

**The Essential Studies Program:
A 21st Century General Studies Program and Model in Student Learning
Chadron State College (CSC) Quality Initiative Final Report**

OVERVIEW OF THE QUALITY INITIATIVE

The goal for CSC's Quality Initiative was to **design and implement a general studies program** that would reflect faculty synthesis of recent scholarly literature of teaching and learning and serve as a model in student learning and engagement. In order to support the resulting **Essential Studies Program (ESP)** and integrate it across campus, we identified three critical objectives:

- **Establish a Teaching and Learning Center (TLC)** to provide necessary resources and support for all instructors teaching courses within the ESP.
- **Streamline processes providing support for adjunct instructors**, especially those teaching within the ESP, in order to integrate adjuncts into the CSC faculty community.
- **Formalize communication between Student Services and Academic Affairs** regarding issues related to the ESP.

CSC's Quality Initiative coincides philosophically with Vincent Tinto's work, *Completing College*.¹ Tinto suggests institutions can intentionally create programs that increase learning and promote completion. He identifies four conditions through which institutions can foster this change: Expectations (or Quality), Support, Assessment and Feedback, and Involvement. The Quality Initiative meets these conditions:

- Expectations (or Quality): The Essential Studies Program, the Teaching and Learning Center, streamlined adjunct processes, and course enrollment lids
- Support: The Advising Center and Tutoring Services
- Assessment and Feedback: "Early Alert" and "Back on Track" programs
- Involvement: Formalizing communication between Student Services and Academic Affairs

Before the HLC Quality Initiative was formally conceived, CSC faculty had initiated a review of the General Studies Program resulting in a proposal for the ESP. College-wide acceptance of that proposal and early stages of implementation predate submission of the Quality Initiative, which articulated goals for continued development and implementation.

BACKGROUND: ESSENTIAL STUDIES PROGRAM CURRICULUM

¹ Vincent Tinto, *Completing College: Rethinking Institutional Action* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

CSC's participation in the HLC Academy for the Assessment of Student Learning between Fall 2006 and Fall 2010 inspired the institution to create, implement, and modify an assessment plan for the General Studies Program. In 2010, based on their experiences with assessment on a preliminary review of current general studies literature, some faculty concluded the institution's General Studies Program was inadequate and out of date. Interested faculty from across campus formed a Faculty Learning Community (FLC) to further evaluate and reimagine general education curriculum through a further analysis of the literature with the goal of making CSC a leader in general education.

During academic year 2010-11, the FLC composed a focus book on general education at CSC and initiated dialogues with representatives from two other institutions. FLC members investigated the history, theory, and practices of general (and liberal) education, including high-impact practices, interdisciplinary and integrated learning, assessment, first year courses, cognitive development, information literacy, and writing. The FLC generated campus-wide involvement, sought faculty feedback, and surveyed students and faculty, to promote transparency and consensus. In Fall 2011, the FLC submitted a formal proposal for a new general education program to Faculty Senate's Academic Review Committee (ARC), CSC's curriculum committee.

The ARC examined and debated the proposal throughout academic year 2011-12. Through these discussions, the institution formally adopted a modified version of the FLC proposal. The approved **Essential Studies Program (ESP)**, contained the following elements:

- 42 credits (reduced from 47 credits under the former General Studies Program)
- 12 new student learning outcomes
- First Year Inquiry (FYI) and Capstone (CAP) courses as "bookends" (interdisciplinary, theme/problem-based, sometimes team taught)
 - FYI courses emphasizing critical inquiry and creative problem solving; CAP courses integrating Essential Studies skills and knowledge
- A program "interior" seeking to engage students and develop or enhance life skills (e.g., communication; teamwork) through various modes of inquiry and integrative, high-impact learning experiences

The ESP was significant to the institution, first, because the faculty conceived and developed it. Second, the ESP presented a thoughtful opportunity for CSC to address perceptions that students learn little in college. In *Academically Adrift*, Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa argue that 45 percent of students demonstrate no significant improvement in learning during the first two years of college.² The authors also claim students who did show improvement manifested only modest gains. Faculty hoped that the ESP would make the first two years at CSC relevant for students and that significant improvement in learning could occur during that period.

