

**Reconceptualizing
UAB's Undergraduate Core Curriculum**

Quality Enhancement Plan

University of Alabama at Birmingham

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Reconceptualizing the undergraduate core curriculum is the focus for UAB's QEP, which ensures that UAB students will have a solid foundation for academic success, professional achievement, and personal fulfillment. The strategies for implementing this plan include the development of A Shared Vision for a UAB Graduate, selection of initial competencies for enhancement, development of targeted interventions, and recommendations for an infrastructure to support a coherent undergraduate experience for students and a continuous cycle of assessment, intervention, and improvement for academic programs.

The Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) begins with a Shared Vision for a UAB Graduate, regardless of major, as an individual who uses **communication skills** effectively, possesses breadth and depth of **knowledge**, is experienced at **problem-solving**, and is prepared for responsible **citizenship** in the community, nation, and world. To achieve this Shared Vision for a UAB Graduate, the QEP identifies three initial targets for enhancement. It prioritizes

1. **Writing** because writing is fundamental to competent functioning across the undergraduate curriculum and in life beyond graduation.
2. **Quantitative literacy** because quantitative literacy enables one to solve quantitative problems in coursework and to make wise decisions about public matters that increasingly are couched in technical terms.
3. **Ethics and civic responsibility** because a university education should develop the ability of individuals to make informed and ethical decisions, to accept responsibility for one's choices, and to participate as part of multiple larger social units.

The QEP incorporates the following implementation strategies to improve student learning in writing, quantitative literacy, and ethics and civic responsibility:

- The enforcement of an orderly progression of academic coursework through consistent advising, automatic early course registration in freshman composition, and automatic prerequisite checking when students register for courses.
- A restructuring of freshman composition, including the adoption of standardized learning objectives, course guidelines, and grading rubrics for English Composition 101 and English Composition 102. Mastery of basic grammar will become a fundamental course objective for EH 101 and be reinforced in EH 102.
- A restructuring of basic math instruction integrated with a new Mathematics Learning Laboratory and emphasizing incorporation of quantitative literacy learning objectives in MA 105 (Pre-Calculus Algebra) and MA (110 Finite Mathematics), which a majority of entering freshmen must pass through prior to graduation.
- A significant expansion of UAB learning communities for regularly admitted students. For each learning community, the same 25 students would be block registered for a Freshman Seminar; EH 101 or EH 102; a social science, physical science, or math course

from Area III or Area IV of the required Alabama General Studies Curriculum, and an optional fourth course. Together, these courses will introduce and reinforce the learning objectives in writing, quantitative literacy, and ethics and civic responsibility.

- Heightened program accountability whereby each department must define those discipline-specific aspects of writing, quantitative literacy, and ethics and civic responsibility which are relevant to its majors and identify the courses in which these aspects are introduced, taught, or reinforced.
- The development of an online Writing Web to facilitate a more coherent approach to teaching and evaluating discipline-specific types of undergraduate writing by providing (1) a detailed description of the most common elements of each writing genre; (2) a set of sample papers; and (3) a generic evaluation rubric that can be adapted for use by instructors and students.
- Shared responsibility for achieving graduation-level competencies among general education (core) courses, courses in the major, other influential components of the university experience such as academic advisers and Student Affairs, and the student.
- A required senior capstone course or experience comparable to those already in place in the professional schools that will draw upon students' previous years of learning and provide meaningful closure to their educational experience at UAB.
- The selection of a yearly UAB Discussion Book as the basis for a series of activities, initiated by the university President, that will unite the UAB community in a shared learning experience that promotes open discussion and civic involvement.
- A new grant program to provide the necessary time and instructional resources for faculty to develop learning community curriculum, to enhance instructional methodologies to improve student engagement, and to transform courses to improve student learning of writing, quantitative literacy, and ethics and civic responsibility.
- Assessment instruments and strategies to measure individual and institutional improvement in student learning of writing, quantitative literacy, and ethics and civic responsibility. These data will provide the basis for modifications in implementation strategies to improve student learning, part of a continuous cycle of assessment, analysis, and improvement.

The Shared Vision for a UAB Graduate reflects high expectations. The phenomenal growth of UAB into a major research university provided the impetus for the Committee to develop an ambitious QEP that helps UAB reach the first Goal in its Strategic Plan: "We will achieve a highly effective undergraduate educational experience to give students the best possible preparation for productive and meaningful careers and lives that benefit society."

THE QEP DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

Background

The process of selecting the Undergraduate Core as the focus of the University of Alabama at Birmingham's Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) began with the strategic planning initiated by President Garrison in Fall 2003. Extensive data analysis and input from campus and community constituents formed the basis for new vision and mission statements that incorporated objectives and measures with a sharper focus on what and how students learn. Provost Capilouto then met with deans and other academic administrators, student and faculty leaders, and teaching award recipients. From these meetings and subsequent discussions, four potential QEP focuses emerged. Of those four possible topics, improving basic learning competencies was selected for enhancement because these competencies have a direct and profound impact on students' success in college and, ultimately, in their lives. The primary vehicle for teaching basic competencies is the core curriculum, which the faculty review teams for the SACS Compliance Audit had already recommended as a prime area for enhancement.

Thus, reconceptualizing the undergraduate core curriculum became the focus for UAB's QEP, which ensures that UAB students will have a solid foundation for academic success, professional achievement, and personal fulfillment. The strategies for implementing this plan include the development of A Shared Vision for a UAB Graduate, selection of initial competencies for enhancement, development of targeted interventions, and recommendations for an infrastructure to support a coherent undergraduate experience for students and a continuous cycle of assessment, intervention, and improvement for academic programs.

The QEP Committee

As part of the Compliance Audit, the Provost asked the deans of the eight schools with undergraduate programs (the Schools of Arts and Humanities, Business, Education, Engineering, Health Related Professions, Natural Sciences and Mathematics, Nursing, and Social and Behavioral Sciences) to nominate one or two representatives from their schools to serve on a Committee to examine the core curriculum under the leadership of the Associate Provost for Undergraduate Programs. When the focus of UAB's QEP was identified, Dr. Capilouto appointed Dr. Marilyn Kurata to chair this committee, newly reconstituted as the QEP Committee. Representatives from the UAB Honors Program, the Division of Student Affairs, the Faculty Senate, and the Student Government Association were also added. The full Committee Roster is shown below:

Dr. Marilyn Kurata (Committee Chair)	Chair and Associate Professor, English
Dr. Edwin Cook (Committee Co-Chair)	Vice Chair and Associate Professor, Psychology
Dr. John Mayer (Committee Co-Chair)	Associate Chair and Professor, Mathematics

Dr. Theodore Benditt	President of the Faculty Senate and Professor, Philosophy
Ms. Denise Bruns	Associate Vice Provost for Enrollment Management, Student Affairs
Dr. Sarah Culver	Associate Professor, Finance
Dr. Michael Froning	Dean, Education
Dr. L. Kyle Grimes	Associate Professor, English
Ms. Cheryl Hall	Assistant Professor, Theatre
Dr. James Martin	Associate Professor, Physics
Dr. Alberta McCaleb	Chair of Undergraduate Studies and Associate Professor, Nursing
Ms. Chinyere Okwu	UAB alumna and President of SGA for Public Health
Dr. E. Douglas Rigney	Associate Dean and Associate Professor, Engineering
Dr. Rose Scripa	Associate Provost for Undergraduate Programs, Academic Affairs
Dr. James Slack	Professor, Government
Dr. Michael Sloane	Director, UAB Honors Program, and Associate Professor, Psychology
Ms. Ann Steves	Associate Professor, Medical Imaging and Therapy

In addition, Dr. John Harris (Associate Provost for Quality Assessment and Orlean Bullard Beeson Professor of Education, Samford University) served as a consultant to the Committee. Dr. Harris is an internationally known expert in quality improvement for undergraduate education.

The QEP Committee Process

Once the focus of the QEP was determined and the committee was appointed, intensive development effort commenced. Initial committee meetings focused on reviews of best practices and plans for surveys, focus groups and other data collection. The whole committee met for two hours twice a week beginning in Spring 2004 and continuing throughout the summer. Beginning in Fall 2004, committee meetings were shortened to ninety minutes twice a week. Beginning in January 2005, the Committee met once a week for ninety minutes. These regular and extended face-to-face meetings of the full committee were essential because generally only individual members knew how the issue under discussion would impact the particular school or campus constituency they represented. The consultant joined the Committee for some meetings. Such meetings modified, sometimes radically, members' pre-existing attitudes and expectations and in many cases led to reconsideration of decisions already made. Most importantly, they moved the Committee towards consensus on the major points of the QEP and towards compromise on minor points.

Between meetings, communications among committee members were enhanced by technology. The committee was provided with a SharePoint web site for posting of information such as documents, resource materials, discussion threads, and minutes.

Each member of the QEP Committee spent time outside of these regular meetings researching other institutions, reading relevant documents, and contributing to the development of the QEP in a variety of ways. Dr. Grimes posted the minutes maintained by the Chair. Dr. Cook was in charge of survey data collection and analysis, including development of the web-based survey instruments. Dr. Mayer coordinated the focus groups for which members acted as moderators and recorders. Drs. Cook, Grimes, Kurata, Mayer, McCaleb, Rigney, and Scripa made site visits

to other campuses and/or attended the annual COC/SACS meeting in Atlanta. Once preliminary data were in hand and preliminary decisions made, each member of the QEP Committee was assigned to two subcommittees, which met as needed. The eight sub-committees focused on learning communities, mid-curricular enhancement, capstone courses, a teaching center, coherence, writing, quantitative literacy, and ethics and civic responsibility. Each subcommittee's charge was to research best practices and develop a preliminary proposal for the Committee's consideration. These subcommittee reports as modified by full committee discussions formed the basis for much of the final QEP proposal.

The leadership team (Drs. Kurata, Cook, and Mayer) met weekly and sometimes more often especially during the later stages of development. The external consultant Dr. Harris joined the leadership team for about one-fourth of these meetings. Leadership meetings were used to set the agenda for the Committee meetings, brainstorm ideas, resolve conflicts, and discuss alternate approaches. The leadership team provided updates on the committee's progress to President Garrison, Dr. Capilouto, the Academic Programs Council (deans and executive leadership of the university), the Faculty Senate, and other campus groups. Drs. Kurata and Cook had primary responsibility for drafting the final QEP proposal.

Data Collection and Analysis

Members of the QEP Committee gathered information from a wide variety of sources. They reviewed literature on educational reform, course design, and assessment. They studied web sites sponsored by peer institutions and other colleges that had developed successful strategies for instruction or assessment, as well as those of organizations, groups, or centers focused on relevant aspects of higher education. The Committee conducted on-line surveys with faculty, alumni, and parents, and they reviewed existing survey (NSSE and FSSE) and standardized test (Academic Profile) results previously collected by the office of the Associate Provost for Undergraduate Programs. Focus groups and less-structured meetings were held with faculty, students, professional advisers, and graduate program directors, while other data were supplied by Career Services and Student Affairs. Members of the QEP Committee made on-site visits to the University of Alabama (Tuscaloosa), Georgia State University, and Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis. They also attended the SACS-COC annual conference and participated in "Shaping the Future: Aspiration, Assessment, Action!", a teleconference on the first year experience sponsored by the National Resource Center.

Campus Involvement

UAB has endeavored to involve multiple campus constituencies in the development of the QEP. In addition to having faculty representatives from the eight schools with undergraduate programs, the QEP Committee also solicited input from more than 300 faculty in these schools. Other campus constituencies represented on the QEP Committee were the UAB Honors Program, the Division of Student Affairs, the Faculty Senate, the Student Government Association, and the Provost's office.

Members of the QEP Committee have met with the Council of Academic Advisors Steering Committee; advisors from the Schools of Arts and Humanities, Natural Sciences and

Mathematics, and Social and Behavioral Sciences; the Vice President for Student Affairs and her executive staff; Keith Sessions, the Director of Alabama's Articulation Program; the Faculty Senate's Curriculum and Research Committee; UAB's Living/Learning Committee; directors of UAB's Learning Community Pilot Project; the Undergraduate Programs Council's Articulation and Curriculum Committee; the deans from the eight schools with undergraduate programs; the Vice Presidents; the Academic Programs Council; Dr. Capilouto, President Garrison, and the Board of Trustees. In addition, the QEP Committee solicited input via focus groups or surveys from students, alumni, graduate program directors, and parents. Throughout the process, concerns and advice were encouraged to be expressed to members of the QEP Committee.

The Faculty Senate passed a resolution in December 2004 encouraging “faculty, students and staff to support the implementation of these enhancement goals for the UAB core curriculum” and requesting “that appropriate institutional resources and infrastructure be made available, to assure the successful implementation and assessment of the QEP plan” (Appendix I).

Individual response to the development of the QEP has been similarly supportive. For example, upon hearing about the QEP, Robert Corley, director of the UAB Center for Urban Affairs, contacted the QEP Committee to discuss ways the Center could become involved. He wrote, “I would be very pleased to have the Center for Urban Affairs cited in the QEP as a partner and a resource for those departments who wish to develop a capstone course with a service learning component. . . . We are truly excited about the opportunities that a more coordinated and academically rigorous service learning program will offer to UAB students and faculty.”

The QEP has the potential to benefit every undergraduate student at UAB. Enhancing the core curriculum as the QEP outlines will ensure that students are better prepared when they take courses in their majors. The QEP will also enhance the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of UAB's graduates, heightening their attractiveness to employers, graduate programs, and the community.

The QEP Committee and the administration will continue to emphasize the central relevance of the QEP to the mission of the university and its goal for undergraduate education, achieving “a highly effective undergraduate educational experience to give students the best possible preparation for productive and meaningful careers and lives that benefit society.” Among the strategies being used to enhance campus-wide and public awareness of the QEP are presentations to faculty and student groups, a campus-wide faculty town meeting, kiosk displays, and notices in the *UAB Reporter*.

