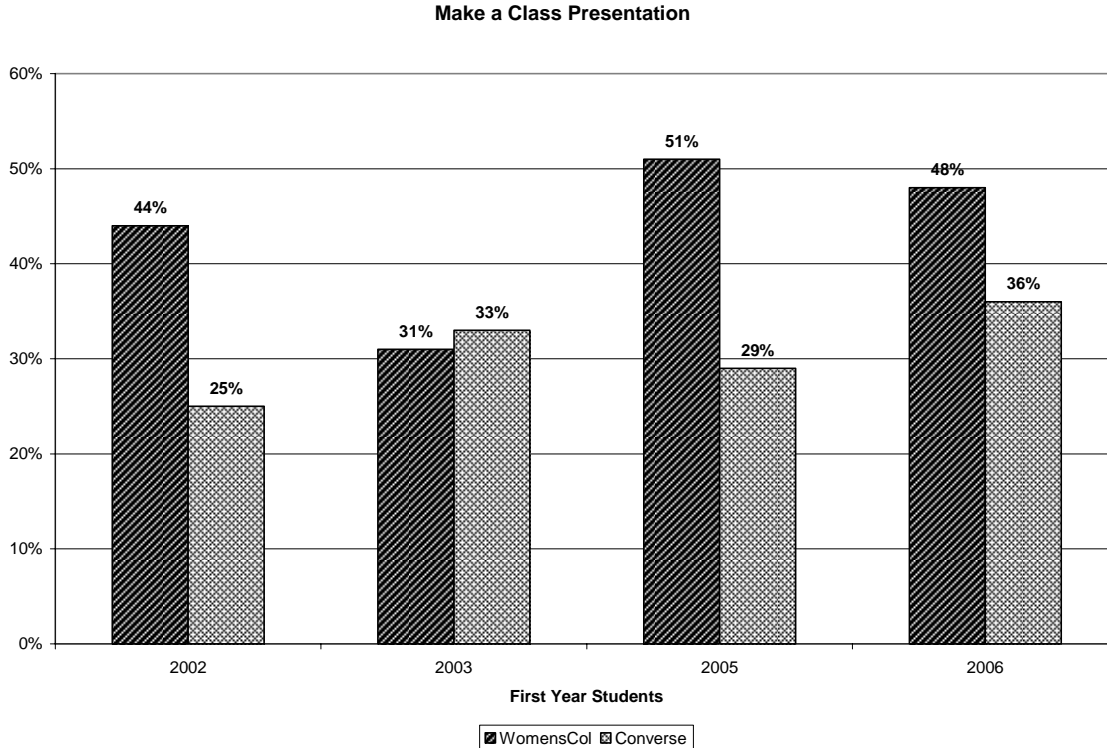
### A. Outline of current GEP



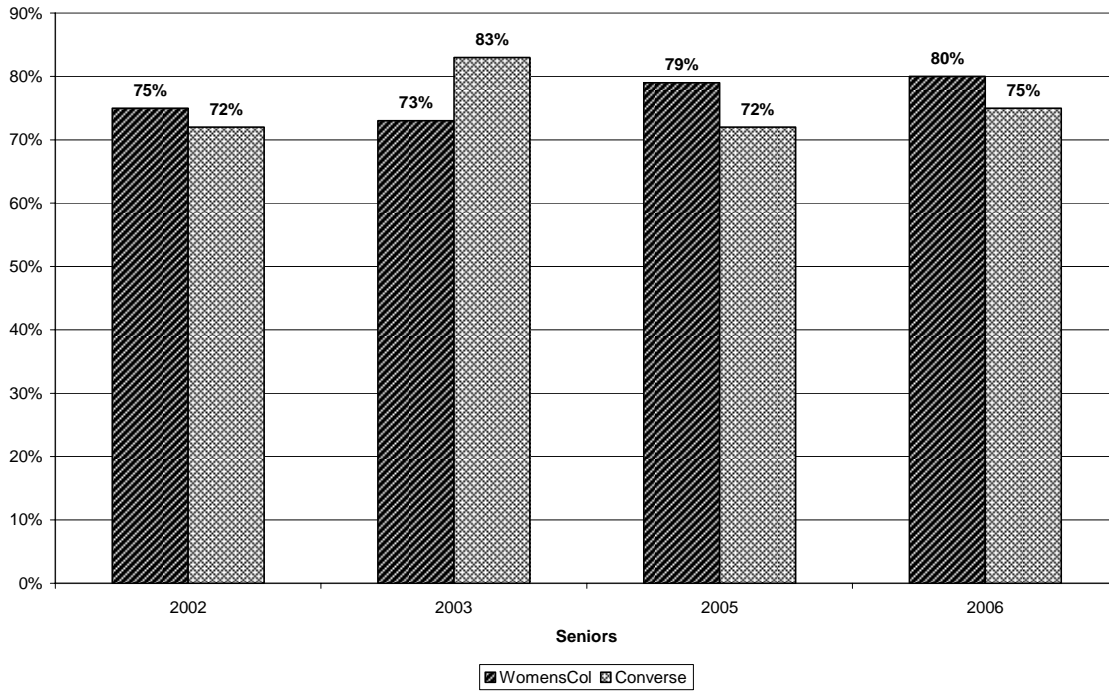
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Worksheet.pdf