SUPPORT FOR THE ESP THROUGH THE QUALITY INITIATIVE

² Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa, *Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

When the ARC approved the proposal for the ESP, the project of developing and implementing the proposal seemed appropriate for an HLC Quality Initiative. Furthermore, the Initiative would align well with the institution's history, mission, and strategic priorities. CSC began as a teaching institution, and as a college rather than a university, it focuses on student learning. The vision statement declares: "Chadron State College aspires to be a premiere institution of higher education in the western High Plains states, innovatively pursuing excellence in teaching, scholarship, and service." With a more skills-based, integrative, and interdisciplinary approach than the former General Studies Program, the ESP better realizes the institution's mission to provide a broad, undergraduate liberal arts education. The Quality Initiative was designed to encourage a nascent culture of inquiry and self-reflective practice.

The Initiative also identified three outcomes necessary to fully realize its goal of a successful, fully integrated Essential Studies Program: 1) establishment of a TLC, 2) streamlined support for adjunct instructors, and 3) formalized communication between Student Services and Academic Affairs. The 2007 Final HLC Comprehensive Visit Team Report emphasized the importance of creating a faculty Teaching and Learning Center, and our faculty agreed. CSC, unlike many institutions across the United States, still relies on full-time faculty to teach the majority of courses; however, approximately 17% of course credits in 2011-12 were taught by adjuncts, a situation that pointed toward more efforts to orient and support these instructors. Finally, enhanced communication and collaboration between Student Services and Academic Affairs was deemed crucial for the success of the ESP and students.

All aspects of the Initiative reflect our strategic priorities. Between 2010 and 2014, CSC was involved in the nation-wide Red Balloon Project, spearheaded by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities in an effort to reimagine higher education. In response, we developed 20 strategic planning initiatives to be implemented between 2011 and 2014. Of these initiatives, six (30%) related to CSC's Quality Initiative:

- Revise General Studies program (to become Essential Studies Program)
- Create integrated and interdisciplinary programs
- Create co-curricular experiences that emphasize leadership, engagement, civic responsibility and positive human interaction
- Promote standards of quality for courses and teaching
- Establish a technology-supported, collaborative and creative teaching and learning center to provide appropriate resources and tools to create high-impact learning experiences
- Establish a deliberate collaborative process to improve communication and effective teamwork across all areas of the college

In 2014, CSC created a new academic strategic plan, the Master Academic Plan (MAP). The MAP's first priority is to "continue to implement and improve the Essential Studies Program (ESP)." Planning priorities since 2010 demonstrate the significance of general education and the importance of the Quality Initiative in helping to meet institutional goals. The successful implementation of the ESP—including the necessary supporting goals—would affirm the College's commitment to teaching and learning excellence.

CSC's Quality Initiative proposal was submitted to HLC in December 2012. In February 2013, CSC received approval.

IMPLEMENTATION AND IMPROVEMENT OF THE ESSENTIAL STUDIES PROGRAM (ESP)

During Fall 2012, before the Quality Initiative proposal had been submitted to HLC, Chadron State College launched the ESP. In achieving this milestone, the college community sought to demonstrate the skills we wished to cultivate in our students: collaboration, communication, critical thinking, and problem solving. By Spring 2012, Academic Affairs and Student Services had coordinated efforts to implement the First Year Inquiry (FYI) courses for Fall 2012. Faculty and staff disseminated information through CSC's website, the media, and meetings with students and their parents. Units across campus worked together to update the CSC NeSIS system to align with the ESP. The Academic Review Committee (ARC) began examining other issues pertaining to the ESP, such as vetting Capstones and other courses and establishing transfer policies. For example, entering freshmen and transfer students with fewer than 12 earned credits would enroll in courses associated with the ESP while students with at least 12 earned credits would continue in the institution's former General Studies Program.