RECONCEPTUALIZATION OF THE UNDERGRADUATE CORE

History of UAB'S Core Curriculum

In 1994 the legislature of the state of Alabama created the Articulation and General Studies Committee (AGSC) through ACT 94-202. The AGSC was charged to develop a state-wide general studies curriculum that could be taken at any and all public colleges and universities in the state. The result was a curriculum consisting of four required areas of study:

- Area I: Written Composition (6 semester hours)
- Area II: Humanities and Fine Arts (12 semester hours)
- Area III: Natural Sciences and Mathematics (11 semester hours)
- Area IV: History, Social, and Behavioral Sciences (12 semester hours)

Area I is the standard two-course sequence in composition. Courses in Area II are expected to develop the ability to deal with issues in values, ethics, or aesthetics as they are manifested in the arts, literature, languages, philosophy, and religious studies, as well as to expose students to the methodologies of the respective disciplines. Area III requires at least three semester hours of mathematics at or above the pre-calculus algebra level and at least eight semester hours in the natural sciences, which must include a laboratory experience. Area IV requires at least three semester hours in history; the remainder can be taken in any of the traditional social and behavioral science disciplines such as psychology, sociology, economics, political science, and anthropology. To meet the requirements of Area II or Area IV, students must elect a two-course sequence in literature or a two-course sequence in History. The AGSC requires that courses in Areas II and IV be broad in scope and content and/or expose students to the methodologies of the relevant disciplines. Arts courses must emphasize appreciation and history, not performance. The procedure by which institutions seek approval of courses to satisfy the various areas is described in the Compliance Audit document (<http://sacs.ad.uab.edu/default.asp>).

In 1998, the AGSC general studies curriculum became operative at all state institutions. The then existing UAB undergraduate program core curriculum was modified in 1998 to comply with the legislative mandate. The basic core curriculum at UAB requires undergraduates to satisfy the following requirements:

- Area I: English Composition I and II (fulfilled by a grade of C or better)
- Area II: 3 semester hours in the fine arts (theatre, art, music), 3 semester hours in literature, and 6 semesters in other arts and humanities courses
- Area III: 3 hours in mathematics at or above the pre-calculus algebra level and at least 8 semester hours in natural sciences.
- Area IV: 3 hours in history and 9 hours in other disciplines in the social and behavioral sciences.

In fulfilling these requirements, students must take at least one sequence (6 hours) in either literature (in Area II) or in history (in Area IV). All courses that satisfy core requirements must be on the approved list of AGSC courses.

Particular undergraduate units within UAB have chosen to adjust these requirements for their students in different ways:

1. The School of Engineering requires 3 fewer hours of coursework in the arts and humanities and 3 fewer hours in the social and behavioral sciences. It also imposes some limitations on which courses students can take to satisfy Areas II, III, and IV.
2. The Schools of Business, Education, Health Related Professions, and Nursing impose some limitations on which courses students can take to satisfy various area requirements.
3. The Schools of Arts and Humanities, Social and Behavioral Sciences, and Natural Sciences and Mathematics require an additional 6-9 semester hours in two of the three following tracks: (i) Foreign Language/Culture, (ii) Critical Reasoning/Philosophy, and (iii) Computer Science/Technology.
4. Students who complete the UAB Honors Program are granted credit for Areas I-IV (except for the mathematics requirement).

Since fall 2000, all undergraduate students entering UAB have been subject to the 1998 core curriculum requirements.

Current Perspectives on the Core

As described in the current edition of the Undergraduate Catalog, UAB's core curriculum is designed to (1) "provide students with the necessary skills and abilities to enable them to succeed in their major course of study during their undergraduate years" and (2) "provide a wide exposure to ideas, perspectives, issues, and knowledge that lie beyond the narrow parameters of any individual major." As an initial effort to discover how we could enhance the effectiveness of the core curriculum in achieving its designated goals, the QEP Committee held small group meetings with faculty, professional advisers, and Student Affairs staff. Their input identified the following interrelated problems undercutting the effectiveness of the current core curriculum:

1. Many faculty and advisers have not embraced the core as fundamental to a UAB undergraduate education.
2. Many students have little sense of how core curriculum courses relate to their major.

These problems are not unique to UAB. AGSC courses are general education requirements and share the consequences described in *Changing General Education Curriculum*: "General education is that ill-defined portion of the undergraduate curriculum that belongs to nearly everyone and is the sole province of no one" (Ratcliff, Johnson, and Gaff, 2004). In practice, UAB students approach the core curriculum with a general distribution checklist mentality. At best, AGSC courses are requirements to be fulfilled before the "real," i.e., major, courses can be

taken. At worst, AGSC courses are tiresome hurdles to be cleared haphazardly and often postponed until they remain the final bars to graduation.

The latter scenario has been possible because the registration system that has been used, based on technology developed in the 1970s, did not automatically block students from enrolling in courses for which they had not fulfilled prerequisites. Thus, basic math and English requirements could be delayed until a student's senior year. In fact, students could and did enroll in sophomore literature, history, and other writing intensive courses without having completed their freshman composition classes.

Considerable improvements have been made. In the past few years, prerequisite requirements for English Composition I and II, entry-level mathematics courses, and sophomore literature courses have been enforced. Advisers have also been steering entering students to take foundational courses early. In 2005, UAB will begin implementation of Banner SCT, a new student information system that allows more sophistication and flexibility in dealing with student records, including registration and prerequisites.

The second reason for the failure to enforce prerequisite checking is the fact that a significant proportion of UAB students transfer from other institutions. For example, 4,257 (38.5%) of the 11,046 undergraduate students enrolled in fall 2003 entered UAB as transfer students. UAB has been slow to consistently enforce prerequisite checking because transfer students have to postpone desired courses if difficulties in the articulation of transfer credit delay their enrollment in courses with prerequisites. The new SCT Banner system has the capacity to simplify articulation of transfer credit.

The QEP Committee realized that enhancement of the core curriculum had to begin by having students, faculty, and advisers recognize the dual purposes of UAB's core curriculum. While general education courses are aimed primarily at developing a breadth of knowledge, a core curriculum is also designed to be foundational in nature. That is, core courses provide exposure to and instruction in basic skills, competencies, and knowledge that prepare students for higher learning in more specialized and advanced courses. Therefore, whenever possible, students should complete foundational courses early in their academic careers. Functioning synergistically with students' major curricula, the core curriculum should be an early, integral, and valued part of each student's undergraduate education at UAB. In short, the core curriculum, as a subset of general education, should teach students those fundamentals that they must learn before they can learn anything else.

To establish the practical reality of what we agreed was pedagogically and theoretically sound, the QEP Committee developed an Early Academic Competencies Survey designed to obtain information about competencies that students need to acquire prior to entry into their major. A list of twenty-six basic competencies was generated from committee discussion and a review of relevant source materials. Phrasing of competencies was generic enough to apply to multiple majors.

The survey was sent to 263 faculty who teach the introductory courses in their majors that are taken primarily by students in the major. Faculty were asked to rate the relative importance of the listed competencies and skills for student success in their majors and the relative mastery of

these competencies by students in these beginning courses. The high response rate of 69% indicates that we were inquiring about an issue of strong interest to the faculty. In addition, responses were received from faculty representing 47 of 55 undergraduate majors, and non-responding majors represented less than 2% of UAB graduates over the last four years (Appendix II). Although discipline-specific faculty groups differed, often radically, in their evaluation of the importance of many competencies, six of the twenty-six competencies were rated very important by all faculty groups as shown by the following table.

Competency	Mean Relevance Rating**	Percent Judged to be Adequately Competent
Read with comprehension	2.73	58.8
Listen with comprehension	2.72	60.7
Think conceptually	2.66	49.6
Analyze and interpret facts or evidence	2.35	50.9
Understand the significance of the UAB Academic Honor Code	2.33	53.2
Synthesize ideas	2.27	50.8

** 0 = not relevant, 1 = useful, 2 = highly relevant, 3 = essential

Thus faculty felt that only about half of their sophomore and junior students were adequately competent in each of the six competencies that were deemed HIGHLY RELEVANT or ESSENTIAL for success in major courses. This strongly suggests that student preparedness in these foundational competencies needs to be increased. In other words, these competencies should be taught in core courses taken early in a student's career at UAB and then reinforced each year until graduation.

A coherent and meaningful core curriculum also needs to promote competencies that students should acquire prior to graduation. Compared to the identification of early, foundational competencies, the task of identifying graduation competencies was viewed as more open-ended, and the methodology was changed accordingly. The Committee organized focus groups with faculty from each of the eight schools with undergraduate programs. Focus groups included faculty who had participated in the early on-line survey and faculty who teach primarily upper-level courses in their majors. Scott Snyder, Director of UAB's Center for Educational Accountability, helped the Committee refine the focus group questions and trained committee members to serve as moderators and recorders.

Focus group questions were designed to move the faculty towards an identification of what they perceived to be desirable competencies for graduating seniors regardless of major. After discussing the foundational competencies identified in the faculty survey, the focus groups generated a list of twenty-four graduation competencies which every UAB graduate should possess regardless of major. These graduation competencies can be roughly grouped into the categories of Knowledge/Skills, Values/Attitudes, and Life Skills (Appendix III). While faculty from different schools often focused on different, sometimes very individualized, concerns and skills for their majors, there was a general call for seniors to possess adequate communication and life skills to succeed professionally and personally after graduation regardless of the student's discipline. Faculty stressed the need to develop an integral relationship between early

foundational competencies and desired graduation competencies. This emphasis paralleled the Committee's own intention to reconceptualize undergraduate education at UAB as an integrated curriculum.

The Committee also scheduled three focus groups with students and one with graduate program directors. The only student focus group that drew sufficient participation was with students recruited from the UAB Honors Program (Appendix IV). Since these students substitute Honors coursework for the core curriculum required of other UAB students, their comments generally were not based on personal experience but reflected a perspective gained from interaction with students not in the UAB Honors Program. Honors Program students disparaged the core curriculum as “very high school” and questioned whether colleges should be responsible for teaching life skills. They recommended more collaborative learning, small classes, and practical application skills in communication and research. Graduate program directors repeatedly expressed the importance of and need for stronger writing skills (Appendix V).

The Goal: A Shared Vision for a UAB Graduate

An explicit, coherent and meaningful statement of the goals of undergraduate education guides strategic planning by identifying targets for assessment and intervention, and by serving as a standard against which proposed changes can be evaluated. While UAB and its various schools, departments, and programs have individual mission statements, the QEP Committee viewed the development of a single Shared Vision for a UAB Graduate as a critical, fundamental step toward rethinking and reconceptualizing the core curriculum. By directing attention towards the end goal of an undergraduate education at UAB, **the QEP reinforces how the core curriculum functions synergistically with major curricula regardless of the particular discipline.**

Additional surveys revealed that UAB alumni and parents of UAB students recognize common desirable outcomes or goals of a UAB education. Recent graduates and parents of current students were invited to take part in online surveys in which they rated the importance of fifteen potential graduation competencies identified by the faculty focus groups. Alumni rated the importance of these competencies on four-point Likert scales, while parents simply indicated which were most and least important (Appendix VI and Appendix VII). Parents and alumni generally agreed on which seven of the listed fifteen competencies were most important:

Competency	Alumni Rating *	Parent Ranking **
Verbal communication	2.61	2.88
Reading comprehension	2.57	2.86
Critical thinking	2.56	2.79
Written communication	2.54	2.79
Information management	2.43	2.39
Ethics	2.36	2.43
Mathematics	1.95	2.43

* 0 = not important, 1 = important, 2 = very important, 3 = essential

** 1 =1 least important, 2 = moderate importance, 3 = most important

Employers of UAB graduates also value these competencies, in particular those related to ethics, understanding of diversity, and communication. Michael Lebeau, Assistant Director of UAB Career Services and President of the Alabama Counseling Association, has tracked employers' needs and values through national sources and local interviews over the past five years. His in-house report summarizing the views of employers of UAB graduates highlights the need for a strong work ethic and for an educational experience that extends outside the classroom through extracurricular and volunteer activities. It also emphasizes the need for general competencies that facilitate problem-solving and life-long learning (2004).

Based on the input and data collected, the Committee developed the following Shared Vision for a UAB Graduate:

A UAB Graduate

- **Communication.** Is able to participate effectively in the world of ideas and information.
 - Reads with comprehension, attention to detail, and an awareness of context, tone, and interconnections with other texts, life experiences, and public events.
 - Writes correctly and effectively in response to specific needs and for diverse audiences and contexts.
 - Speaks effectively as determined by audience, setting, and circumstances.
 - Uses information technology effectively for professional communication.
- **Knowledge.** Possesses a depth and breadth of knowledge sufficient for informed decision-making.
 - Demonstrates substantial knowledge in a disciplinary major.
 - Differentiates among methodologies, major ideas and figures, and specific information or issues relevant to the sciences and humanities.
 - Uses effectively the technology appropriate for one's discipline.
- **Problem-Solving.** Is able to collect and evaluate data and analyze complex issues, using appropriate methods.
 - Demonstrates critical thinking skills by synthesizing information, making reasonable arguments, and arriving at logical conclusions.
 - Demonstrates quantitative reasoning by interpreting data in multiple formats and applying quantitative methods to solve complex problems.
 - Demonstrates the ability to achieve goals through collaboration.
- **Citizenship.** Is aware of contemporary issues and prepared to engage responsibly in the community.
 - Understands civic responsibility and engages in informed decision-making with respect to social and political issues.
 - Recognizes that values and ethics are integral to one's academic, personal, and professional life.
 - Respects the significant role of diversity in the contemporary world.

Focusing on four major goals and three to four specific outcomes within each, our Shared Vision for a UAB Graduate will unify undergraduate education at UAB. **Through the Shared Vision, UAB's QEP emphasizes a set of core competencies more than the set of courses that comprise the core curriculum.** This emphasis is expressed through mechanisms, policies and procedures that distribute between the core and major curricula responsibility for these competencies that all graduates should master.