### B. NSSE Results

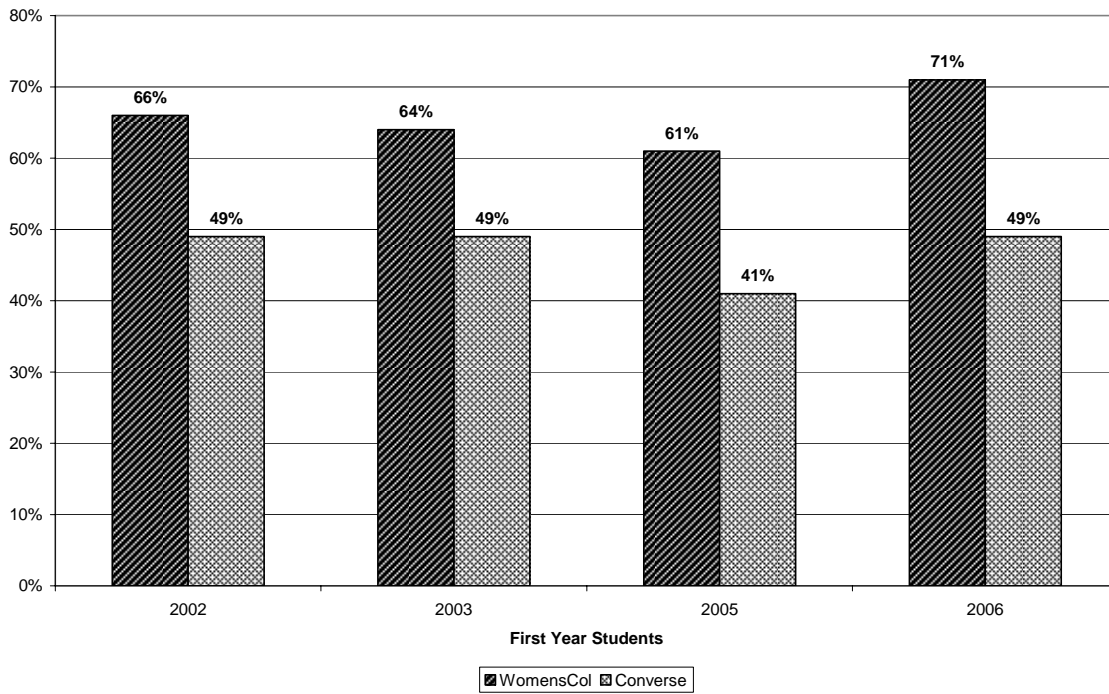
Results for each of the four questions addressed below are divided into four categories by NSSE: never, sometimes, often, and very often. For ease of presentation and in order to avoid the problem of a small number of cases per category the results have been combined into two categories: not often and often. A methodological note: at times the differences between the Converse and benchmark group results are not statistically significant.



