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Commission for Women

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Many people worked hard for two years behind the scenes during the planning and accreditation phases of UT’s Quality Enhancement Plan. Then, at the end of fall semester, their hard work paid off when the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools granted UT overwhelmingly positive reaccreditation. Campus leaders didn’t await outside endorsement to begin thinking interculturally. We’ve had a wonderful array of events on campus this year – speakers and performers whose experiences have enlivened our desire to know the world and to become superior intercultural partners.

This month we’ve officially entered a more public phase of the QEP. We’re drawing student, faculty, and staff attention to the plan with a new Web site and a new name, Ready for the World. And, we’re drawing every area of university life into the process of attuning to the global experience. Four faculty-staff groups are at work: Global Advisory Committee, Assessment Work Group, Curriculum Infusion Work Group, and Fostering Intercultural Awareness Across Campus.

I want to thank the campus leaders who participated in this Commission for Women roundtable for continuing the discussion of our intercultural and international initiative on campus in such a wonderfully constructive way. Let’s keep conversing and learning -- and nurturing a community where we are all creative, engaged and Ready for the World.

Why does UT need the Ready for the World Initiative?

Hodges: The QEP initiative began about two years ago as a requirement of the SACS accreditation committee. The chancellor came up with the idea of focusing on internationalization and intercultural awareness because it fits UT’s strategic plan to focus on better understanding and appreciation of cultural pluralism. The whole idea is that we enhance student learning, especially in our undergraduates, but also that we engage faculty, staff and students all across campus.

Gehlhar: QEP, which just this month adopted a new name – Ready for the World -- not only engages UT goals but those of the state of Tennessee and society in general. It is imperative that today’s university graduates be fully aware of society inside and outside the United States. If UT graduates are not conversing broadly, they will not perform as well in their professional careers or in their lives.

Hindle: I see Ready for the World offering a unifying theory for the campus, the state, and beyond, which lays out opportunities for learning to thrive in a pluralistic society. The world is getting smaller and smaller due to our communicating and traveling worldwide, and we have a growing dependence on each other. Technology now allows us to do good things together or to do destructive things to each other unless we communicate and understand each other. This great theory of unity is long overdue.

Hodges: I like the fact that you talked about our growing dependence on one another. I think that understanding is at the center of being Ready for the World, and the QEP document serves as a framework for how we an do this -- not only for the next 5 or 10 years as SACS requires, but as we go on and on and on. This framework will help us appreciate and make the most of our dependence.
How do student, faculty, and staff demographics relate to Ready for the World goals?

Hodges: If you look at who are earning PhDs in hard sciences and engineering, statistics show that it’s overwhelmingly international. Fewer American graduate students are enrolled now in the U.S. and at UT in those areas, so as baby boomer professors retire, more international faculty and staff will come here because they are the ones who have the programs that attract diverse students.

Ready for the World is the key to retention of minority students, faculty and staff who are recruited from diverse backgrounds. We must show them once they are on campus that we value diversity and have programs to support that.

Hodges: Over the past decade, the number of minority college students [at the University of Tennessee] has increased tremendously. I think in part it is due to lottery scholarships. But I hope an atmosphere of diversity will begin to draw them – in their classes, their extracurricular activities, and through study abroad opportunities.

Hodges: I’ve noticed very strongly in the last decade that the percentage of international students who are graduate students has gone up. The trend is toward fewer undergraduate students. Undergraduates interact overwhelmingly with international students. Fewer American graduate students.

Across the street is the International House where we are working to create an environment where a normal process interacts with students, faculty and staff in environments where broader perspectives are present. We don’t know everything presented, but it offers opportunity for constructive exchange, and even sharp exchange about ideas that disagree with each other.

Peacock: One more related point. I hear students complain about opportunities to study abroad. Is there another way to seize that opportunity? I think there are difficulties in communications sometimes. Even so, I think it’s good for students in broad topics like math or engineering, or war, to see different faces on the subjects they study.

Hodges: Aside from the immediate affect of helping students see these different things that Sarah so well stated, it helps students prepare for their careers. In past student surveys some have said “I wish I had studied abroad or interacted more with students from other backgrounds.”

Through Ready for the World programming and initiatives, our students can now engage in interactions with other cultures while they are here and become much better prepared for their careers.

Peacock: I just had a thought. If faculty members reinforce these multi-cultural events and say, “This has my stamp of approval,” I think that that will reach a lot of our students. As little as you would think that, students do listen to their teachers.

Are staff included?

Hodges: That’s one of the greater hallmarks of the plan – inclusion of staff as well as students and faculty. As a staff person I feel very positive about it. It takes a village to have a university. We’re all in this thing together and we need each other.

Ready for the World calls on all of us to stretch and grow, to get training in new areas. Students and faculty are used to stretching, but staff, perhaps, haven’t done as much stretching. Ready for the World compels us to do so, and I think that’s a wonderful, wonderful thing. Can you tell I’m rather delighted with this whole initiative?