Practices at other universities suggest ways in which this emphasis can be expressed. During site-visits to Georgia State University and Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI), members of the QEP Committee were impressed by the concerted effort to “advertise” and impress on each campus’s consciousness that institution's goals for undergraduate education. Georgia State University distributes a free mouse pad imprinted with the question, “Who is the Georgia State University Graduate?”, and the bullet-pointed answer. IUPUI distributes a bookmark / 3-ring notebook tab that describes in detail their “Principles of Undergraduate Learning” (PULs) and moreover paints an abbreviated version of these PULs on the walls of classrooms and hallways.

UAB will adopt a comparable strategy as part of the implementation of the QEP. A campus-wide campaign to publicize the Shared Vision for a UAB Graduate has already begun with the goal of bringing coherence to the understanding of a UAB undergraduate education to all segments of the campus community. Such a campaign will also be used in materials annually marketing the university to prospective applicants and employers, so that the larger community and general public understand the goals of our institution’s educational programs.

Initial Targets for Enhancement

Any plan to improve student learning simultaneously with respect to all of the specific competencies identified in the Shared Vision for a UAB Graduate would be both impractical and ineffectual. The Committee therefore selected three competencies for initial enhancement by this QEP:

- **writing**
- **quantitative literacy**
- **ethics and civic responsibility**

These selections were based on three general types of considerations. First, standardized test data and faculty survey and focus group results clearly identified these competencies as most in need of enhancement at UAB. Second, since these competencies are all foundational, early and multiple points of intervention are possible, and such interventions can contribute to success in major curricula. Finally, these competencies were selected because they contribute broadly to the Shared Vision for a UAB Graduate. Specific details concerning the selection of these three competencies for initial enhancement are provided below.

Writing

Rationale for Inclusion

The QEP prioritizes writing because it is fundamental to competent functioning across the undergraduate curriculum and in life beyond graduation. UAB faculty who teach discipline-specific courses taken early in the major curricula clearly view writing as an important “foundation” competency that is currently in need of improvement. These faculty (N=181, representing virtually all of UAB’s active majors) completed an Early Academic Competencies Survey that asked about the relevance of 26 basic competencies and skills that the QEP Committee had identified (Appendix II). Results indicated that

- Among the top-ranked 13 competencies that were rated as “Highly Relevant” or “Essential,” more than one-third dealt explicitly with writing (“write sentences using standard English”, “compose an organized paragraph”) or with higher-order cognitive abilities that are honed and assessed in the context of writing (“think conceptually,” “synthesize ideas,” “construct coherent arguments”).
- Only 62% of undergraduates entering early discipline-specific courses were judged to be competent at writing sentences in standard English.
- Only about half (47-53%) of these students were judged to be competent in the higher-order writing-related skills.

The ETS Academic Profile test administered to a sample of 116 UAB graduating seniors in April 2004 substantiates the observations of faculty concerning the need for improved writing skills among our students. This test produces both norm-referenced and criterion-referenced scores in the areas of Critical Thinking, Reading, Writing, and Mathematics (Appendix VIII). Results showed that among the senior sample

- 24% tested as “Not Proficient” in Writing at Level 2, which emphasizes basic semantic and grammatical manipulations of prose.
- 47% tested as “Not Proficient” in Writing at Level 3, which includes such intermediate-level skills as appropriate use of parallelism, recognition of redundancy, and selecting the most effective revision of a sentence.

While these percentages of students classified as "Not Proficient" were lower for UAB students than for a comparison group from fourteen other institutions classified as Doctoral/Research Universities I and II, the results are cause for national concern, not local congratulations.

Finally, writing is a fundamental competency, the enhancement of which will contribute broadly to our Shared Vision for a UAB Graduate. Efforts focused on improving writing contribute directly to development of other communication competencies, such as reading and public speaking. Writing is crucial for the communication of knowledge and for effective problem-solving. The ability to write effectively also enables more responsible engagement in the community. For example, a special issue of *College Board Review* (2004) opens with an essay

by former U.S. Senator Bob Kerrey, now president of New School University, who describes the inseparable bond between good writing and democracy.

Current Impediments to Acquisition of Effective Writing Skills at UAB

First, there is a disjunction between what faculty outside the Department of English expect will be taught in the freshman composition courses and what English faculty perceive to be the function of English Composition I and II. Most non-English department faculty expect freshman composition to include extensive grammar review as well as practice in advanced composition. However, expecting freshman students to have already learned basic grammar in high school, English faculty frequently focus on developing higher-level writing skills like audience awareness, voice, and logical argument. Sometimes faculty and course expectations are even more mismatched. For example, faculty from the Schools of Engineering and Nursing complained that students have to "unlearn" what they were taught earlier because their discipline-specific writing is so different from the expository writing emphasized in freshman composition as a consequence of AGSC guidelines and criteria for written composition in general studies courses.

Second, a lack of consistency in instructional emphasis and grading standards exists across multiple sections of first-year composition courses despite the shared course objectives mandated by AGSC. As an academic unit with a strong egalitarian tradition, UAB's Department of English generally requires all full-time faculty to teach freshman composition and sophomore literature annually. However, full-time English faculty have voted against mandatory standardized syllabi and textbooks for any course, including freshman composition (EH 101 and EH 102). The consequence is that sections of these core courses differ widely in the types of textbooks used, content and level of classroom discussion, and focus of faculty instruction.

Even when course content corresponds to the best practices in teaching composition, there is a significant difference in teacher expectations and grading standards. For example, among 43 sections of EH 101 (English Composition I) taught in fall 2003 the average class grade (on a 4.0 scale) differed by as much 1.72 points, and for spring 2004 the range of class averages based on 22 sections was nearly as large (1.54 points). While grades in EH 101 are related to expected predictors such as high school GPA, ACT English and ACT reading, these predictors do not appear to account for differences among sections in average grade. Even larger differences among average class grades occurred in EH 102 (English Composition II) for these terms: ranges were 1.94 points (22 sections) and 2.10 points (43 sections) for the fall 2003 and spring 2004 semesters, respectively.

Contributing to such inconsistencies is the high turnover of faculty. During 2003-04, the English department gained seven new full-time faculty (temporary and regular) and lost five full-time people. In fall 2003, twelve of the thirty-one adjunct instructors and teaching assistants teaching core English courses had not taught previously during the calendar year.

Third, a significant percentage of UAB graduates have fulfilled one or both of their freshman composition requirements elsewhere. UAB is required to accept transfer credit for any course that has been articulated under the AGSC agreement, and a large number of UAB students are transfer students. For example, of 11,046 students enrolled in fall 2003, 991 were new transfer

students (this number does not include students who had transferred in before fall 2003). More than 83% of the new transfer students entered with more than 31 transfer hours earned.

Fourth, faculty in majors other than English frequently complain that students in courses in their major lack basic writing skills. While this may be true some of the time, writing problems at this level often result from the students' inadequate understanding of the major subject and relative unfamiliarity with the forms of writing that they are being asked to produce in the major (Hounsell, 1997). Discipline-specific writing follows distinct conventions in terms of methods of organization, approach, style, and even voice. Confused students resort to pompous rhetoric, misuse words, or produce incoherent writing that is (mis)interpreted by faculty as a basic writing problem that should have been addressed in EH 101 and EH 102.

QEP Goals for Writing

Because writing is a core competency with pervasive effects on success within and beyond undergraduate education, and because both faculty feedback and standardized testing suggest weaknesses in writing instruction, enhancement of writing skills is a primary goal for the UAB QEP. The considerations described here strongly suggest that any attempt to enhance the writing competency of our graduates must begin with standardized and enhanced writing instruction in freshman composition courses taken during the first year at UAB.

It is equally important that enhancement of writing competencies of graduates must involve greater communication with and participation of the various major programs. Such participation and communication can address multiple issues. These include the current disparity between expectations and goals of English faculty and faculty in other programs, the need to "catch" students who transfer in one or both of their freshman composition courses, and the benefits to be gained from coherent and coordinated writing instruction across the undergraduate experience.

UAB graduates should be able to demonstrate a mastery of basic writing skills and strong competency in the discipline-specific writing relevant to their majors. Specifically, a UAB graduate should be able to

- Respond to an assigned topic
- Write a logical argument that makes an unambiguous claim, is supported by reasonable and appropriate evidence, notes and refutes opposition claims, and is directed toward an identified audience
- Incorporate external sources pertinent to the argument and document such sources accurately and appropriately
- Exhibit competence in grammar, usage, and mechanics
- Use writing conventions specific to the disciplinary major

Quantitative Literacy

Rationale for Inclusion

The QEP prioritizes quantitative literacy because it is fundamental to solving quantitative problems that occur in school, life, and work, and in communicating solutions to those problems to others. UAB faculty who teach discipline-specific courses taken early in the major curricula clearly view a number of competencies related to QL as important “foundation” competencies that are currently in need of improvement (Appendix II).

- On the Early Competencies Survey, faculty rated the following competencies as “Highly Relevant” or “Essential”: “understand and relate multiple representations of the same information,” “construct abstractions,” “solve multi-step problems or logical puzzles,” and “construct coherent arguments.” However, only in “understand and relate multiple representations of the same information” were as many as 50% of beginning majors rated as currently competent by these faculty.
- A subgroup of faculty in the natural sciences, technology, psychology and engineering also ranked the following quantitative competencies as “Highly relevant” or “Essential” to their majors: “make and use graphical representations of data,” “visualize spatial relations,” and “solve problems using high school algebra or plane geometry.” However, only in “solve problems using high school algebra and geometry” were as many as 50% of beginning majors rated as currently competent by these faculty.

The ETS Academic Profile test (AP) administered to a sample of 116 UAB graduating seniors in April 2004 indicated that weak mathematical skills remain a problem for students approaching graduation (Appendix VIII). Among the senior sample

- 20% tested as “Not Proficient” in Mathematics at Level 2, which emphasizes moderately complex word and algebraic problems, basic set problems, and interpretation of moderately complex graphs.
- 52% tested as “Not Proficient” in Mathematics at Level 3, which includes complex word problems that require logical reasoning, generalizations about sets and functions, and use of exponents and roots more sophisticated than squares and square roots.

Although the percentages of UAB students classified as “Not Proficient” on the math parts of the AP were significantly lower than for a comparison group from fourteen other institutions classified as Doctoral/Research Universities I and II

(<http://www.ets.org/hea/acpro/pdfs/seniordoc.pdf>), the generally low rates of proficiency are again cause for national concern rather than local congratulations.

Two recent international studies contribute to concern over U.S. students’ poor competency in math. The 2003 Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) compares the performance of fourth-graders and eighth-graders. TIMSS reported that U.S. eighth-graders were outperformed by students in nine of the forty-four countries that participated in the study. U. S. students’ average score of 504 lagged behind the 605 score of front-runner Singapore, as

well as the scores of Korea, Chinese Taipei, Hong Kong, Japan, Belgium, Estonia, Hungary, and the Netherlands [<http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2005/timss03>]. U.S. teenagers fared no better on the 2000 Program for International Student Assessment study (PISA). In this study, 15 year olds in Japan, Korea, New Zealand, Finland, Australia, Canada, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom significantly outperformed U.S. students in math [<http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2002/2002116.pdf>].

These international studies and the AP test administered to UAB students identify general weaknesses in basic math skills. However, feedback from faculty in the School-wide Focus Groups (Appendix III) emphasized the need for students to be able to **apply mathematics in a variety of contexts**. Thus, Education faculty expressed concern over students' analytic, research and organization skills, as well as basic knowledge of math. Social and Behavioral Science Faculty noted the importance of quantitative skills for effective problem solving in both professional and everyday contexts. The value of quantitative skills related to personal financial management was suggested in the Honors Student focus group (Appendix IV).

The need to consider quantitative reasoning within a broader context is also made by the economist, Arnold Packer, in *Why Numbers Count: Quantitative Literacy for Tomorrow's America*: "Important quantitative competencies are those that can be used to solve problems people would frequently encounter on the job or in their roles as citizens or parents" (1997). Robert Moses, founder of the community-based Algebra Project for school reform, and Charles Cobb, a co-founder of the National Association of Black Journalists, emphasize the social imperative for producing quantitatively literate graduates: "the most urgent social issue affecting poor people and people of color is economic access. In today's world, economic access and full citizenship depend crucially on math and science literacy" (2001). A widely referenced compendium of views on quantitative literacy (*Mathematics and Democracy: the Case for Quantitative Literacy*, edited by Lynn Arthur Steen, 2001) also emphasizes the connection between quantitative literacy and citizenship.

Thus, while standardized testing at the local, national and international levels points to the importance of enhancing basic math skills, education theorists and UAB students and faculty from a variety of disciplines emphasize the need for a broader quantitative literacy. "In contrast to mathematics, statistics, and most other school subjects, quantitative literacy is inseparable from its context. In this respect it is more like writing than like algebra, more like speaking than like history. Numeracy has no special content of its own, but inherits its content from its context" (Steen, 2001). Deborah Hughes-Hallett, respected author of one of the best known reform calculus textbooks, echoes this central idea: "mathematics focuses on climbing the ladder of abstraction, while quantitative literacy clings to context. Mathematics asks students to rise above context, while quantitative literacy asks students to stay in context. Mathematics is about general principles that can be applied in a range of contexts; quantitative literacy is about seeing every context through a quantitative lens" (2001).

Within this framework, the QEP therefore seeks to enhance both basic math competencies and the application of those competencies in a variety of contexts.

Current Impediments to Acquisition of Quantitative Literacy at UAB

We have identified four problems that impede student learning in the area of quantitative literacy (QL). First, many students postpone fulfilling the math core requirement until their last year or even last semester at UAB. There can be no building on a foundation if students have not learned foundational competencies early in their academic careers.

Second, current instructional methods in early math courses are not achieving the desired student learning outcomes. Although there are common syllabi and textbooks in the basic math courses, there is wide variation in success rates in pre-calculus courses across different sections of a course. More significantly, the overall success rates are low. For example, 36% of students enrolled in MA 105 in Fall 2004 did not pass the course, receiving a D, F, or W, even though the mean high school GPA for this subgroup was 3.29 and the mean ACT math score was 23.4.