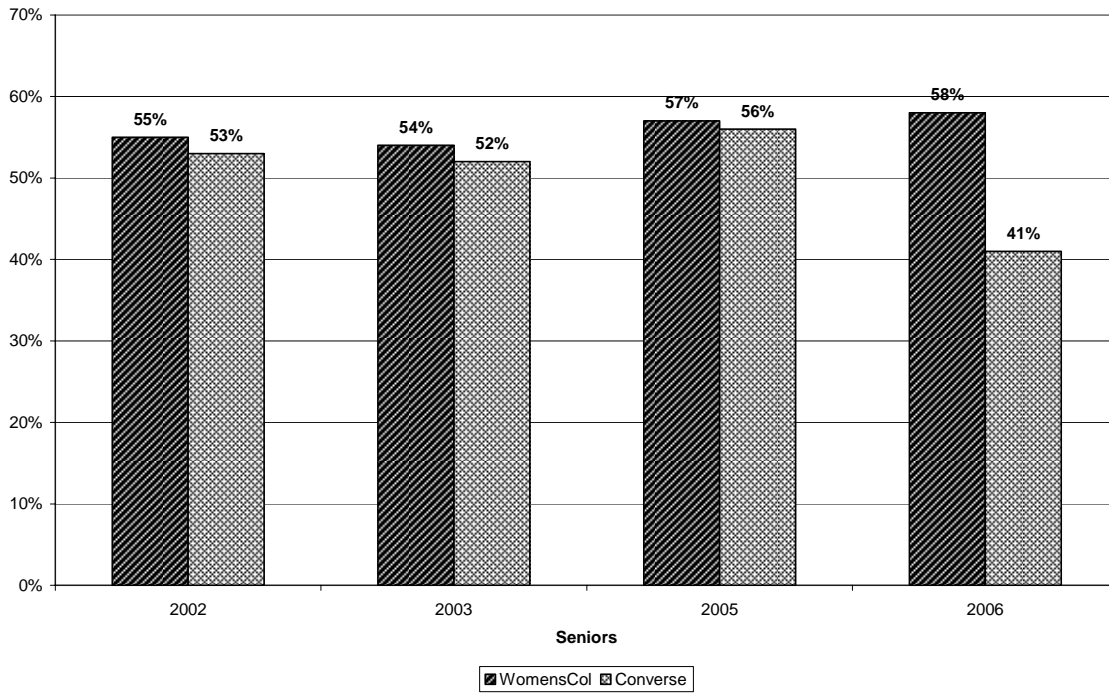
### Make a Class Presentation



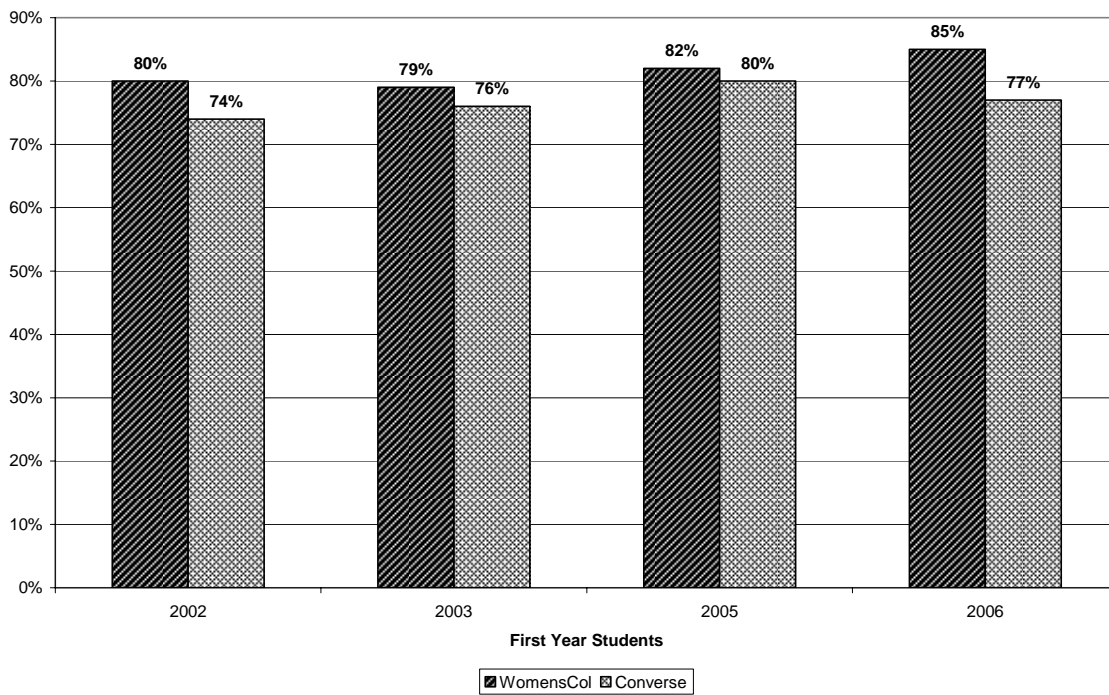
### Prepared 2 or More Drafts of a Paper