The 2012-13 academic year also saw the establishment of a Presidential Committee on Essential Studies whose purpose was to:

- Facilitate continued development of the ESP, working with Deans, Academic Review Committee, Faculty Learning Communities, and the Teaching and Learning Center.
- Coordinate and implement the Essential Studies Program.
- Submit to the President the following:
 - Sustainable plan to encourage interdisciplinary and high impact course development, implementation, and improvement
 - Viable online and on-campus course rotation for meeting each outcome
 - Assessment plan that included "closing the loop"
 - Five-year timeline (through 2017) with milestones for progress
- Incorporate plans, timelines, and other related materials within the CSC Quality Initiative for the HLC 2017 visit.

The Presidential Committee, comprised of seven faculty members representing diverse disciplines, two deans, and one professional staff member, was intended to function during implementation of the CSC Quality Initiative.

We met significant objectives during the first year (2012-13) of ESP implementation. First, with support from an ESP Summer Institute (May 2012), resources in the Teaching and Learning Center, and other collaborative efforts, faculty designed and taught interdisciplinary, inquiry-based FYI courses on such topics as "Virtue and the Warrior Spirit," "A Pox on You: The Biological, Legal, and Sociological Consequences of Infectious Diseases," "10,000 BC Great Plains, North America: Human Survival and the

Environment,” and “Mathletics: Not for Spectators.” Second, several new courses specific to the ESP were approved by Academic Review. Third, the Presidential Committee on Essential Studies accomplished the following:

- Identified the ESP Summer Institute as the best method to encourage interdisciplinary and high impact course development, implementation, and improvement. The TLC and others organized a second ESP Summer Institute, which took place in May 2013.
- Assembled a report indicating number of ESP courses, by outcome, offered Fall 2012-Spring 2013, and provided general recommendations.
- Developed a component-based assessment plan.
- Composed a 5-year timeline (through 2017) that delineated milestones for achieving progress.
- Created a student survey for 2012-13 FYIs and collected data during both semesters.

At least four outcomes were achieved during the second year (2013-14). First, in Fall 2013, the ARC approved the assessment plan developed by the Presidential Committee on Essential Studies. Second, assessment data were collected on all of the ESP outcomes for which courses were offered. Faculty began to examine the data and make improvements to enhance student learning. Third, the Presidential Committee was discontinued and Faculty Senate assumed responsibility for Essential Studies. Fourth, the position of Essential Studies Faculty Coordinator was created to oversee the day-to-day operations of the ESP. Each of these steps increased faculty involvement and control.

During the third year (2014-15), assessment data were collected through formal and informal processes, so faculty and staff members could work together to make evidence-based decisions in support of student learning and success. This feedback indicated a continuing need for more sections of FYIs and courses taught under Outcome 9, Civic Engagement, which resulted in new courses. Also, the Essential Studies Faculty Senate Committee (ESP Committee) was established to fulfill Priority 1.2 of the institution’s Master Academic Plan (MAP). The Committee:

- Reviewed and retained the 6-credit FYI requirement.
- Reduced the ESP Capstone (CAP) from 6 credits to 3 credits, effective Fall 2015.
- Requested and gained three new tenure-track faculty lines for the ESP. This recommendation was based on the need for more faculty resources under MAP priority 1.1, “Develop a sufficient number of [FYI and] CAP courses to accommodate approximately 650 students.” Each of the three academic schools received a position.
- Successfully proposed FYI and CAP “Topics” courses to expedite approval process for new FYI and CAP courses during the two-year catalog cycle, which helped meet the assessed need for more FYIs.
- Created new CAP Substitution Request Form and process.
- Allowed the Education Program’s capstone course to satisfy the Essential Studies CAP, requirement, effective Fall 2017, which helped tie the ESP to program curricula in a meaningful manner.
- Hosted an ESP Summer Institute focused on inquiry-guided teaching and learning. This met MAP priority 1.3, to “provide faculty development for high impact practices,

interdisciplinary and team-taught courses [and other needed support].” This marked the third consecutive year CSC hosted an ESP Summer Institute, all well attended by faculty and supported by institutional funding and resources.

Also, faculty members began teaching CAP courses within the ESP, including Cuba Libré—a course on Cuban history, politics, and culture—that involved a 10-day field trip to the island nation. Such experiences reflect the institution’s emphasis on high impact learning. The Cuban CAP course and field trip received positive media attention locally and highlighted the innovative approaches to teaching and learning shared by faculty. Building on this success, a second field trip to Cuba is scheduled for January 2017.