Third, quantitative literacy (as opposed to “school” mathematics) is not systematically taught, nor is it generally understood. Many faculty and students think that the Department of Mathematics “owns” anything quantitative, and hence, is solely responsible for students becoming quantitatively literate. This perception reflects the common misconception that proficiency at “school” mathematics is equivalent to QL.

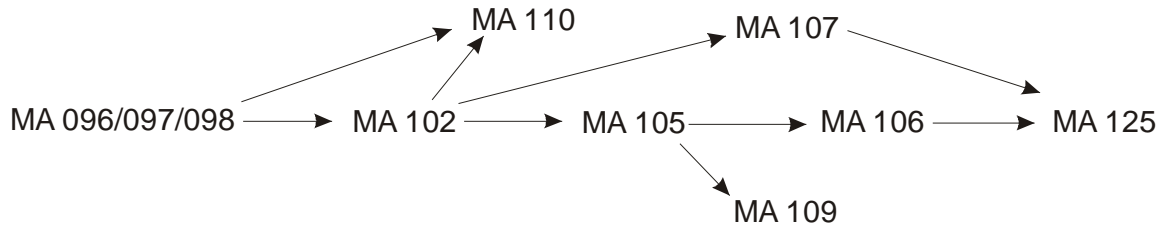
Fourth, an important aspect of foundational mathematics instruction at UAB is that the foundational courses are much less clear than in English. Unless they have already fulfilled the requirement, all students must take Freshman English I and Freshman English II (in that order) before enrolling in their required sophomore literature course. In contrast, entering freshmen place into a wide variety of entry-level mathematics courses as shown in the following table.

Distribution of Entering Freshmen in Mathematics Courses

Course	Description	Fall 02	Fall 03	Fall 04
MA 096/097/098	Elementary Algebra (developmental)	646	723	528
MA 102	Intermediate Algebra	241	280	166
MA 105	Pre-Calculus Algebra	75	76	244
MA 110	Finite Mathematics	52	65	83
Subtotal		1014	1144	1021
MA 106	Pre-Calculus Trigonometry	45	47	58
MA 107	Pre-Calc Algebra and Trig.	41	52	57
MA 109	Business Calculus	9	9	46
MA 125	Calculus I	58	58	155
Total		1167	1310	1337

Source: UAB Institutional Studies

The following diagram shows the sequencing of these courses:



Comparing the table and the diagram, one may note that in Fall 04, for example, 1021 out of 1337 freshmen (76%) entered MA 105, MA 110, or below. MA 110 is a terminal course and MA 105 is a gateway. Few students take the MA 107 bridge from MA 102 to MA 125, and these are all technical majors, like engineering. Thus, while students follow a variety of pathways at the foundational level in math, most native students pass through MA 105 or MA 110 at some point in their undergraduate curriculum.

QEP Goals for Quantitative Literacy

Our Shared Vision for a UAB Graduate begins with four QL objectives that should be mastered on two levels. Modeled on the recommendations of the Mathematical Association of America in *Quantitative Reasoning for College Graduates: A Compliment to the Standards* (Sons, 1998), every UAB graduate should be adept at:

1. Using multiple formats, including verbal, symbolic, visual and numerical, to present information.
2. Interpreting mathematical representations, such as formulas, graphs, tables and diagrams, in order to draw valid inferences from them.
3. Applying arithmetical, algebraic, geometrical and statistical methods to solve problems.
4. Evaluating the reasonableness of proposed answers to mathematical problems, and exercising caution in making generalizations.

In addition, UAB graduates should be able to demonstrate awareness of, and strong competency in these four objectives in their discipline and in life:

- **Discipline QL** refers to students demonstrating the four QL objectives at a level sufficient to solve realistic and authentic problems in their discipline.
- **Life QL** refers to students demonstrating the four QL competencies at a level sufficient to solve problems they encounter in their personal and social lives.

Ethics and Civic Responsibility

Rationale for Inclusion

The QEP prioritizes ethics and civic responsibility because the role of a university is to prepare students to function effectively and engage responsibly in both the academic community and

post-graduation life. Effective and responsible living depends upon the ability of individuals to make informed and ethical decisions, to accept responsibility for one's choices, and to participate as part of multiple larger social units.

UAB faculty who teach discipline-specific courses taken early in the major curricula highlighted a particularly narrow aspect of the ethics competency as essential for successful work in any major. In the Early Academic Competencies Survey, they ranked "Understand the significance of the UAB Academic Honor Code" as the fifth most essential competency in a field of twenty-six competencies and ranked "Apply ethical considerations to decision making" as the thirteenth. At the same time, they felt that only 53% of beginning students understood the UAB Academic Honor Code and only 57% of those same students applied ethical considerations to decision making. The faculty focus groups elicited even stronger and repeated concerns about students needing to explore the dimensions of ethical and moral choices, take personal responsibility, give back to the community, nation, and world, and practice citizenship. In their commencement speeches at the May and December 2004 graduation ceremonies, Lucy Jones and Akofa Bonsi, UAB Truman Scholars, exhorted their classmates to reach out and exercise civic responsibility in the broadest sense of being a good citizen.

Articles, studies, and national surveys support the perceived importance of ethics and civic responsibility. Ronald Alsop (2004) reports that when the Harris Interactive survey asked recruiters to identify "very important" attributes in M.B.A. graduates, two of the three top-ranked attributes were "Personal ethics and integrity" (85%) and "Ability to work well within a team" (87%). The top-ranked attribute was "Communication and interpersonal skills." At the 2004 SACS-COC conference, keynote speakers Ambassador Philip Lader and Mr. David Gergen emphasized the responsibility that institutions of higher learning must assume to inculcate the value of service in our students. Their directive was that higher education's goal, as well as duty, is to produce graduates who embrace service at the local, national, and international levels.

Current Impediments to Acquisition of Ethics and Civic Responsibility at UAB

At orientation, new students are introduced to the UAB Academic Honor Code, which is also in the undergraduate catalog. Individual schools also have policy statements on such subjects as plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct. However, knowing a policy is not the same as understanding, let alone practicing, a policy. Academic dishonesty is not always reported by students or faculty because the process is often perceived as too time-consuming, too unpleasant, or more punitive than the situation warrants. In November 2004, UAB's chapter of Alpha Lambda Delta, the national honor society for freshmen, sponsored a forum to discuss cheating and academic dishonesty on UAB's campus. This is not a local problem. *Educating Citizens: Preparing America's Undergraduates for Lives of Moral and Civic Responsibility*, the result of a three-year study sponsored by The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, documents the pervasive culture of cheating among high school students (Colby, 2003).

UAB has rightfully boasted of longstanding support for the community through various academic and non-academic activities, but such engagement is usually voluntary, personal, or short-term with no systematic approach or coordination. The most notable exception to this is found in the UAB Honors Program, which has made civic involvement and outreach an intrinsic part of its nationally applauded success. Honors students receive up to three semester hours of

credit for completing long-term service projects with, for example, homeless shelters, inner city public schools, and prisoner education. However, the UAB Honors Program is limited to two hundred students, about 3% of each graduating class.

QEP Goals for Ethics and Civic Responsibility

The QEP seeks to enhance all aspects of the Citizenship component of the Shared Vision for a UAB Graduate. Our graduates should understand and apply ethical and moral considerations, as they relate to everyday choices as well as those associated with their chosen disciplines. UAB graduates should be able to identify and discuss, with understanding and respect for diverse perspectives and opinions, social and political issues of contemporary importance. Our graduates should recognize the role of diverse experiences and backgrounds in shaping individual perspectives and beliefs, including their own. They should be informed decision-makers, whose perspectives and beliefs also reflect and integrate knowledge gained from academic study of the sciences and humanities. Students should act in ways that are consistent with a sense of ethical and civic responsibility to their community.

This shared vision of citizenship competencies for UAB graduates is also reflected in goals for UAB students, who are citizens of the university community. Our students should comprehend and adhere to the UAB Academic Honor Code, engage respectfully in classroom discussions of controversial and sensitive topics, actively seek knowledge that informs and challenges personal opinions, and fulfill their civic responsibilities to the larger community through voting, social action, volunteer service and political participation.

THE PLAN: ENHANCEMENT OF WRITING, QUANTITATIVE LITERACY, AND ETHICS AND CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY

The UAB QEP includes multiple elements. One category of elements includes those interventions and assessments designed to specifically enhance one or another of the three targeted competencies. These are described in the first half of this section of the document (*Targeted Interventions and Assessments*). Relevant courses are restructured, a new freshman seminar is introduced, and assessments are chosen or developed. Other new initiatives that support single competencies--a Writing Web, a Math Learning Laboratory, and a yearly UAB Discussion Book--are also described here.

A second category of QEP elements cuts across all three of the targeted competencies. A guiding principle in development of the QEP has been that an undergraduate education must proceed in an organized, rational and coherent way. For important general competencies to be fully developed in students by the time they graduate, those competencies must be introduced in the freshman year and reinforced and integrated within the various disciplines in subsequent years. Although freshman learning communities already exist at UAB, the QEP greatly expands this program into an integrated and coherent context for introducing all of the targeted competencies as well as the Shared Vision for a UAB Graduate. Beyond the freshman year, individual academic programs (majors) take primary responsibility for embedding development of all of the targeted competencies into their curricula. Finally, senior capstone courses or experiences reinforce the targeted competencies while emphasizing their integration with discipline-specific knowledge and skills. These infrastructure elements are described in the second part of this section (*Infrastructure to Support a Coherent Undergraduate Experience*).

The multiple elements of the QEP require coordination. A Director of Core Curriculum Enhancement will be appointed to oversee execution of the QEP. The Director will chair an Executive Core Curriculum Committee that includes the chairs of task forces and committees that have specific roles in advancing the individual elements of the QEP. The next section of this document (*Institutional Commitment and Timeline*) provides a detailed description of the administrative structure, the projected timeline, and the budget.

Targeted Interventions and Assessments

Writing

Interventions

The goal for enhancement of writing involves two main components: mastery of basic writing skills, and competency in discipline-specific writing relevant to the students' major programs of study. Each of these components is addressed through two major interventions.

To enhance students' mastery of basic writing skills as a foundation for discipline-specific writing, it is critical that students take courses that introduce basic writing at the earliest possible point in the curriculum. Therefore, UAB will require all eligible freshmen to register for EH 101 (English Composition I) the first semester they attend UAB and to enroll in EH 102 (English

Composition II) the semester after they pass EH 101. The Chair of the Department of English and the Department of English's Director of Freshman Composition have met with the Director of Academic Programs and Policy, the Assistant Vice President for Enrollment Services, and the University Registrar, as well as relevant technical staff, to review the complex programming requirements that will ensure implementation and automatic enforcement of this requirement beginning in Fall 2005.

Enhancement of basic writing skills also requires a coordinated effort to improve the content and consistency of the freshman composition classes. The Director of Freshman Composition is working with English faculty on a restructured EH 101 for department-wide adoption in Fall 2005. The restructured course will include standardized learning objectives, course and text guidelines, grading rubrics, and a major grammar review. A comparable restructuring of EH 102 will take place in time for it to be adopted for Fall 2006. The common template and requirements will eliminate some of the instructional problems caused by faculty turnover. In addition, the Provost will be working with the Dean of the School of Arts and Humanities and the Chair of the Department of English to identify and address the causes for the high faculty turnover.

In line with the renewed emphasis on basic grammar review, the English department is exploring several software alternatives for grammar instruction and practice. One English faculty member is piloting use of PH Words, an online instruction, practice, and assessment program in grammar and writing concepts. Available 24/7 online, the Prentice Hall program demands no new university resources, matches student need for flexible access, provides instant feedback, includes exercises to learn, identify, and demonstrate different writing concepts, and can provide diagnostic data for the student, instructor, program, and university. Also, at least two of the textbooks being considered for adoption in EH 101 come with an online package. Arrangements are being made for Allyn/Bacon to set up an in-house demonstration of their technical support for writing. The publisher will provide training sessions for faculty if the English department adopts their textbook.

When restructuring of EH 101 is completed, workshops on the new guidelines and grading rubrics will be scheduled for full-time and adjunct faculty. Both the Director of Freshman Composition and Dr. Kyle Grimes, the English department representative on the QEP Committee, have extensive experience working for the Educational Testing Service (ETS) as scorers and scoring or table leaders for the GRE, GMAT, and AP exams. A model for guidelines, rubrics, and sample benchmark essays for analytical writing is provided by ETS [<http://ftp.ets.org/pub/gre/awintro.pdf>].

Intervention for discipline-specific writing involves identifying and characterizing the types of writing that students are expected to produce in the various disciplines, as well as greater participation by major program faculty in the writing instruction effort. An exploratory survey of the kinds of writing assignments students commonly complete during their undergraduate years at UAB revealed a limited number of pedagogical genres including

- Documented research papers
- Reviews of research

- Short essays (500-1000 words) written in response to specific prompts or instructions
- Essay examinations
- Case studies
- Lab Reports
- Reviews/critiques of art, performances, books, or articles
- Technical reports and project assessments
- Business letters, memos, business plans, and other business-related documents
- Very short, often paragraph-length, responses or exercises
- Journals
- Annotated bibliographies

Genres are not limited to a single department or major, though they may—as in the business writing above—be limited to the majors of a single school.

A Writing Committee will oversee the process of developing a formal list of distinct genres of student writing and identifying their defining characteristics. This committee will also be responsible for developing a **Writing Web**, which will include the following features

1. A brief description of the most common elements of each genre;
2. A set of sample papers to provide benchmarks; and
3. A generic rubric that instructors can download and adapt to the purposes of their own discipline and assignments, and that students can use in a self-assessment of their own efforts in the genre.

The fact that “As an aspect of critical thinking, accurate self-assessment is crucial to performance in professional fields and essential to lifelong learning” (Greater Expectations Project on Accreditation and Assessment, 2004) is especially true in writing.