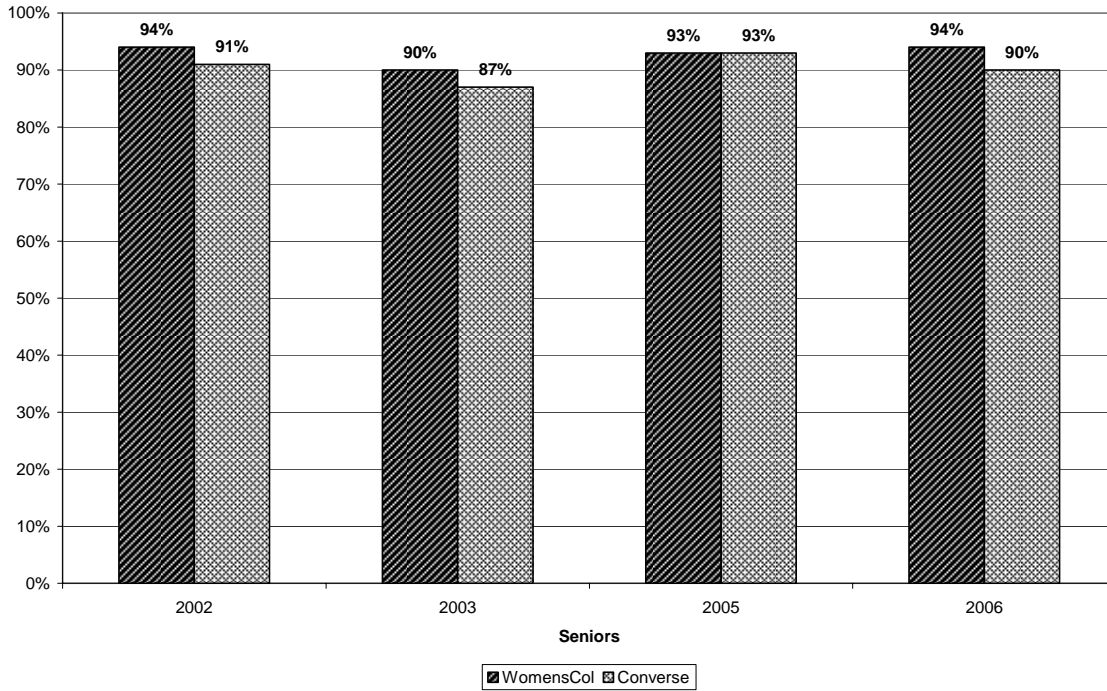
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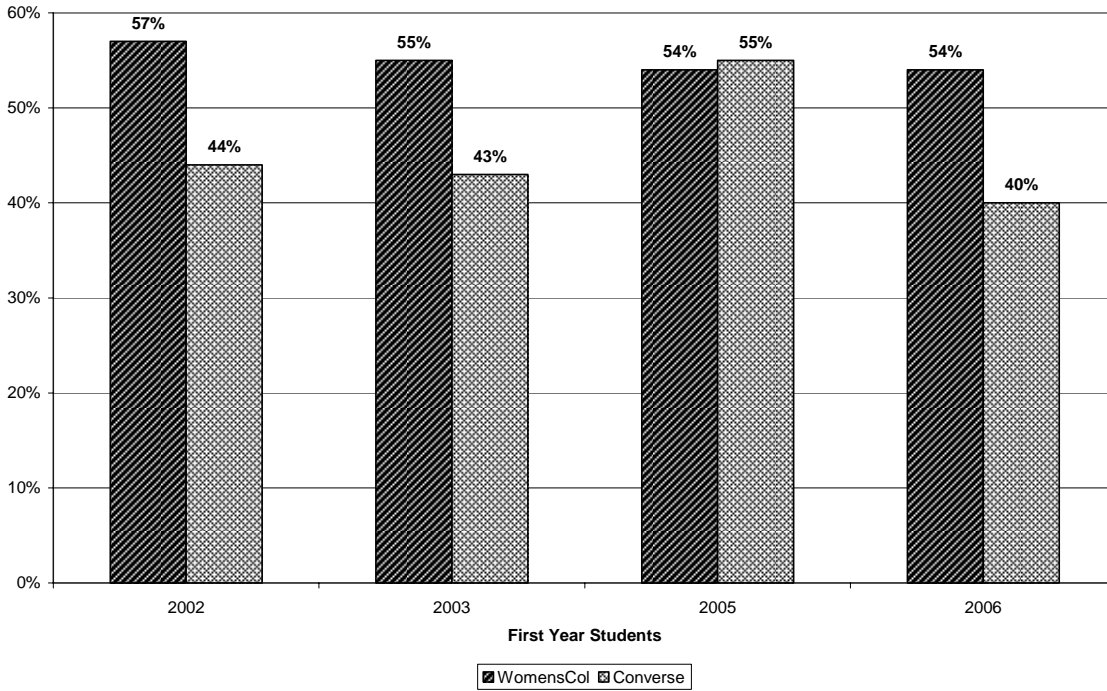
**Worked on a Paper or Project that Required Integrating ideas from Various Sources**