Progress accelerated during the fourth year (2015-16). The ESP Committee continued to work with Faculty Senate developing procedures, reviewing courses taught within the ESP, and defining the Committee’s relationship with the Academic Review Committee (ARC). The ESP Committee took the following actions:

- Determined that academic departments would continue to submit proposals for all new ESP courses (Outcomes 2-11) to the ESP Committee before presenting them to ARC; however, new FYIs and CAPs would require only ESP Committee review. At the end of each semester, the ESP Committee would provide a final summary update on those courses to ARC.
- Accepted Family and Consumer Sciences Program and the Business Program capstone courses to fulfill ESP CAP requirements.
- Approved new FYI and CAP “Topics” courses.
- Discontinued the co-liaison model for ESP assessment data collection. Instead, the ESP Committee is working on a plan with assessment staff to enter ESP data into CSC’s assessment software, Tk20.

In Spring 2016, the Faculty Senate adopted six undergraduate learning goals, aligned with ESP student learning outcomes. In addition to providing a more integrated, institutional approach to student learning, these undergraduate outcomes will help assess transfer students’ mastery of core competencies. In Fall 2016, following a plan already in place, faculty will begin collecting assessment data on the six undergraduate learning goals, which they will analyze with ESP assessment data. Although implementation of the ESP curriculum has been successful, assessment of both sets of data will contribute to continuing improvement.

THE TEACHING AND LEARNING CENTER (TLC)

One of the three pivotal goals for supporting the Initiative was **the establishment of a Teaching and Learning Center (TLC)**, in order to provide resources and support for instructors in all academic

programs. Responding to Strategic Initiative 8 in the Red Balloon Project (2010-14), faculty and professional staff crafted a plan for implementing a TLC. The strategic initiative documents also emphasized the use of technology in the learning environment and in support for new and adjunct faculty. During academic year 2011-12, a team of faculty determined the mission and goals of the TLC. In July 2012, CSC hired a TLC Assistant Director, who became the Director the following year and served until Spring 2015, when the Director returned to full-time teaching. In Fall 2013, an academic support unit called Teaching and Learning Technologies was established, and an Associate Vice President of Teaching and Learning Technologies became the oversight for the TLC and the Library Learning Commons (LLC). Under this structure, the TLC was linked to the Master Academic Plan (MAP) through nine project plans.

The TLC mission is to promote teaching excellence and scholarship of learning through faculty-driven initiatives. The TLC achieves its mission by:

- Providing avenues to explore alternative pedagogy and teaching techniques.
- Supporting faculty by providing resources for professional development.
- Fostering the exchange of ideas that promote the application of scholarly teaching within the college community.
- Celebrating and learning from successes (and missteps) within a self-reflective community.

The TLC began some workshops and programs during the 2011-12 academic year and has offered a full schedule of activities since Fall 2012. Faculty assisted in program development and decisions and sought input from the campus community. With changes in course delivery modes and technology in mind, the TLC has sponsored webinars and offered workshops on a variety of topics, including assessment, interdisciplinary course development, high-impact practices, faculty learning communities, and Quality Matters. A New Faculty Orientation program was designed to orient new faculty members and assist them with instructional development in academic areas. This year-long orientation includes practical training on a variety of topics planned by the academic deans, TLC staff, and a faculty member who serves as the New Faculty Orientation facilitator.

In addition to the New Faculty Orientation facilitator, three full-time, professional staff members support the TLC:

- Instructional Technology (IT) and Design Specialist who coordinates course development and assists faculty with meeting Quality Matters standards.
- IT Analyst who supports the use of technologies in the teaching and learning environment, including videoconferencing and mediated classroom technologies.
- IT Specialist who helps faculty with the institution's learning management system and supporting tools.