The Writing Web will be available to both students and instructors. The University of Wisconsin-Madison [<http://www.wisc.edu/writing/Handbook/index.html>] and the Rutgers University Writing Program [<http://wp.rutgers.edu>] sponsor websites with content somewhat similar to what we hope to achieve. The Writing Web will facilitate greater communication about writing instruction among faculty, greater understanding of expectations for written work among students, and a more coherent approach to both teaching and evaluating undergraduate writing than has heretofore been available.

Finally, since students are expected to produce different types of writing depending upon their courses and majors, we must hold ourselves responsible for identifying where and how students are taught discipline-specific writing. Each department will identify from a short list the types of writing specific to its major(s) and the course(s) in which these types of writing are introduced and taught. For example, English literature majors learn how to write literary criticism and annotated bibliographies in EH 301 Reading, Writing, and Research for Literature; mechanical engineering majors learn how to write project assessments and case studies in EH 300 Engineering Communication; and psychology majors learn to write research reports in PY 315 Methods in Psychological Research.

If a particular major requires its students to do, for example, technical reports but such writing is not explicitly taught in any course students can take, then faculty must incorporate such instruction into the design of an existing course or develop a new course. When there are no faculty within a department who can share their best practices in teaching discipline-specific writing, the QEP makes funds available to bring in consultants to offer faculty writing workshops or otherwise support the enhancement of writing in courses outside the Department of English. A soon-to-be-established Executive Core Curriculum Committee (see Administrative Structure and Roles) will review programmatic requirements to ensure (1) that all students who have earned degrees in a major will take the course(s) in which that discipline's writing genres are introduced and reinforced; and (2) that departments develop course sequencing that promotes the logical development and practice of the writing skills relevant to their majors.

Assessment of Writing

Strategies for reducing inter-section variability will be adopted. This is a critical first step in the assessment process since changes in student performance will be hard to detect if a high degree of variability is due simply to different teaching, testing, and grading strategies employed by instructors. To identify such differences, the Director of Freshman Composition will review syllabi for adherence to the new guidelines and will monitor the average mean class GPAs in all sections of EH 101 English Composition I and EH 102 English Composition II. The Director will work individually with faculty whose mean section GPA falls outside the 95% confidence limits for the mean of all sections combined. The Director will give the Chair of the English department a report of these data and any intervention measures that were taken to address problems. Comparing the variability among sections in average class GPAs before and after the restructuring of EH 101 and EH 102 will help the department and QEP leadership to assess the effectiveness of the restructuring effort, and to pinpoint areas where further standardization or training may be required.

Second, UAB will continue to administer the ETS Academic Profile (AP) test to a sample of entering freshmen to establish a baseline for assessing writing and critical thinking skills. For comparison, we will also continue to administer the AP to a sample of graduating students. The AP assesses what students know about writing, in other words, their ability to select the most appropriate word in a textual passage or identify the main idea in a paragraph. We also want to assess the quality of our students' writing.

Third, the English department is exploring the use of a Cognitive Level and Quality Writing Assessment instrument (CLAQWA) developed by the University of South Florida. The chair of

the QEP Committee attended a workshop on CLAQWA and has met and corresponded with Dr. Teresa Flateby. Although CLAQWA was developed to demystify the writing process for faculty outside the English department and normalize the evaluation of discipline-specific writing, exactly what the QEP's mid-curriculum enhancement of writing requires (see below), it is also used at the University of South Florida and elsewhere to normalize evaluation standards within freshman composition. CLAQWA can be used for assessing performance and changes in performance for individual students, single classes, or whole programs—at the beginning, mid-points, and end of the undergraduate curriculum. More information can be found at <http://www.brevard.edu/fyc/listserv/remarks/flateby.htm>.

CLAQWA is being pilot tested in one section of EH 102 during Spring 2005. The course instructor, the Chair, and the Director of Freshman Composition will evaluate CLAQWA's suitability for our program's needs. If their decision is positive, we will bring Dr. Flateby or an associate to UAB in Summer 2005. The Director of Freshman Composition and other key English faculty will receive training in how to use CLAQWA, as well as how to offer CLAQWA workshops for other faculty in its use.

If CLAQWA proves unsuitable, then Dr. Kyle Grimes, who chaired the Writing Subcommittee of the QEP, will work with the Director of Freshman Composition and others to develop a writing rubric. A random sample of student writing will be harvested from freshman composition courses, especially at the beginning of EH 101 and at the end of EH 102. The collected samples, with names removed, will be evaluated by trained cross-disciplinary faculty juries using the common rubric. This process should yield a baseline assessment of the writing abilities of students in the early stages of the undergraduate program. This information will be used by the Department of English, in collaboration with QEP administration, to identify strengths and weaknesses in the freshman composition classes and, in turn, to modify the standard curricula and learning objectives for these courses as necessary.

Fourth, we also plan to harvest random samples of student writing at the senior level, most typically writing done in the context of the senior capstone course or experience (see below). This writing will be assessed using a two-tier process. A basic competency assessment will be carried out following the same procedure and the same rubric as outlined above for the freshman year assessment. This will enable us to detect and document any changes in the quality of basic writing over the course of the students' undergraduate experience. Such information will be used to help us identify and strengthen weaker components in our program to improve student writing.

Writing done in a capstone course should reflect the knowledge, methods, and protocols of the particular discipline in which that writing is produced. Therefore, the senior writing samples will undergo a second level of assessment by external evaluators—specialists in the field from other universities or from the private sector.

Finally, a modified version of the Early Academic Competencies Survey will be sent every two years to faculty, who will be asked to identify the areas or ways in which basic writing and discipline-specific writing skills have or have not improved.

Quantitative Literacy

Interventions

Paralleling writing, quantitative literacy (QL) within the QEP involves intervention on two levels: enhancement of “life” QL as it pertains to problems faced by people in their roles as citizens, parents and employees solving non-technical problems, and “discipline” QL that enhances students’ ability to solve realistic and authentic problems in their chosen fields of endeavor.

Acquisition of both types of QL is likely to be facilitated when students take their basic math courses early on within their undergraduate program of studies. Such courses provide a context for explicit teaching of QL competencies and also support the use of QL in context, as occurs (or can occur) in many of the sciences. For this reason, advisers have already begun directing students to take a foundational mathematics course that satisfies the AGSC mathematics requirement within the first 30 undergraduate hours. Within the QEP, students will be required to complete successfully such a course within the first 60 hours. Students placing into developmental mathematics courses (based on ACT math and high school GPA) will be required to enroll in these courses until they are completed successfully.

As noted above (*Current Impediments to Acquisition of Quantitative Literacy at UAB*), students can enter math courses at a variety of levels. However, the majority of entering freshmen will pass through either MA 105 (Pre-Calculus Algebra) or MA 110 (Finite Mathematics) prior to graduation (and within their first 60 hours, according to the new policy). Therefore, the Department of Mathematics has targeted these courses for early restructuring to support the acquisition of QL for discipline and for life. In particular, the learning objectives in the syllabi for these courses will be modified to include explicit instruction in the four general QL competencies so students will

1. Use multiple formats, including verbal, symbolic, visual and numerical, to present information.
2. Interpret mathematical representations, such as formulas, graphs, tables and diagrams, in order to draw valid inferences from them.
3. Apply arithmetical, algebraic, geometrical and statistical methods to solve problems.
4. Evaluate the reasonableness of proposed answers to mathematical problems, and exercise caution in making generalizations.

Because many students take MA 102 (Intermediate Algebra) in preparation for MA 105 or MA 110, changes to the structure of this course will also be made.

The Associate Chair of the Department of Mathematics and the course coordinators for MA 102, MA 105, and MA 110 will collaborate on the restructuring of these courses. Their tasks will include revision of course objectives and standard syllabi, instructor training, and monitoring of outcome data. If outcome data suggest that QL goals are not being advanced in some courses,

then the Associate Chair and coursemaster(s) will meet with the instructor to address possible causes and ensure that appropriate modifications are made.

As part of the effort to address the high variability and low success rates in pre-calculus mathematics, the Department of Mathematics developed a proposal in Spring 2004 to implement a substantial restructuring of pre-calculus mathematics courses. Developed in conjunction with the Math department, the School of Natural Sciences and Mathematics, and the Office of the Provost, the plan proposes a significantly larger role for computer-based instruction and computer-based homework assignments. Pre-calculus instruction will occur in a new Mathematics Learning Laboratory, capable of aggressively serving 2,500 students per semester. This is in contrast to the current CAPA (Computer Assisted Personalized Approach) Mathematics Assistance Lab which can serve 400 students aggressively and at most another 1,000 minimally per semester.

The restructured math courses will combine some classroom contact hours with a faculty member and a minimum number of required hours per week to complete homework assignments and take tests at an individual computer station in the Mathematics Learning Laboratory. Students benefit from immediate feedback on tests and homework, supplemental instruction as needed from laboratory staff, weekly monitoring of progress, and flexible hours. Adopting such an approach has reduced failure rates and increased student satisfaction at such places as Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University and the University of Alabama (Tuscaloosa). Although the Mathematics Learning Laboratory will not open until Fall 2007, the QEP call to emphasize QL offers an opportunity for exciting synergy. Computer-based instruction and computer-based homework assignments run the risk of over-emphasizing algorithmic learning. However, tying greater reliance on computer-based learning to explicit emphasis on QL reduces the potential over-emphasis on rote learning of algorithms.

The concepts and components of QL may not be apparent immediately to most students and many faculty, especially those in the arts and humanities, but even to some in technical and scientific fields. Therefore, the Executive Core Curriculum Committee will work with both academic and non-academic units to develop campus awareness of QL for disciplinary mastery and QL for citizenship and life.

The Director of Core Curriculum Enhancement will appoint an interdisciplinary QL Task Force no later than Summer 2005 to lead the effort to identify QL objectives and assessment instruments in core courses. The Task Force will also help departments begin to identify where and how disciplinary aspects of QL are introduced within courses taken by their majors in the junior and senior years. As capstone courses and experiences are implemented, all undergraduate programs will identify where disciplinary QL is reinforced at the senior level as well.

The Executive Core Curriculum Committee will be responsible for reviewing programmatic mapping of instruction in the QL competency. Specifically it will review procedures, syllabi and data in mid-curriculum courses as well as capstone courses and experiences.

Assessment of Quantitative Literacy

First, UAB will continue to administer the ETS Academic Profile (AP) test to a sample of entering freshmen in order to establish a dynamic baseline for mathematical skills and proficiencies. For comparison, we will also continue to administer the AP to a sample of graduating seniors.

Second, we will compare the success and failure rates, as well as mean high school GPAs and math ACT scores, of students in pre-calculus courses after the Mathematics Learning Laboratory is fully functional with past rates and scores.

Third, the QL Task Force will develop an in-house Assessment of Quantitative Literacy instrument (AQL) that can assess a student's ability to recognize, understand, solve, explain, and elaborate upon quantitative problems that arise in citizenship and life. Our model for developing an AQL is the recent, and still under development, "Critical Thinking Assessment Test (CAT)," a project of Tennessee Technological University (TTU) and the National Science Foundation under the direction of Barry Stein [<http://www.tntech.edu/cat>]. The goal of the CAT project at TTU is to refine the test instrument for assessing critical thinking skill in undergraduates through testing at six participating institutions over the next three years. We are impressed by the format of CAT: a short answer essay test that faculty score according to a detailed scoring guide. Several of the questions have the "citizenship and life" focus that correlates with our emphasis on ethics and civic responsibility and an essay test reinforces the centrality of writing. We aim to accomplish something similar with our AQL.

As with the development of CAT, the AQL test development process would involve small groups of faculty or individuals to design problems and questions with the goals of minimizing familiarity bias and maximizing real-world correspondence. For example, problems based in the popular media might require the interpretation of data in graphs and charts from *USA Today* or the formulation of quantitative statements and inferences in the context of newspaper and magazine articles. Larger groups of faculty would evaluate problems and questions for face validity. Faculty involvement in design and scoring will help focus faculty attention on QL and promote the face validity of QL assessment. While the QL Task Force will complete its pilot AQL by summer 2006, the process of developing and refining scoring criteria, assessing criteria and construct validity, and refining inter-rater reliability and internal consistency may last several years. Therefore, the QL Task Force will morph into a standing QL Committee.

In Fall 2006, a trial AQL will be administered to a sample of students at freshman orientation and to students in the restructured MA 105 (Pre-Calculus Algebra) and MA 110 (Finite Mathematics). A sample of students enrolled in freshman-level science courses that have a QL emphasis, as well as a control group of students enrolled in freshman-level science courses without a QL emphasis, will also be tested beginning in Fall 2006. These data will be used to both refine the AQL and modify course curriculum and instruction to address problems and capitalize on successes.

In Fall 2007, a revised AQL will begin being administered to sophomore and junior students in selected general studies and major courses that include QL components, as well as to a control group of comparable students in general studies and major courses without QL components.

Finally, departments will begin collecting context-based assessment of QL within their required capstone courses or experiences. An interdisciplinary faculty committee will review data with help from the Office of Planning and Information Management, providing departments and programs with an analysis of successes and problems. Departments and programs will then be responsible for reporting on the consequent modification and initiating a new round of program assessment.

Ethics and Civic Responsibility

Interventions

First, the foundations for ethical decision-making and the basics of civic responsibility will be taught in a new Freshman Seminar. This course is a required component of the learning communities proposed by the QEP as a major intervention strategy for all three targeted competencies. Students will be instructed in the foundations of ethical decision-making and the basics of civic responsibility. Minimally, they will:

- engage in respectful discussion of ethical and social controversies,
- learn to consider alternative viewpoints and perspectives,
- receive diversity training,
- be introduced to community service opportunities in the Birmingham area, and
- learn about the political process as they are encouraged to vote or register to vote.

Learning communities will be described fully in a later section (*Infrastructure to Support a Coherent Undergraduate Experience*).

Second, beginning in Fall 2006, each department will identify for its undergraduate major track(s) (1) the aspects of ECR of particular relevance to its major(s); (2) those courses that include significant instruction or reinforcement in the aspects of ECR of particular relevance to its major(s); and (3) other courses taken by its majors that include significant instruction in any aspect of ECR.