Hodges: That’s so true. Ready for the World brings people together to support one another – for example, the necessity of planning and programming brings student affairs and academic affairs together. It’s a whole new approach to the goals we have at the university. Faculty depend on staff like Jim and Pam who interact with our students. Their understanding and engagement in this awareness process will make it work because faculty can’t do it all. Students depend on staff as they spend time in classrooms and labs, so staff are very influential in passing on an understanding of what it means to be Ready for the World.

Hodges: From a personal point of view, and as a staff member, I would say that life is much richer in diverse societies and on diverse campuses. It’s more satisfying to be part of a community that cares about global relationships.

Ready for the World emphasizes an expanded view of “diversity.” The Commission for Women’s “Gender in the Workplace” survey shows that to work, teach, research, and study at UT we need a welcoming environment, family-supporting, that offers opportunities for growth. I would say that they can’t understand their classroom, their workplace, their community if they can’t understand their classroom, their workplace, their community.

What role does the Diversity Council play?

Hodges: I serve on the Diversity Council with Pam and a number of other people who care that UT has a good sense of the Quality Enhancement Plan and the Diversity Plan go hand in hand, that they support one another, they work together, that they are not separate.

Hodges: And every academic and administrative unit is working to increase the variety of programming. For example, the idea of the ‘infusion’ is central. We’ll have more cross-cultural programming and student activities in all of our departments.

Hodges: Not only are they coming up with them, but also they are making them work and will be held accountable for reaching measurable goals.

Will Ready for the World improve the quality of education on campus?

Hodges: Infusion is central. We’ll have more cross-cultural perspectives throughout the curriculum so it becomes a natural part of what students learn; they will come into contact with cross-cultural perspectives throughout their studies. It gives faculty a chance to think in different ways about what they teach, think more from an interdisciplinary approach, showing more and more international and intercultural perspectives in what they teach.

Peacock: Students realize their careers depend on a global economy where it’s important to know how to interact with people from other cultures, make a good impression and have positive long-term relationships, in business. They are very important to know how to shake hands! It’s hard for me to put it into words, but I think Ready for the World will be an awesome improvement in the quality of education at UT. Students will benefit. Ready for the World will benefit Knoxville as a whole, if it takes off. It will expand on the sense of community I feel in Knoxville -- you walk down the street and people smile at you. If you can introduce more diversity on the smaller scale then it will have an impact on the larger and larger scale, too.

Hodges: And it applies not to just the business community but really to any profession nowadays. No profession is in isolation. Anybody’s going to advance in any field they have to be able to get along with others, exchange ideas with others – on the other side of town or on the other side of the globe.

Hodges: Or in Washington D.C.

Hodges: Yes. Anywhere in the United States, too. We want UT graduates who are not afraid of other people, but rather, are comfortable working with all people.

Summary Comments

Hodges: As long as UT’s Quality Enhancement Plan remains a document, it’s nothing. It has to be appreciated, used and implemented – not just by one set of people, but across campus.

Peacock: From the student perspective, I hope campus organizations can begin to work together more, to network through the central program council and other central leadership bodies. We’ll become informed about each other’s international and intercultural programming and begin to collaborate and reach our target groups with the news about what’s going on. The weekly Student @tennes see that started this semester can help us with that.

Hodges: The International and Intercultural Awareness initiative is a “framework,” something upon which to build, something upon which to grow. That’s how I look at the Quality Enhancement Plan – a framework for moving into something grander in the future.

Hodges: QEP is an organic thing, isn’t it? We are growing as we work with it and move with it and internalize it. So the Quality Enhancement Plan will change and then it will change. Its working name has already changed! Now let’s go get Ready for the World!

More Information

The Center for International Education coordinates a listserv called I-Events. You can enroll at: http://web.utk.edu/~globe/i-events.php.

The Ready for the World Web site has a calendar of events and much more information about multiculturalism and diversity on campus in beyond. The address is: http://www.tennessee.edu/readyfortheworld.

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http://uthr.admin.utk.edu/tandd/

So rumor has it that you have a question about policy HR128?

Whether you are an employee or a supervisor, it’s important to get the facts straight. Don’t listen to hearsay! Check out the information at The University of Tennessee Employee and Organizational Development website.

The site includes information about various policies as well as HR128. In addition, a Frequently Asked Questions, FAQ on HR128, document is available for download in PDF format.

Why not go to http://uthr.admin.utk.edu/tandd/ and get the RIGHT information? What’s stopping you? You will find a wealth of knowledge about HR128 as well as a list of courses, both in the classroom and online.

The Networker is published two times each year by the UT Commission for Women. Comments and suggestions may be forwarded to the Communications Committee in care of Ms. Deb Haines, medical illustrator: dhaines@utk.edu or 865.974.0989. If you are a club advisor, you may receive duplicate copies. Please share extras.

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