As its role continues to evolve, the TLC provides a variety of services and professional-development opportunities for faculty, including:

- Learning management system (Sakai) support
- Mediated classroom support and development
- Workshops, seminars, and institutes
- Online course development, tutorials, and webinars
- Web space and web log (blog) support
- Instructional technology SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis
- Instructional media production and post-production
- Quality Matters training and course reviews
- Instructional design for approved courses and programs
- Individual consultations about course and program design
- New faculty orientation and new faculty support
- Faculty fellowships (two per year)
- Library book and equipment loans
- Meeting and collaboration space

The TLC provides faculty with opportunities to engage and participate in seminars, workshops, and institutes. As noted previously, the annual ESP Summer Institute has been a successful means to involve faculty members. TLC-sponsored events, including lunch hour meetings, faculty presentations, LMS-based sessions, external speakers, webinars, and workshops, have been well attended. For example, between 2012 and 2015, the number and types of events have increased annually. During those years, the TLC sponsored 167 events—not including specific events for new faculty—with 711 duplicated participants. Types of events and percentage of overall attendance are: Webinars, 22%; ESP Summer Institutes and FYI events, 12.7%; workshops, including individual consultations, 20%; faculty presentations and faculty learning communities, 21%; and lunch hour meetings, 15.4%. Together these events constitute 91% of programs offered. The TLC also reports on its utilization via its blog. For more information on the academic year 2015-16, read “Data Driven Self-Reflection: Modeling the Behaviors We Preach” (<http://academic.csc.edu/tlc/blog/?p=1579>) and visit the Reports page (http://academic.csc.edu/tlc/blog/?page_id=20). According to faculty Professional Activities Reports for academic year 2015-16, 42% of full-time faculty requested assistance from the TLC, including all first year faculty.

The 2015 Summer Institute provides a typical example of ESP Summer workshops. In May, 21 CSC employees gathered to explore the role of inquiry-guided learning in the ESP. Participants were faculty members, professional staff, the Dean of Liberal Arts and the Essential Studies Program, the Director of the Teaching and Learning Center, and the Faculty Coordinator of the Essential Studies Program. Over the course of two days, following a “Faculty Learning Community” model, the group:

- Read, reviewed and discussed current literature on Inquiry Guided Learning (IGL).
- Reviewed outcome language for FYIs in the undergraduate catalog and developed a shared definition of Inquiry-Guided Learning for CSC. Evaluated application of IGL in two “case studies” of FYI courses at CSC; explored ways to develop, refine, implement, and assess inquiry-guided learning in CSC curriculum to share with campus community.

- Discussed the “case studies” and other issues related to Inquiry Guided Learning at CSC via teleconference with Virginia S. Lee, an author and expert on IGL Reviewed and assessed the inquiry-guided learning that has been attempted at CSC thus far and identified ways to continue improving the program.

TLC service space is divided between the Reta King Library Learning Commons and Old Admin. Eventually, all services will be housed in the basement of Old Admin, where four rooms have been designated for use by the TLC. Three of these rooms have been remodeled and are used by TLC technical support staff. The final room is scheduled for completion in the near future. Other plans include further development of online and web resources. A needs assessment system that allows for regular faculty input into programming is also a priority. An endowment will be established this fall for the TLC, which will benefit the center into the foreseeable future. There have been 18 CSC donors who have contributed a total of over \$10,000. Finally, while seminars, workshops, and institutes have continued, a formal search will be underway in the future to fill the position of Director of the Teaching and Learning Center, as this position is embedded within the MAP.

INTEGRATION OF ADJUNCTS INTO THE ESSENTIAL STUDIES PROGRAM

The second pivotal goal for integrating and supporting the ESP across campus was **streamlining processes associated with the support of adjunct instructors**. While a survey of adjuncts in Spring 2012 revealed approximately 70% of respondents shared a positive or very positive view of their experiences teaching for the institution, CSC realized processes related to the support of adjunct instructors needed to be improved. In Fall 2012, a group of staff and faculty devised a flow chart illustrating the hiring and orientation of adjunct instructors. The group quickly concluded the procedures were onerous, so CSC has explored ways to improve them. Achieving this goal has proved to be somewhat problematic because our procedures in this area are more vulnerable to impacts of staff turnover. We are striving to improve, but we are still in the process of creating sustainability. The following are some of the attempts that have been made to improve assimilation of adjunct faculty.