Third, all majors will be required to incorporate senior-level ECR competencies in their capstone courses or experiences. “Senior-level” refers to competencies that reflect, for example,

- deeper understanding of multiple sides of controversial issues,
- greater depth of knowledge that can contribute to informed decision-making,
- greater appreciation of knowledge, as opposed to prejudice, as a basis for informed decision-making,
- greater involvement in a diverse community as a pre-baccalaureate student, and

- greater specificity of plans for post-graduation civic involvement and responsibility.

Fourth, the QEP proposes that UAB adopt an annual book for discussion. This UAB Discussion Book would be selected every spring by President Garrison from a short list generated by a Discussion Book Committee, which would include faculty, staff, students, and community representatives. During the following academic year, students and employees across campus could engage in a variety of activities centered on the issues raised by the selected text. Activities might include discussion within a course, online book discussion, dorm debates, a campus-wide moderated blog, a presentation by the author as part of UAB's Speakers Program, and an essay contest. The book should be accessible to a wide audience in both language and approach and raise meaningful questions about morality, ethical behavior, politics, science, philosophy, or the arts, thus integrating moral, civic, and academic learning. By providing multiple institutional opportunities for open, safe debate, the Discussion Book will promote a campus culture of respect for diverse opinions and ideas. Each year, the UAB community will be united by a genuinely shared learning experience that promotes civic involvement. Our model is the Campus Community Book Project at the University of California, Davis, which successfully sponsors a series of presentations, films, picnics, receptions, workshops, and special activities relevant to the book selected for campus-wide reading.

Fifth, ethics and civic responsibility (ECR) must be modeled throughout the university community. The Executive Core Curriculum Committee will work with an ECR Task Force, Student Affairs, and other campus units, both academic and non-academic, to promote campus-wide awareness of ECR and all its components.

The Director of Core Curriculum Enhancement, in consultation with the Provost and deans, will be responsible for ensuring that these interventions occur.

Assessment of Ethics and Civic Responsibility

The QEP conceptualizes ethics and civic responsibility as a multi-faceted construct that includes responsible moral reasoning in everyday life and the students' chosen disciplines, as well as sensitivity to and respect for diverse opinions of others, knowledgeable decision-making, and responsible engagement in the community.

While standard instruments are not available for assessing all of these facets, the Center for the Study of Ethical Development at the University of Minnesota has created the Defining Issues Test (<http://www.centerforthestudyofethicaldevelopment.net/>), the most widely used test to measure development of moral judgment. The test consists of five or six scenarios illustrating moral dilemmas and asks students to rank a series of statements in terms of importance of consideration in making their decision. The test can be given within a class period, is scored by the Center, and can identify measurable advancements to higher levels of moral reasoning as students progress through the curriculum.

Beginning in 2006-07, the Defining Issues Test will be given to a sample of 250 students at the beginning and at the end of their freshman year. Half of these students will have participated in a learning community and half of the tested students will not have participated in a learning community, so the data can help identify whether the learning community experience enhances

student learning in ECR, as well as help identify where student learning of ECR objectives needs further enhancement. Beginning in 2006-07, the Defining Issues Test will also be given to a sample of senior students to provide baseline data for comparing to future test scores of seniors who will have enrolled at UAB after the QEP is implemented.

A complete assessment of ECR as conceptualized within the QEP will require a set of additional assessments, some behavioral or observational and some based on surveys of students' activities and experiences. While all goals cannot yet be specified, they would certainly include measures of engagement in activities that benefit the community (including the UAB community), their participation in the political process, and the extent to which they felt that minority positions were respected and valued in discussions of controversial issues both inside and outside of the classroom. Some of these data will be supplied by the National Study of Student Engagement (NSSE), which is administered to freshmen and seniors every third year (next in 2006). In addition, the ECR Task Force will develop an in-house assessment instrument to assess more local objectives such as students' comprehension and adherence to the UAB Academic Honor Code.

To assess disciplinary aspects of ethics and civic responsibility, each student in a senior capstone course or experience will be asked to address an ethical issue related to the student's particular professional discipline, as well as articulate a plan for responsible engagement in civic life beyond graduation. Samples will be harvested and evaluated by a jury composed of both internal and external evaluators according to rubrics generated by each discipline and reviewed by the Executive Core Curriculum Committee. Assessment results at the capstone level will be used by the relevant departments to make decisions on curriculum changes and by the Office of Planning and Information Management to track general improvements in student learning of ECR.

Because ECR has such a strong component of social desirability, the ECR Task Force may acquire some data anonymously or in creative ways that do not depend on students' evaluating their own ethical behavior. Results of these assessments would be shared with appropriate units that were positioned to take appropriate action. Minimally, results would be shared with faculty and administration involved in freshman seminars within learning communities, because this is the primary venue for the introduction of ECR competencies.

Infrastructure to Support a Coherent Undergraduate Experience

Fundamental to the QEP is changing the campus perception of the core curriculum from a general distribution checklist to a group of courses that teach basic learning competencies required for success in one's academic, professional, and personal life. A student's undergraduate years at UAB should be a coherent experience that involves a progression in learning:

FOUNDATIONS → EXPANSION → FOCUS → CONSOLIDATION

Infrastructure elements that support this progression are described below. UAB's current implementation of freshman learning communities is expanded to provide a foundation for a coherent undergraduate education that specifically addresses the targeted competencies. In the sophomore and junior years students expand their exposure to content areas and focus on a

particular discipline. As students focus, targeted core competencies are reinforced and discipline-specific elements are introduced. In the senior year, students are encouraged to consolidate and integrate their undergraduate learning through capstone courses or experiences. Responsibility for teaching and reinforcing the targeted competencies shifts over time from central QEP administration to the individual academic programs.

Learning Communities: Foundations in the Freshman Year

Learning communities can range from the simple block scheduling of a common cohort of students in two or more courses to a fully integrated instructional program in which designated cohorts of students take team-taught classes together (Smith et al, 2004). Our QEP proposes a middle model in which the same 25 students will be enrolled in three (or four) classes for which faculty have developed coordinated syllabi that promote interdisciplinary connections and together introduce the targeted competencies in writing, QL, and ECR. Freshmen learning communities will become the ideal UAB venue for introducing the entire Shared Vision early in students' undergraduate curricula and for giving students a sense of a coherent undergraduate education from the start.

Empirical studies and program evaluations at such institutions as the University of Wisconsin, Georgia State University, MIT, University of Missouri-Columbia, Evergreen State College, Temple University, and Portland State University document the effectiveness of structured learning communities in increasing student engagement and promoting faculty revitalization, thereby improving student learning. Learning communities have been equally successful in improving retention rates and GPA for students and promoting cross-disciplinary dialogue among faculty especially on commuter campuses.

However, learning communities per se are not a cure-all (Jaffee, 2004). To be successful, they must link learning to context, collaboration, and community (Donovan, 1991). To be sustainable, they must have substantial institutional support for crucial faculty development (Smith, 2002). The most effective learning communities involve a transformation of how, more than what, faculty teach. Transformation occurs only when the interdisciplinary and collaborative possibilities of learning communities are realized. In the most effective learning communities, both students and faculty participate in the community and in the learning (Levine, 1999).

Until last year, UAB's learning communities have focused on conditionally admitted students and consisted of grouping a course in critical thinking (University 101) with a course in freshmen composition. In 2003-04 and 2004-05, Dr. Kevin Fitzpatrick organized three learning communities that target regularly admitted students. This pilot program enrolls the same group of students in University 101, a freshmen composition course, and one other course like introductory biology or chemistry. Despite its success, cross-campus faculty involvement in and knowledge of the learning community concept remain limited. The QEP proposes a reconceptualization of learning communities as the desired starting point for all regularly admitted freshmen entering UAB. This change begins with a campaign to educate the campus about learning communities. The Director of Core Curriculum Enhancement will appoint a Learning Community Task Force no later than Summer 2005. One of the Task Force's charges will be to foster campus awareness of the value of learning communities as an effective means to achieve UAB's mission with respect to undergraduate education.

The QEP's learning community model will block register the same 25 students in

- A two-three credit hour Freshman Seminar
- A freshman composition course (EH 101 or EH 102)
- A social science, natural science, or math course from Area III or Area IV
- A fourth course (optional)

A learning community can be composed of a cohort of students within the same major or school, or can be open to students with more varied interests. Besides introducing students to the Shared Vision for a UAB Graduate, each learning community will include specific instruction in the targeted competencies.

The **Freshman Seminar** will introduce students to the fundamentals of ethical decision-making and the practice of civic responsibility. ECR instruction will begin with a review of the UAB Academic Honor Code, which students heard about at orientation, and a discussion of its application and implications for all students. Other ECR components will deal with social and ethical issues, community service, and participation in the political process. The Freshman Seminar will also include writing assignments and QL citizenship objectives with the emphasis on instruction and understanding in context, for example, newspaper articles that include graphs or statistical data.

Primary instruction and practice in writing will occur in the **freshman composition course**, but the other targeted competencies will also be introduced or reinforced. Some of the required readings and writing assignments in either EH 101 or EH 102 will require students to explore ethical, social, or political issues. Some readings may involve understanding statistical data presented in graphs or charts.

The **science or math course** will be required to include QL objectives. Faculty teaching these courses might, for example, develop students' ability to use quantitative formats to represent phenomena and to translate in either direction between textual and quantitative presentations.

The **optional (and unspecified) fourth course** may supplement instruction in one or more of the targeted competencies. For example, in a learning community designed for pre-nursing students, this fourth course could be PHL 115 Contemporary Moral Issues since the School of Nursing requires students to have taken a course in ethics. The Department of Government has already developed two new courses (PSC 105 Ethics and Morality in Democratic Society and PSC 106 Democracy, Citizenship and Civic Engagement in America) specifically designed to enhance the targeted competencies in partnership with other courses within a learning community.

The Learning Community Task Force will begin no later than Summer 2005 to review the extensive literature on best practices in learning communities, consult with expert consultants and experienced learning community faculty, and attend relevant workshops or conferences. This Task Force's first goals are to design template(s) for the Freshman Seminar, a required component of the new learning communities, and strategies for integrating writing within the interdisciplinary learning communities (Zawacki and Williams, 2001). In addition to the

resources described above, the Learning Community Task Force will use data from the Cooperative Institutional Research Program Freshman Survey. Administered to entering freshmen in 2001 and 2003, it provides such information about UAB freshmen as reasons they came to college; self-evaluations of their academic skills and personal traits; and relative importance of various subjects like politics, social issues, and community involvement. These data will help shape the Task Force's decisions.

The Learning Community Task Force will also be instrumental in recruiting faculty to develop learning community proposals and in promoting crucial faculty development for the groups of three to four faculty teaching the courses in each learning community. The faculty development program will include workshops developed by national experts in the field and competitive grants to support collaboration among faculty to develop appropriate curricula and materials for model learning communities. The first grants will be awarded in 2005-06. The first round of new learning communities will be offered in 2006-07.

The Fall 2006 implementation date for a structured expansion of learning communities at UAB coincides with the opening date of a new 750-bed freshman student residence hall and a new university dining hall. Some members of the QEP Committee have been working with a university-wide committee that is designing a living/learning community in conjunction with the new student facilities. The QEP's new learning communities will build enriching partnerships among students, among faculty, and among campus units. Successful implementation of learning communities at UAB will demand collaboration minimally between the Registrar's office, Room Scheduling, Admissions, Academic Advising, Student Affairs, and Academic Affairs (Shapiro and Levine, 1999).

The new student residence and dining halls are part of an ambitious Campus Plan that creates a central green for the university. Also bordering this green is a Campus Recreation Center nearing completion. New classroom buildings are projected for the third and fourth sides of the green. Just as the central campus green will help impose coherence on the physical space of the university, so too will the learning communities help impose coherence on the first courses taken by new freshmen entering UAB.

The calendar for implementation of learning communities at UAB is incremental with eight targeted for the first year and approximately eight new learning communities added each year thereafter. All learning community faculty must make a three-year commitment. There will be inevitable faculty attrition due to a variety of personal and professional reasons, but we hope to build up a cadre of experienced faculty who regularly embrace the opportunity to participate in learning communities. The following chart displays our plan to increase the number of learning communities incrementally:

Year	Number of Learning Communities	Number of Students Enrolled
2006-2007	8	200
2007-2008	14	350
2008-2009	20	500
2009-2010	25	625

Thus, the total number of UAB students enrolled in learning communities in five years will be approximately 50% of regularly admitted freshman students. The Office of Planning and Information Management will track students beginning in 2006-07 to compare relative performance and student engagement of students who participated in these learning communities and students who did not participate in any learning community.

Program Accountability: Expansion and Focus during the Middle Years

UAB's QEP is based on the idea that important core competencies must be introduced early and reinforced throughout the undergraduate curriculum. Such competencies are also most likely to be retained if they are introduced and reinforced *in meaningful contexts*. While contextual learning begins in integrated freshman learning communities, the most meaningful context for most students is the academic program in their chosen major. For this reason, primary responsibility for reinforcing the competencies associated with the Shared Vision shifts to the major programs as students advance through their undergraduate program of studies.

During the sophomore and junior years, the targeted competencies will be reinforced and developed in directions specific to the student's major through what we call mid-curriculum enhancement. Academic programs (majors) are, therefore, accountable for reinforcing these competencies and introducing their discipline-specific components in the sophomore and junior years. Details of program accountability for the target areas of writing, quantitative literacy, and ethics and civic responsibility have already been provided in preceding sections. The Director of Core Curriculum Enhancement and the Executive Core Curriculum Committee, in collaboration with the Provost, deans, and chairs, will oversee program accountability.

Capstone Course or Experience: Consolidation in the Senior Year

In "Reinventing Undergraduate Education: A Blueprint for America's Research Universities," the Boyer Commission reported that "too many students report a sense of anticlimax in their senior years" and urged universities to reinvigorate the last year through courses that "draw together" the preceding three years and provide enrichment and closure to their educational experience (1998). In line with this recommendation, the QEP directs each major to adopt a senior capstone course or experience as a graduation requirement no later than spring 2009.