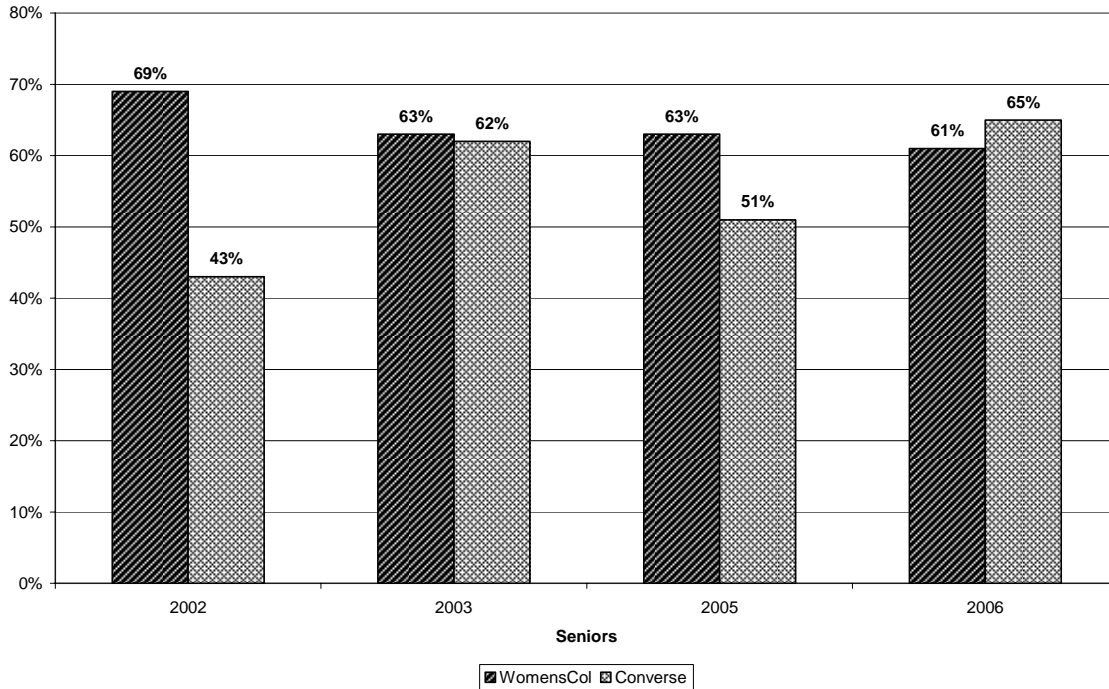
**Worked on a paper or Project that Required Integrating Ideas from Various Sources**



**Used an Electronic Medium (eg listserv, Internet) to Discuss or Complete an Assignment**



Used an Electronic Medium (eg listserv, Internet) to Discuss or Complete an Assignment



### C. Consultant's Report

Projected Quality Enhancement Plan  
Converse College  
December 15, 2005

#### Background

On September 21, 2005, Dr. Jeff Barker, the Vice President for Academic Affairs/ Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences of Converse College, contacted me by email. In that communication, he 1) indicated that Converse has undertaken a review of its general education program (GEP) and intends to utilize this review and assessment of program results as its Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) in its bid for reaffirmation of accreditation by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), and 2) invited me to consider serving as consultant to Converse in the development of its QEP.

I have been associated with Presbyterian College, a cohort institution and neighbor of Converse, since 1979. From 1979 to 1997, I was a fulltime faculty member in political science (serving for a time as the first political science department chair after the 1985 organizational separation of political science from history). From 1997 to 2005, I served Presbyterian College as its chief academic officer during a time in which the college developed, approved, and is now implementing a new program of general education. This year Presbyterian College honored my request to leave administration, effective July 1, 2005, to return to fulltime teaching. PC also granted me sabbatical leave for fall semester, 2005.

I have long had a high regard for Converse, seeing it as a true partner and cohort in providing students with a career-oriented liberal arts-based education of high quality. Converse Senior Vice President Tom McDaniel graciously and effectively served as a consultant during a time in which Presbyterian College was in discussion with its sponsoring denomination, Presbyterian Church (USA), about elements of the new general education program here and about other aspects of church relationship. I have known McDaniel as a friend and mentor for many years. Moreover, in the three years since Dr. Barker's arrival at Converse, he and I have developed a strong mutual respect and sincere inter-institutional sense of collegiality. I felt honored to receive the call to serve as consultant, and I am happy to have undertaken this task.