A faculty member created the Excellence in Learning website to orient adjunct faculty to campus operations and instructional resources. During academic year 2011-12, the site operated as a static resource. Feedback received in 2012 resulted in a re-structuring of the site (renamed ASKc) as a communication hub for adjunct faculty, the addition of a FAQ module, the addition of a time-management module, and information about dealing with difficult students. An award-winning adjunct faculty member served as an ASKc mentor, with assistance as needed from the TLC and a project coordinator. By Summer 2013, based on faculty and administrative feedback, other additions were made to the site, including:

- A Quick Contact Guide
- New modules on professional development, Tk20, and Open Education Resources
- Academic year schedules

- Expanded information on Chadron State College students
- Important updates to content

The TLC collaborated with deans, the ASKc mentor, and others to develop materials for some of the new modules. The ASKc site was used until Spring 2014, after the project coordinator was reassigned and the adjunct ASKc mentor resigned. Support for adjuncts was conducted through assigned office assistants.

In an attempt to better support our adjuncts in 2014-15, department chairs and deans crafted an adjunct mentor proposal. Adjunct instructors, particularly those teaching ESP courses, would be paired with a full-time faculty member who taught the same course(s). During Fall 2015, when the proposal was to be implemented, difficulties arose regarding faculty compensation and time, and it was decided to table the proposal.

While surveys indicate adjunct instructors are satisfied with their interactions with CSC, we believe there is room for improvement. Building on the success of the ASKc site, we plan to replace that site which will orient new or potential adjuncts to the institution whether they teach face-to-face or online. It will provide a brief overview of how and where positions are advertised, the hiring process, links to the TLC, the evaluation process, and information about the college itself and the community of Chadron. We expect to launch the website in November 2016. We have learned from previous difficulties regarding the sustainability, and the deans are committed to direct oversight of this project and securing adequate technical support, as is indicated in the timeline at the end of this document.

Meanwhile, we are using a simplified process to assist part-time faculty. Once a new adjunct submits all necessary paperwork to Human Resources, an office assistant is assigned to follow up with various units across campus to ensure the individual has all resources needed to teach.

COLLABORATION BETWEEN ACADEMIC AFFAIRS AND STUDENT SERVICES/STUDENT AFFAIRS

Finally, our third pivotal goal involved **formalizing communication between Student Services and Academic Affairs** regarding ESP support, including:

- The Advising Center
- Course enrollment lids and addition of new sections
- Tutoring Services
- The “Back on Track” program for students in academic jeopardy
- The “Early Alert” program to identify and intervene with students with potential academic risk

Starting in Fall 2013, the deans became members of the Student Services Steering Committee. These meetings occur once or twice a month. Other collaborative meetings on specific issues involved members of Academic Affairs and Student Services working together to accomplish the following:

- Obtain support and constructive feedback regarding Student Services assessment.
- Refine processes associated with add and drop dates for course enrollment.
- Resolve communication issues, including:
 - Faculty concerns about the Call Center sending students to the wrong places (e. g., Business Office vs. the Business Academy)
 - Faculty questions about promoting certain courses with START Team assistance
 - Misunderstanding of the waitlist function in NeSIS (CSC student information system)
 - Accidental placement of waitlisted students in courses after a session started without notification
 - Faculty concerns about advising students into FYI courses
- Coordinate frequent visits by Student Services staff to the monthly All-Chairs meetings to create collaborations and share information regarding the awarding of scholarships, faculty reporting dashboard improvements, and other issues.
- Coordinate the establishment of a Graduate Student Appeals Committee to meet federal financial aid compliance guidelines.
- Coordinate advising months and advisor assignments, including scheduling in the Advising Center.
- Coordinate reporting “no show” students via NeSIS.
- Monitor course demand reports, which produce enrollment indicators allowing the Student Services Steering Committee to plan for course offerings, including FYI deficiencies.
- Develop and implement the First Year Inquiry (FYI) Academic Reprieve.
- Refine the “Back on Track” program designed to aid students on academic probation and suspended students allowed to reenter. This included required participation in “Back on Track” activities.