UAB's Schools of Business, Education, Engineering, Health Related Professions, and Nursing currently have required capstone courses or experiences. In addition, students in the fine and performing arts, as well as departmental honors programs, already have requirements in place that can be adapted to satisfy capstone guidelines. While the ways to meet the capstone requirement will be as diverse as the undergraduate programs on this campus, every capstone course or experience must include a significant writing component. Under the direction of the Director for Core Curriculum Enhancement, the Executive Core Curriculum Committee will ensure that existing and new capstone courses include a set of well-defined learning outcomes, a significant writing component, and assessment of the QL and ECR objectives specific to the relevant discipline.

A university-wide capstone requirement will enhance the educational experience of our students by helping impose coherence on the undergraduate program, by requiring the integration of

targeted competencies, and by ensuring accountability and a heightened level of excellence through required assessment. Capstones will provide data for individual, program, and institutional assessment on graduating seniors. Each school will be encouraged to maintain an electronic portfolio of all capstone projects or papers to facilitate such analysis.

INSTITUTIONAL COMMITMENT AND TIMELINE

Administrative Structure and Roles

Although the QEP will involve all units at UAB associated with undergraduate education, the following units are principally responsible for successful implementation of the QEP. *Bold italics indicate a new position or committee.*

Administration of the QEP

Director of Core Curriculum Enhancement (CCE Director)

- Reports to the existing Associate Provost for Undergraduate Programs
- Participates in meetings of the Academic Programs Council (deans and executive leadership of the university)
- Coordinates and supervises implementation of the QEP
- Chairs the Executive Core Curriculum Committee and the Learning Community Task Force
- Works with all campus units to develop QEP initiatives
- Administers budget to support QEP initiatives, including grants to develop learning communities, to bring in external consultants, and to support course and program development
- Seeks external funding for initiatives relevant to the QEP

Executive Core Curriculum Committee (chaired by the CCE Director and composed minimally of QEP task force/committee chairs, the Provost, and representatives from Student Affairs and Office of Planning and Information Management)

- Exercises primary oversight over implementation of the QEP
- Develops campus awareness of the value of learning communities as an effective means to achieve UAB's mission with respect to undergraduate education
- Reviews proposals for learning communities
- Develops campus awareness of quantitative literacy and ethics and civic responsibility
- Reviews restructuring of basic English and math courses by relevant departments to ensure incorporation of student learning outcomes relevant to QEP
- Reviews program accountability for mid-curricular enhancement
- Reviews proposals for capstone courses or experiences
- Makes recommendations to the Provost, deans, and chairs

Primary Structures for Writing

Department of English (coordinated by the departmental Chair and Director of Freshman Composition)

- Restructures freshman composition (EH 101 and EH 102)
- Selects or develops and tests instrument for assessing basic writing competency
- Trains faculty in use of assessment instrument
- Monitors student and faculty performance

Writing Committee (established by the CCE Director)

- Coordinates identification of distinct writing genres
- Collects range of models for each writing genre
- Helps programs and faculty develop assessment instruments for discipline-specific writing
- Develops the Writing Web with technical support from appropriate units

Primary Structures for Quantitative Literacy

Department of Mathematics (coordinated by the departmental Chair and Associate Chair)

- Restructures the teaching of basic math courses
- Administers the Mathematics Learning Laboratory
- Develops QL instruction and objectives in MA 105 and MA 110
- Monitors student and faculty performance

Quantitative Literacy Task Force (established by the CCE Director)

- Develops in-house Assessment of Quantitative Literacy instrument
- Helps programs and faculty develop QL objectives
- Helps programs and faculty develop Discipline QL assessment instruments

Primary Structures for Ethics and Civic Responsibility***Ethics and Civic Responsibility Task Force*** (established by the CCE Director)

- Helps develop specific ECR learning objectives for the Freshman Seminar
- Helps programs and faculty develop ECR objectives
- Helps programs and faculty develop instruments to assess ECR

UAB Discussion Book Committee (appointed by President Garrison)

- Creates short list for UAB Discussion Book
- Develops activities related to Discussion Book

Primary Structure for Learning Communities***Learning Community Task Force*** (chaired by the CCE Director)

- Designs Freshman Seminar templates to achieve specific ECR learning objectives
- Develops the Call for Proposals and application form for learning communities
- Recruits faculty to develop learning community proposals
- Helps design and implement faculty development for learning community faculty
- Works with consultants to carry out preceding responsibilities

Other Contributing Units

All Departments with undergraduate degrees (coordinated by Chairs and Deans)

- Identifies and describes writing genres required for each major
- Collects student samples of writing genres

- Maps instruction and practice in writing within each major
- Maps instruction and practice of QL within each major
- Maps instruction and practice of ECR within each major
- Collects assessment data on student learning in writing, QL and ECR

Office of Student Affairs (coordinated by the Vice President for Student Affairs)

- Supports the Learning Community Task Force's development of learning communities
- Works with faculty to incorporate extracurricular activities into the learning community curriculum
- Helps develop campus activities related to the UAB Discussion Book
- Coordinates with departments to support student learning tied to civic engagement

Office of Equity and Diversity (coordinated by the Vice President for Equity and Diversity)

- Helps develop campus activities related to the UAB Discussion Book
- Works with learning community faculty to offer diversity training within learning communities

Office of Information Technology (coordinated by the Vice President for Information Technology)

- Develops programming that requires eligible freshmen to register for EH 101 during their first semester at UAB and to register for EH 102 the semester after they fulfill the EH 101 requirement
- Implements block registration for learning community students
- Implements automatic prerequisite checking before students can register for courses
- Develops programming that flags students who have not fulfilled the Area III mathematics requirement within their first 60 hours

Office of Planning and Information Management (coordinated by the Vice President of Planning and Information Management)

- Collects, manages and distributes data relevant to all QEP goals
- Provides advice in the selection or development of rubrics and assessment instruments
- Provides technical support in the selection or development of assessment instruments
- Analyzes assessment data
- Helps units understand assessment data to promote informed decisions to modify instruction, course and program objectives, rubrics, and assessment instruments

Timeline

Year	QEP Activities
2004-2005	Identify Director of Core Curriculum Enhancement Restructure English Composition I and develop grading rubrics Pilot test CLAQWA for basic writing assessment Establish Learning Community Task Force Begin restructuring of MA 110 (Finite Mathematics) Offer workshops for English faculty on new freshman composition syllabus and rubrics Begin forming Executive Core Curriculum Committee
2005–2006	Enforce early enrollment in required basic English and math courses Implement restructured English Composition I Restructure English Composition II Continue restructuring of basic math courses Develop first learning community proposals and offer support for faculty development Establish Quantitative Literacy Task Force Establish Ethics and Civic Responsibility Task Force Establish Writing Committee Establish UAB Discussion Book Committee
2006–2007	Implement enforced prerequisite checking for all courses Offer eight QEP Learning Communities Implement restructured English Composition II Implement restructured MA 105 (Pre-Calculus Algebra) and MA 110 (Finite Mathematics) Schedule ECR activities centered around first UAB Discussion Book Distribute capstone guidelines with call for courses/experiences to be incorporated into catalog, schedules, and major requirements no later than fall 2009 Schedule workshops on instruction in & assessment of discipline-specific writing Award first round of competitive grants to support enhancement of non-learning community courses that assess student learning of targeted competencies Award first round of competitive grants to support development of capstone course models Begin construction of Writing Web.

Year	QEP Activities
2007 - 2008	Offer fourteen QEP Learning Communities Schedule ECR activities centered around second UAB Discussion Book Award second round of competitive course development or enhancement grants Continue construction of Writing Web Schedule workshops on instruction in & assessment of discipline-specific writing Produce Pilot Impact Report
2008-2009	Use Pilot Impact Report to develop interventions to strengthen QEP initiatives Offer 20 QEP Learning Communities Schedule ECR activities centered around third UAB Discussion Book Schedule workshops on writing instruction and use of Writing Web Complete construction of Writing Web Award third round of competitive course development or enhancement grants Award first program development grant to improve curricular support for achieving targeted competencies
2009 –2010	Offer 25 QEP Learning Communities Schedule ECR activities centered around fourth UAB Discussion Book Review required capstone courses or experiences for all majors Award fourth round of competitive course development or enhancement grants Award second round of program development grants Consider expanding Writing Web to include program archives for relevant capstone courses Produce Impact Report for SACS
2010 – 2015	Continue expansion of QEP Learning Communities Develop and improve QEP initiatives Continue cycle of assessment, intervention, and improvement

Budget and Resource Allocation

The budget for the QEP will derive from the UAB Educational Foundation (\$250,000 per year) and institutional funds. Capital improvement budgets or current operational costs will fund (1) staff to write the programming necessary for block scheduling, prerequisite checking, or sequential registration, (2) construction and maintenance of the Mathematics Learning Laboratory, and (3) assessment instruments such as the NSSE or CIRP which are regularly administered by the Office of Planning and Information Management.

Budget Notes

Administration:

1. The Director, who is responsible for coordinating and supervising implementation of the QEP, will be a tenured faculty member on a 12-month appointment.
2. Professional development activities include attendance at conferences and workshops on learning communities, assessment, and other subjects directly relevant to effective implementation and review of QEP initiatives.

Learning Communities (LC):

3. External consultants will be a resource for the LC Task Force in making decisions on LC guidelines, Freshman Seminar template(s), learning objectives, and embedded assessment. Consultants will offer workshops on-campus or off-campus for LC faculty on developing effective collaborative course materials and strategies for creating successful learning communities.
4. LC Faculty Development Grants initially support the LC Task Force in its formative work and subsequently, as competitive grants, provide support for LC faculty to attend workshops and conferences on LCs, develop collaborative course materials, or otherwise enhance their ability to create successful model LCs.
5. Limited funds are available to support community building activities within individual LCs (for example, entry fees to a special museum exhibition or refreshments related to participation in extracurricular event).

Non-Learning Community Course Restructuring and Development:

6. Development funds to support the restructuring of freshman composition (EH 101 and EH 102) and basic math courses (MA 015 and MA 110) to enhance student learning in general and to support achievement of QEP competency goals in particular.

Quality Enhancement Plan--University of Alabama at Birmingham

Proposed Budget							
		Academic Year					
Budget		2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10
Note	Administration						
1	Director-Office of Core Curricular Enhancement (Salary)	\$41,250	\$90,000	\$90,000	\$90,000	\$90,000	\$90,000
	Director-Office of Core Curricular Enhancement (Fringe Benefits)	\$9,323	\$20,340	\$20,340	\$20,340	\$20,340	\$20,340
2	Professional Development Activities	\$0	\$12,000	\$12,000	\$13,000	\$13,000	\$14,000
	Office Support (.5 FTE Secretary + Supplies)	\$10,162	\$22,173	\$22,173	\$22,173	\$22,173	\$22,173
	Learning Communities (LC)						
3	External Consultants & Workshops (working in conjunction with LC Task Force)	\$5,000	\$25,000	\$25,000	\$15,000	\$15,000	\$15,000
4	LC Faculty Development Grants	\$10,000	\$100,000	\$100,000	\$150,000	\$150,000	\$200,000
5	LC Support & Special Activities	\$0	\$1,000	\$2,000	\$3,000	\$4,000	\$5,000
	Non-Learning Community Course Restructuring and Development						
6	EH 101/EH102 and MA105/MA110---Restructuring	\$20,000	\$30,000	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
7	Grants to Enhance Other Courses to Develop and Assess Targeted Competencies	\$0	\$0	\$15,000	\$20,000	\$20,000	\$20,000
8	Grants to Develop or Enhance Model Capstone Courses	\$0	\$0	\$30,000	\$60,000	\$90,000	\$60,000
9	Redesigning Curricula Program Grants	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$20,000	\$40,000
	Assessment						
10	Academic Profile Tests (freshmen, transfers and seniors)	\$13,000	\$12,825	\$12,825	\$12,825	\$12,825	\$12,825
11	Defining Issues Test	\$0	\$2,000	\$2,000	\$2,200	\$2,200	\$2,400
12	CLAQWA	\$0	\$7,500	\$5,000	\$2,000	\$0	\$0
13	External and Internal Reviewers	\$0	\$0	\$6,000	\$12,000	\$18,000	\$25,000
	Development of Internal Assessment Instruments						
14	Assessment Instruments	\$18,000	\$18,000	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
	Other						
15	UAB Discussion Book Activities	\$0	\$1,000	\$10,000	\$10,000	\$12,000	\$12,000
16	Develop Writing Web	\$0	\$0	\$10,000	\$5,000	\$5,000	\$5,000
	TOTALS	\$126,735	\$341,838	\$362,338	\$437,538	\$494,538	\$543,738

7. Competitive grants will be available for faculty development to enhance instruction in a particular course to improve student learning of the targeted competencies and/or develop embedded assessment.
8. Competitive capstone grants will be available for faculty to develop or enhance model capstone courses or experiences which comply with specified guidelines. The funds are to be used for development of sustainable initiatives.
9. Larger competitive grants will be available to departments to support restructuring a program or significantly redesigning curricula to enhance and assess student learning of targeted competencies.

Assessment:

10. ETS Academic Profile Tests will be given annually to freshmen, transfer students, and a sampling of seniors.
11. The Defining Issues Test will be given annually to a sample of freshmen and seniors.
12. If the Cognitive Level and Quality Writing Assessment Instrument (CLAQWA) is adopted, then one of its developers at the University of South Florida will work with the Department of English and individual schools to train key faculty in its use as an assessment instrument.
13. Funds are available to support the use of External and Internal Reviewers to assess basic writing competencies, as well as discipline-specific writing, QL, or ECR competencies.

Development of Internal Assessment Instruments:

14. Grants will be available to support the development of in-house instruments for assessing basic writing, QL, and ECR competencies.