As consultant, I spent two profitable working days, October 11 and 12, on site at Converse. Prior to this visit, I received for review various working documents, including the current *Strategic Plan* and *Undergraduate Catalog* and Academic Worksheets indicating incremental changes in the GEP over recent years. During my days at Converse, the chair of each of 13 academic departments met with me in one of four small focus groups. One of these, Dr. Joe Dunn, and I are colleagues of longstanding, and my friend Dr. John Theilmann also dropped by to greet and talk with me. On October 12, I met with Jeff Barker and the members of the Curricular Programs Committee. Barker and McDaniel as well as Dr. Brant Bynum met with me at various times during my visit, and Petrie School Dean Joe Hopkins and I had lunch on the second day. Although I did not meet new President Elizabeth Fleming, I certainly sensed the community's positive excitement over her imminent arrival on campus. I am grateful for the hospitality extended to me by the Converse community, and the willingness of all to talk with me and to answer my questions.

### Quality Enhancement Plans (QEPs)

According to the current issue of the *SACS Handbook for Review Committees*, the QEP is to describe "a carefully designed and focused course of action that addresses one or more critical issues related to enhancing student learning." Quality Enhancement Plans are a new feature of the reaffirmation process, and no single SACS-accredited institution yet has more than a single round of experience in producing its QEP. One of the schools already successfully completing the process, including also the QEP, is Rollins College, reaffirmation of which came at the annual meeting of the SACS Commission on Colleges in December 2005. Rollins' QEP is available in PDF form for review at [http://www.rollins.edu/QEP/QEP%202\\_15\\_05.pdf](http://www.rollins.edu/QEP/QEP%202_15_05.pdf)

Treatment of the QEP takes a different form than do other aspects assessed in an institutional bid for reaffirmation. The SACS off-site committee considers the questions of institutional fulfillment of Core Requirements and of Comprehensive Standards, but it does not receive and consider the QEP. In the interim between receipt of the report from the off-site committee and the visit of the on-site Reaffirmation Committee, the institution produces and files, for use by the on-site team, a Focused Report documenting the institution's case that it has complied with Core Requirements and Comprehensive Standards for which the off-site committee ruled the institution non-compliant. The QEP also is presented by the institution for review and

assessment by the on-site Reaffirmation Committee. Assessment of the QEP is based on four particular criteria:

**1. Focus**

The institution identifies a significant issue(s) related to student learning and justifies its use for the Quality Enhancement Plan.

**2. Institutional Capability for the Initiation and Continuation of the Plan.**

The institution provides evidence that it has sufficient resources to implement, sustain, and complete the Quality Enhancement Plan.

**3. Assessment of the Plan.**

The institution demonstrates that it has the means for determining the success of its Quality Enhancement Plan.

**4. Broad-Based Involvement of the Community.**

The institution demonstrates that all aspects of the community were involved in the development of the Plan. (foregoing language from *Handbook for Review Committees*, p. 35).

I recently served on a nine-person (plus SACS staff representative) on-site Reaffirmation Committee for a college located in a large Southern city. Two of the nine committee members (both, I understand, recommended to SACS by the college) served as QEP consultants on the on-site committee. The seven other members also became engaged with the QEP, and the committee chair took an active role in its assessment. Our site visit occurred on November 14-16, 2005. Most of the remaining unfinished business regarding Core Requirements and Comprehensive Standards was resolved by the end of the first working day. Virtually all of the second day was taken up with the college's QEP, a 58-page document (32 pages of narrative, 26 pages of appendices) titled *Enhancing Student Learning Through Significant Cross-Cultural Experiences*. Substantial issues were raised by committee members as to deficiencies and shortcomings of the QEP. These concerns, expressed especially by the consultants and chair, involved matters related to all four SACS-stipulated criteria for assessment of a QEP. This is reflected in the length and proportion of the on-site committee's narrative that was devoted specifically to the QEP (eight of the 22 pages of the on-site Reaffirmation Committee report).

Yet following what appears to be emerging precedent, the committee framed its reservations and concerns, not through an up-or-down vote on the QEP's acceptability, but rather in terms of three carefully-crafted recommendations, to be addressed by the college prior to the SACS vote on the college's reaffirmation:

(Focus) "... that the institution define what it means by a cross-cultural experience (and) evaluate the ... goals of the program to determine if they

can realistically be accomplished within the bounds of the program....”

(Institutional Capability) “... that the institution reevaluate the personnel and budgetary needs of the program.”

(Assessment of the Plan) “... that the college revise the assessment plan for the QEP to include measurable planning outcomes that are derived from a manageable purpose and clear goals.”

Committee members also felt that for purposes of “broad-based involvement of the community” representatives of local agencies through which many of the students will work in fulfillment of new curricular requirements associated with the QEP should have been engaged in the planning discussions at the time of the QEP’s creation. However, the Reaffirmation Committee made no recommendation on this point, because any such recommendation would have been *post hoc* in nature.