The continued implementation of the “Back on Track” program is an example of successful collaboration between Academic Affairs and Student Services. In the last few years, the Coordinator of the Learning Center has reached out more deliberately to faculty members serving as academic advisors to inform them of students’ status and ask them to encourage full student participation with “Back on Track.” These efforts have yielded increased student completion of the program. Those who fully participate in and complete “Back on Track” are more likely to increase their grade point averages and achieve academic good standing than similar students who do not fully participate.

The “Early Alert” program has also been revised during the years of the Quality Initiative. The “Early Alert” program functions as a means for faculty to notify the Director of Transitional Studies and other appropriate support personnel that a student is struggling in a course. For years, faculty members either consistently submitted Early Alerts or failed to participate at all. In Fall 2013, we temporarily halted the program to reassess it. In Spring 2014, “Early Alert” was placed under a dean and Director of

Transitional Studies. Since the program's reinstatement, faculty participation has almost doubled. As faculty have used an automated corrections roster to report student "no shows," they have developed the habit of submitting student names for "Early Alert." The Director of Transitional Studies and other staff then contact the students, their advisors, and other appropriate groups, such as Athletics, the Learning Center, the International Office, and Project Strive. Follow up with students is also documented within corrections rosters for faculty review. This refined process reflects the collaborative efforts of many units across campus while allowing data collection for assessment and improvement.

During academic year 2014-15, a series of meetings took place between Student Services, the Graduate Dean, the Faculty Senate Graduate Council, and others to establish a Graduate Office devoted to the institution's graduate studies programs. The office is staffed by two project coordinators, one to assist with the Master of Arts in Education and Master of Education programs, and another to assist with the MBA and Master of Science in Organizational Management programs. A faculty member serves as the Graduate Studies Faculty Coordinator to further assist the Graduate Dean. Student Services staff meet frequently with those in Academic Affairs who are responsible for the graduate programs. They examine and refine policies and procedures, consider applications for evolving technology and leverage use of the student information system. As a result, automated communications generation email, or "com gens," are sent to graduate students when they reach benchmarks within their respective programs. For example, once students successfully complete a certain number of credits within a program, they receive a "com gen" reminding them of upcoming tasks. This automated process saves staff time and provides information for graduate students, thereby serving as a retention tool.

Another crucial development during this period includes the reorganization of the President's Executive Council. Since Fall 2013, the Executive Council has been chaired by the Vice President for Academic Affairs. Beginning in Fall 2014, all tasks associated with the Executive Council have been tied to the Master Academic Plan (MAP). This illustrates the President's commitment to the MAP and the utilization of the Executive Council, comprised of academic and non-academic leaders, to work collaboratively to identify obstacles to overcome. The deans have tied Executive Council task force groups to the MAP and the Quality Initiative to attack a variety of challenging issues.

In response to the Quality Initiative, participants from many institutional units are collaborating on the Executive Council's Retention Task Force, which is comprised of faculty members, administrators, and staff. Based on discussions with leaders of other institutions, we concluded that assessing Student Services and other entities across campus is most effective when they are included in problem-solving groups and processes. Retention issues specifically related to the ESP make this collaboration significant for our Initiative. For example, as freshmen students became concerned about the impact that failing a six-credit FYI course would have on their grade-point averages, a cooperative effort was needed to determine a "forgiveness policy" (the FYI Academic Reprieve) that would maintain academic standards and provide remediation for affected students.

Academic Affairs also joined forces with Student Affairs to assist with student success and retention. When students experience personal challenges that impact their academic performance,

Student Affairs responds, but this response is more effective when coupled with faculty participation. Some actions that demonstrate faculty/Student Affairs collaboration are:

- When instructors suspect that extenuating circumstances may be involved in student absences (sickness, personal issues, etc.), they may contact the Senior Director of Student Affairs. This office may notify other units, such as:
 - Residence life
 - Counseling and disability services
 - Coaches and athletic teams
 - Student Activities
 - School nurse
- In some situations, Student Affairs may contact parents and guardians to ensure student safety.
- The Senior Director of Student Affairs may put together a profile of the complete student problem, combining academic, personal, emotional and physical factors. These profiles inform critical discussions between the Senior Director of Student Affairs, academic deans, and other administrators. Current discussions include formalizing this process.
- When student absence is discipline or conduct related, the Senior Director of Student Affairs may work with the faculty to ensure that students can continue their education if possible.