Because Presbyterian College and Converse College come up for reaffirmation in the same cycle, there may be some comparative value in iteration of where we stand at Presbyterian, one of your cohort institutions, with regard both to our general reaffirmation report and to QEP. Our reaffirmation initiative is being led by my successor as chief academic officer, interim Provost Bud Warner. Eight people—four administrators, four faculty—make up the team leading our effort. One of the faculty members has led in data compilation for the report to SACS, another is serving as report editor, and a third is spearheading the QEP labor.

This fall this leadership team presented to the full faculty four possibilities for QEP: 1) Living-Learning communities, 2) Internships and Intercultural Education, 3) Leadership Development, and 4) Capstone Courses. From these options, the faculty selected Internships and Intercultural Education. This will provide impetus for implementing a new curricular requirement that each student complete either an internship or an intercultural education component prior to graduation. This requirement is a feature of the new general education plan which the faculty approved by a 67% majority on March 25, 2004 and again (in somewhat modified form) by a 71% majority on October 20, 2005. A detailed outline for the QEP has been developed by Dr. Warner, though the document itself is yet to be written, and the search for a catchier title superseding Internships and Intercultural Education currently is under way.

#### The Converse General Education Program and Consultant Observations and Suggestions:

The Converse College GEP engages students in wide-ranging studies in the humanities, fine arts, natural sciences, and social sciences. Changes occurring in the GEP over the last ten years have been incremental and segmental rather than comprehensive. The most important of these changes may have been the replacement of the three-hour requirement in Western Cultures with a six-hour sequence titled Ideas and Culture. Finite Math has replaced Algebra as the finishing requirement in mathematics. In response to recommendations of the SACS site team in the most recent past reaffirmation round, Converse added two new three-hour requirements, one serving computer literacy, the other in public speaking. Provisions apply for exemption, under certain circumstances, from some GEP coursework. Even so, one effect of the incremental changes is

additional weight to what already was a substantial GEP load for students. This adds to the problems entailed in maintaining a four-year graduation track even by students who regularly register for full loads of classes.

Pursuant to goals and objectives articulated in *Designing the Future*, the five-year Strategic Plan enunciated by Converse College in 2002 (specifically to Undergraduate Curriculum Goal 1: “To strengthen the General Education Program” and to four Objectives accompanying that goal), key stakeholders (the Vice President’s office, Faculty Senate, Curricular Programs Committee, department chairs, and others) have become engaged in a comprehensive discussion of the GEP during the spring and fall of 2005. For the purpose of community discussion, a document titled “GEP Revision Draft” was produced and dated September 21, 2005.

In an email sent to me on December 9, 2005, Jeff Barker wrote that the Converse SACS “leadership team has decided to narrow the focus of the QEP. We have decided to take one GEP goal that emerged in the initial months of review and focus on enhancing our performance in that area. The three goals we’ve isolated for consideration are 1. critical thinking, 2. writing, and 3. communication fluency (writing, oral communication, computer-based).”

I strongly believe that Converse has made a very wise decision in narrowing the focus for the purpose of the Quality Enhancement Plan. This is so for all the following and perhaps other reasons. 1) comprehensive revision or reform of a general education program is characteristically a lengthy and difficult process, one which must surmount many turf and other political and material obstacles, some of which may be unanticipated *a priori* (one would not want to anticipate a QEP about which there might be deep community divisions at the time of the visit to Converse of the Reaffirmation Committee); 2) a new president has come to lead Converse, and she will need both time and the space to place her imprimatur upon institutional policies as important as the GEP; 3) narrowing the focus of the QEP does not preclude a more general review assessment of Converse’s GEP—a review which may still lead eventually to a comprehensive revision of that GEP.

Converse now has charted for itself the task of examining, for the purposes of the QEP, one particular GEP goal and of modifying and adapting the GEP for the particular objective of enhancing student learning vis-à-vis the selected goal.

1. Critical Thinking. *Encouraging Authenticity and Spirituality in Higher Education*, an important new work by Arthur W. Chickering, Jon C. Dalton, and Liesa Stamm, assails the contemporary academy’s preoccupation with “rational empiricism” to the neglect of “values and beliefs, moral development, spirituality, and self-understanding”; this, despite the traditional rootage of liberal learning in the maxim, “know thyself,” and this, in the face of an abundance of data suggesting that today’s college student is far more interested in securing his or her material well-being than in “developing a philosophy of life.” This work could come to be considered a call for Converse to take up the matter of *critical thinking*, modifying the GEP for the particular purpose of enhancing student learning with respect to critical, thinking. Institutions and their leaders sometimes shy away from a focus upon critical thinking due to the perceived difficulty in measuring (especially quantitatively) the achievement of targeted outcomes. In the event of your selection of critical thinking, or even in your considering critical

thinking as a possible choice, I commend to you this Chickering, Dalton, and Stamm work, which also provides what may prove to be some useful assessment methodologies.