Because of deliberate, intentional efforts to collaborate across units, communication between Academic Affairs and Student Services has never been better; however, we understand communication lines and methods are always evolving. We believe our coordinated efforts at keeping pace with this evolution demonstrate the institution's active engagement in intentional, continuous improvement.

FINAL REFLECTIONS AND NEXT STEPS

At Chadron State College, we believe the Essential Studies Program and related projects implemented through the Quality Initiative and discussed in this report continue to have a significant impact on our institution. We hoped the ESP would have a transformative effect on the lives of students, and we are beginning to see this effect. Through high impact experiences, students are engaging in learning that creates connections between the acquisition of knowledge and their roles in society.³ According to one document promoting the ESP, "The FYI and Capstone may be thought of as 'bookends' to a whole program functioning as a means of helping students explore and understand critical thinking, problem solving, and the nature of inquiry."⁴ Students are making deep and significant connections between coursework and the complex world around them.⁵ We anticipate the ESP will serve as a key recruiting and retention tool because CSC has one of the more innovative general education programs in the United States. Faculty members are further positioning CSC as a leader in the

³ George D. Kuh, *High-Impact Educational Practices: What They Are, Who Has Access to Them, and Why They Matter* (Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2008).

⁴ "FAQ Regarding the New Essential Studies" document.

⁵ http://www.csc.edu/modules/news/public_news/view/10908, accessed 25 March 2016

theory and practice of teaching and learning. The CSC administration continues to support the implementation of this Initiative by allocating funds and other institutional resources for ESP Summer Institutes, three ESP faculty lines, the Teaching and Learning Center, and assessment personnel and tools.

The college intends to continue all aforementioned collaborative efforts. Such activities are deeply aligned with CSC's mission and values and reflect who we are as an institution. These collaborations will continue to evolve, as CSC adheres to the notions of self-reflection and continuous improvement. Funding of high impact practices and faculty professional development through the ESP is absolutely crucial and remains an undisputed institutional priority. Plans are also underway to complete the final room within the Teaching and Learning Center. Finally, we have projected a timeline for continued implementation of the Initiative.

TIMELINE FOR NEXT STEPS

Between 2016 and 2020, we anticipate accomplishing the following on an annual basis:

Essential Studies All Faculty Work Session, August

- Update from ESP Committee
- Update on Tk20 Status
- Update on HLC Conference
- Prepare for HLC site/virtual visit
- Determine assistance needed

ESP Committee

- Perform functions as constituted by Faculty Senate
- Assist in preparation for HLC site/virtual visit
- Assess ESP (Reports due in September)
- ESP Summer Institute, May (with TLC)

Academic Review Committee

- Evaluate new Essential Studies Program courses, Outcomes 2-11
- Create and refine policies related to ESP and evaluate policy suggestions made by ESP Committee

Teaching and Learning Center

- Course design, delivery, and improvement
 - Interdisciplinary course design
 - Quality Matters (online courses)
 - Incorporation of high impact practices
- Support for adjunct faculty
- Teaching and pedagogical issues
 - Teaching of first year students

- Team teaching
 - Pedagogical aspects of high impact practices
- Assessment
 - Assessment of high impact practices
 - General course and program assessment
 - Implementation of changes based on assessment
- ESP Summer Institute, May (with ESP Committee)

Adjunct Faculty

- Deans to conduct annual review of and update adjunct processes during Summer, including updating adjunct website and determining timeline and frequency for conducting adjunct survey
- See two items below regarding adjuncts

Between 2016 and 2020, we also anticipate completing the following tasks:

- Fall 2016: Establish endowment for TLC
- September 2016: Explore adjunct processes with Wayne and Peru State Colleges
- November 2016: Launch new adjunct website
- Academic Year 2016-17: Conduct national search for Associate Vice President for Teaching and Learning Technologies, with July 1, 2017 start date
- Spring 2018: Examine all "grandfathered" courses that meet ESP outcomes to determine appropriateness
- Conduct national search for Director of Teaching and Learning Center, as this position is embedded in the MAP