2) Writing or 3) Communication fluency. A substantial value accruing from selection of either of these goals might be in enabling Converse to unpack the goal from particular course requirements which came following the last SACS review and to integrate the goal instead into and throughout the GEP and indeed throughout the curriculum (ie., “writing across the curriculum” or “communication—writing, oral communication, and the understanding and use of IT—across the curriculum”). The Writing (only) option would likely be easier to operationalize, precisely because of its narrower scope. Particular courses in the GEP and in each major might be designated “writing courses,” with required papers or other written projects, and with a newly-codified requirement of a specified number of completed writing assignments (and perhaps assignments of particular kinds—eg, research papers, expository writing, fiction). Papers might be archived as evidentiary exemplars of student learning in this area.

A QEP embracing “Communication”—writing, oral communication, IT—might well be recognized and applauded, by virtue of its breadth, as a bolder departure for the purpose of enhancing student learning. Data documenting goal achievement—student papers; records (eg. videoclips) of classroom oral presentations, perhaps involving the use of PowerPoint; and the like—may be somewhat more difficult to compile and archive. One possibility may be to utilize capstone courses as the venue for confirming the undergraduate record of each student enrolled in the capstone in writing, speaking, and the use of IT in communication over the course of her student tenure at Converse. In considering QEP possibilities with appropriately narrow yet worthwhile foci, Converse’s leaders may, in addition to the preceding, also want to give at least some thought to one or both of the following:

- 1) “Strengthen(ing) the Ideas and Culture course to ensure adequate staffing, training, and support of faculty teaching this core GEP course.” (Objective 1 under Undergraduate Curriculum Goal 1: “To strengthen the GEP” in *Designing Our Future*”), and
- 2) Leadership Development (as a joint endeavor of Academic Affairs and Student Life), a project in which Converse already has considerable experience, and one which would be of particular value to students at a women’s college.

Clearly, however, any of the three goals for the enhancement of student learning which are currently under consideration—Critical Thinking, Writing, or Communication Fluency—offers considerable potential and value for a QEP.

I am happy to have taken part as consultant in your planning, and would gladly serve as a sounding board (or in some other capacity) as your plans develop further and the QEP takes form.

J. David Gillespie, Ph.D.  
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**D. Draft of a basic template for a IDC syllabus that helps explain the goals as related to the QEP:**

**[IDC 150: Ideas and Culture]**

**Professor \_\_\_\_\_**

**3 Credits**

**Course Description:**

**[How does this course develop communication fluency (writing, public speaking, computer skills)?]**

[Can you include components that support women's studies, and/or global perspectives?]

[Can you include components that support any of the other GEP goals?]

**Specific Objectives** [# 1-4 and as many of # 5-11 that apply]:

By the end of this course the student will improve in her ability to:

1. [content-specific objectives—see above]
2. express herself clearly and logically in written work
3. demonstrate effective public speaking skills
4. use technology to enhance communication.
5. understand global perspectives
6. relate to the role of women in society
7. think critically

**Activities:** [#1 and as many others as possible/practicable]

1. Communication fluency
  - a. Writing:
  - b. Speaking
  - c. Computer technology:
2. Global perspectives
  - a.
  - b.
3. Women's Studies

**Outcome Assessments:** [tests, papers, projects, presentations, performances, etc. to assess the objectives above]

- Objective 1 \_\_\_\_\_
- Objective 2 \_\_\_\_\_
- Objective 3 \_\_\_\_\_
- Objective 4 \_\_\_\_\_
- Objective 5 \_\_\_\_\_
- Objective 6 \_\_\_\_\_
- Etc.

Texts:

- 1.
- 2.

**Weekly Schedule of Assignments/Activities** [if appropriate]

**Bibliography/Resources** [if appropriate]

**Grading Scale**

[Include both scale and means of determining grades]

**Attendance Policy**

**Academic Accommodations**

Students with documented disabilities may request academic accommodations by contacting the Director of Academic Support at 864-577-2028 (ext. 2028 on campus).

**The Honor Code**

The Honor Code applies to all Converse students. Any observed cheating must be reported. See the undergraduate or graduate student handbook for policies and procedures relating to violations of the Honor Code.

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