Other:

15. Funds will be used to make some copies of the UAB Discussion Book available across campus and to support such relevant activities as, for example, a presentation by the author, dorm debates, and an essay contest.
16. The Writing Web, an online resource for faculty and students, will feature descriptions of the most common elements of each writing genre, a set of sample papers to provide benchmarks, and adaptable generic rubrics for evaluation and self-assessment

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Appendix I. Faculty Senate Resolution in Support of the QEP

Resolution 2004.12.1:

Whereas the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) Committee has proposed an initial plan to further develop UAB's core curriculum to improve student learning and student functioning as individuals and citizens beyond graduation, and

Whereas this plan has four major elements for the enrichment of the core curriculum, including communication, knowledge, problem-solving and citizenship, and

Whereas, the QEP committee has identified three core competencies in writing, quantitative literacy, and ethics/civic responsibility as initial targets for this enhancement program, and

Whereas, continued faculty involvement in both implementation and assessment strategies will be important to the success of these efforts, and

Whereas, these proposed changes will require additional resources for faculty development, training, and support,

BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED, that the UAB Faculty Senate endorses these major concepts proposed by the QEP committee and encourages faculty, students and staff to support the implementation of these enhancement goals of the UAB core curriculum, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the UAB Faculty Senate requests that appropriate institutional resources and infrastructure be made available, to assure the successful implementation and assessment of the QEP plan.

Adopted by the UAB Faculty Senate at its meeting of December 14, 2004.

Appendix II. Early Competencies Faculty Survey

The Early Academic Competencies survey was conducted to obtain information about competencies that students needed to acquire prior to entry into their major. That is, the survey did not deal with all possible competencies that one might want students to possess prior to graduation, just those that needed to be acquired early in their undergraduate curriculum, as a foundation for successful work in their majors.

The list of competencies was generated based on committee discussion and review of a variety of relevant source materials. Phrasing of competencies was generic, to make sense to faculty in the diverse set of disciplines that the early core “serves.”

Participants

Targeted faculty were those who taught courses taken **early in the major curriculum sequence and taken primarily by students in the various majors**. Service courses were specifically excluded. Based on nominations by QEP committee members, 265 faculty were invited to complete the survey. Two indicated that they did not teach appropriate courses. Of the remaining 263 faculty, 181 (69%) responded.

Responses were received from faculty representing 47 of 55 (i.e., 85% of) undergraduate majors. In most cases, courses in non-responding majors are staffed by faculty primarily affiliated with another major. Non-responding majors represented less than 2% of UAB graduates over the last 4 years.

Of responding faculty, 26.5% held the rank of Professor, 36.5% were Associate Professors, 30.4% were Assistant Professors, 5.0% were Instructors, and 1.7% were Adjunct Faculty.

Faculty were asked to respond to survey items on the basis of their experience teaching a particular course. Faculty responded based on courses at all four levels: 28.2%, 26.5%, 29.3%, and 16.0% responded on the basis of 100-, 200-, 300-, and 400-level courses, respectively.

Analytic Approach

The principal data extracted from the survey were ratings of each of 26 competencies on two dimensions:

1. **Relevance** of each competency for students to succeed in the course. Response options were 'Not Relevant,' 'Useful,' 'Highly Relevant,' and 'Essential.' For data summary, these responses were numerically coded as 0, 1, 2, and 3, respectively.
2. For competencies considered to be at least ‘Useful,’ the percentage of students who typically take the course who possess the competency to an acceptable degree (**Percent Adequately Competent**). Response options were ‘0-25%,’ ‘25-50%,’ ‘50-75%,’ and ‘75-100%.’ For averaging, these ranges were represented by their numeric midpoints (12.5%, 37.5%, etc.).

Majors were statistically grouped into clusters based on similarity of responses of affiliated faculty to the 'Relevance' questions. The most important characteristic of this procedure was that majors were categorized objectively based on relevance ratings rather than human judgment. Three clusters were identified, and are tabled below. In some cases clusters mapped onto school boundaries, but the method also separated functional groups within some schools.

Cluster	School	Majors
A: Social Science, Humanities, Education, & Nursing (28 majors)	A&H	English, Philosophy, Spanish, Art History, French, Communication Studies
	SBS	All majors except Psychology
	Education	All majors
	Health-Related Professions	All majors except Medical Technology
	Business	Management, Marketing, Accounting
	Nursing	Nursing
B: Basic and Applied Math, Natural Science, Psychology & Engineering (15 majors)	NS&M	All majors
	Engineering	All majors
	SBS	Psychology
	Business	Finance, Economics
	Health-Related Professions	Medical Technology
C: Arts (4 majors)	A&H	Music, Theatre, Art, Art Studio

Results

Mean relevance ratings and estimations of the percent of student currently competent were tabulated for the entire sample of respondents and separately for faculty in Clusters A, B, and C. These means are tabulated on the next two pages. Items are sorted from highest to lowest based on mean rated relevance for the full sample.

Relevance means are based on the following scale: 0 = 'Not Relevant,' 1 = 'Useful,' 2 = 'Highly Relevant,' and 3 = 'Essential.' Mean percentage of students currently competent is based on computations in which each scale range is represented by its midpoint (12.5% for 0-25%, 37.5% for 25-50%, etc.).

Mean Relevance Ratings

Competency	Overall	A	B	C
Read with comprehension	2.73	2.87	2.60	2.21
Listen with comprehension	2.72	2.75	2.68	2.69
Think conceptually	2.66	2.66	2.66	2.63
Analyze and interpret facts or evidence	2.35	2.34	2.57	1.60
Understand the significance of the UAB Academic Honor Code	2.33	2.53	2.11	1.83
Synthesize ideas	2.27	2.38	2.03	2.40
Write sentences using standard English	2.27	2.56	1.85	1.83
Speak effectively in English	2.18	2.39	1.80	2.06
Compose an organized paragraph	2.11	2.50	1.47	1.77
Use basic information technologies, including the Internet	2.10	2.37	1.70	1.71
Construct coherent arguments	2.05	2.14	1.90	1.96
Understand and relate multiple representations of the same information	1.98	2.07	1.78	2.13
Apply ethical considerations to decision making	1.87	2.06	1.52	1.85
Use library resources	1.77	2.13	1.16	1.60
Understand how societal and cultural context affects interpretation of facts	1.77	2.34	0.65	1.98
Construct abstractions	1.76	1.65	1.89	2.06
Work collaboratively	1.73	1.94	1.33	1.77
Solve multi-step problems or logical puzzles	1.72	1.38	2.38	1.65
Communicate an appreciation of diversity in society	1.68	2.19	0.64	2.04
Understand and use the scientific method	1.52	1.37	2.01	0.69
Empathize with others	1.48	1.89	0.70	1.54
Make and use graphical representations of data	1.45	1.19	2.19	0.50
Visualize spatial relations	1.35	0.91	1.98	2.08
Solve problems using high school algebra or plane geometry	1.23	0.85	2.22	0.21
Solve problems using mathematical techniques beyond H.S. algebra or plane geometry	0.92	0.62	1.73	0.00
Communicate an appreciation of the arts	0.86	0.87	0.30	2.83

Mean Ratings of Percent of Current Students Adequately Competent

Competency	Overall	A	B	C
Read with comprehension	58.81	57.86	59.05	64.58
Listen with comprehension	60.73	60.34	62.37	57.29
Think conceptually	49.61	48.36	53.78	42.71
Analyze and interpret facts or evidence	50.90	50.50	51.62	51.04
Understand the significance of the UAB Academic Honor Code	53.25	50.63	56.22	60.42
Synthesize ideas	50.81	50.75	50.28	53.13
Write sentences using standard English	61.99	63.80	58.45	63.02
Speak effectively in English	75.66	75.54	73.13	85.94
Compose an organized paragraph	53.35	52.31	55.19	54.69
Use basic information technologies, including the Internet	68.30	69.84	67.24	61.46
Construct coherent arguments	47.48	45.23	53.05	43.75
Understand and relate multiple representations of the same information	50.50	49.53	51.19	54.69
Apply ethical considerations to decision making	57.00	55.35	59.82	58.33
Use library resources	49.02	50.48	47.02	45.83
Understand how societal and cultural context affects interpretation of facts	48.85	46.98	54.08	45.83
Construct abstractions	44.59	44.41	46.53	38.54
Work collaboratively	61.28	59.74	63.74	64.06
Solve multi-step problems or logical puzzles	47.07	45.72	49.92	45.83
Communicate an appreciation of diversity in society	57.53	53.88	63.68	64.58
Understand and use the scientific method	43.82	40.58	51.72	36.11
Empathize with others	61.92	61.51	63.94	56.94
Make and use graphical representations of data	50.13	46.47	55.58	54.17
Visualize spatial relations	50.98	47.64	55.06	55.73
Solve problems using high school algebra or plane geometry	46.81	44.50	51.13	37.50
Solve problems using math. techniques beyond H.S. algebra or plane geometry	43.13	40.44	46.18	irrelevant
Communicate an appreciation of the arts	43.09	39.65	41.67	65.63

Appendix III. Graduation Competencies Faculty Focus Groups

The QEP Committee conducted focus group meetings with faculty from each of the eight schools with undergraduate programs. The primary purpose of these focus groups was to identify the competencies that faculty believed to be most important for all UAB graduates to possess, regardless of their undergraduate major. Each focus group had a moderator and a recorder, both of whom were members of the QEP Committee but specifically selected to *not* be faculty of the same school as the focus group participants.

In advance of each focus group meeting, participants received four documents intended to orient participants to the issues and prompt thinking and discussion:

1. A Focus Group Agenda (described below).
2. A brief summary of the QEP Early Academic Competencies Survey.
3. A page of quotations from *Taking Responsibility for the Quality of the Baccalaureate Degree* (Greater Expectations Project on Accreditation and Assessment , 2004).
4. A *UAB Reporter* article: “UAB to ‘rethink, reconceptualize’ undergraduate core” (Gunter, 2004).

Each focus group meeting followed a consistent agenda, beginning with a welcome and introductions, a brief overview of the purpose of the focus group meeting, and some basic ground rules to facilitate participation and minimize distraction. The results of the Early Academic Competencies Survey were briefly reviewed, and subsequent discussion centered around the following questions:

1. Regarding the survey results: Were there any surprises? Did we miss any important competencies?
2. What competencies should be expected of all UAB graduates? That is, if we have done a good job as faculty, what knowledge, skills, or perspectives should be displayed by all of our graduates?
3. What is currently going on in your courses (or the courses in your major) to develop and reinforce the competencies you have identified in Question 2? What else could be done?

Subsequent to each focus group meeting, the moderator wrote a descriptive summary of the focus group discussion. Focus group participants received feedback from the meeting, and were asked to comment on the record and suggest corrections to the moderator summaries.

Summaries were revised by the moderators with attention to these comments. The QEP chair made final edits while the co-chairs compiled a summary table of competencies that were discussed in the various focus groups.

Moderators' Summaries of School-wide Focus Groups

School of Arts and Humanities

This group of faculty was very passionate about wanting to improve student learning. Most of the allotted time was spent on how to teach writing since the majority of the group was from English. They provided, in my mind, valuable discussion about the English department's history of when some measures of learning had been implemented and then later phased out.

Writing across the curriculum is what they deemed to matter most in the ability to increase writing and communication skills. However, they recognize that assigning and grading multiple writing assignments are enormously labor intensive. Resources of time and money are the stumbling block here. There was limited optimism that UAB could accomplish this type of model. However, should the university decide to make this a major initiative, they would be on board to help direct that effort. They were willing to train faculty about teaching writing and assessing writing. They didn't like the idea of electronic portfolios because it seemed too cumbersome. They missed the camaraderie that they had when they graded essays together. They also cautioned that the legal ramifications of high-stakes exit exams must be thoroughly explored before they are considered for adoption.

School of Business

The group was very concerned about the lack of work-ethic, personal responsibility and professionalism among some UAB students. The belief was underscored that the university system can reward the processing of students and penalize faculty who enforce high academic standards. For example, flunking students can result in poor student evaluations, which would undermine a faculty member's case for tenure and promotion.

The group felt that an academic work ethic ought to be instilled in the early competencies and continued throughout the major. In addition, at graduation students should have sound communication skills, a sense of confidence in their own field, an ability to think logically, sound ethics, a high level of personal responsibility, and a love of learning.

The group felt that outcomes assessment, required by business academic accreditation, can facilitate the measurement of these competencies—but what would be necessary is strong support by department chairs, deans, the Provost, and the President.

School of Education

The Education faculty focus group underscored a concern about the quality of the educational experience. It felt that the university system rewards and thus sometimes encourages quantity (credit hour production and the number of students enrolled and graduated) over quality. The group expressed strong concern about the importance of verifying fully the competency of students at graduation.

In terms of early competencies, the group was concerned about weaknesses in communication (analytic, written and verbal) skills. It believed that students also lack research and organization

skills, as well as basic knowledge of math and science. The group expressed great concern about the perception that education was an “easy” major, and that too many UAB students “shop schools” for the easiest routes to a diploma. The group felt that central to changing this situation is strong support from UAB administration for maintaining high standards and expectations.

The focus group felt that UAB graduates should have sound professional skills, wellness-oriented personal attitudes and abilities, and sound communication and analytic skills. Further, the UAB graduate must be an enlightened and informed citizen.

The group felt that education accreditation requirements facilitate the measurement of these competencies. The group concluded that more inter-school communication and collaboration among faculty are necessary to enhance the quality of education. It also observed that some departments at UAB rely on too many adjunct faculty, and while adjuncts can and may be necessary and helpful to prepare students for specific professions, over-dependency on adjuncts is counterproductive to quality education and high academic standards.

School of Engineering

Like the others, this was a good focus group. They did not want to waste time answering “what-if” questions because they had been through a similar process with their own accrediting agencies in the past. They saw implementing the QEP plan beyond SACS accreditation compliance as a tremendous but worthwhile challenge. They agreed that the university should make effective teaching an important part of compensation. They thought that the university would have to provide sufficient support and rewards for faculty development and course restructuring before all of the faculty would “buy-into” the efforts demanded by the QEP.

School of Health-Related Professions

The group expressed concerns about the relationship of new admission standards and the work/results of the QEP committee. They are very concerned with the lack of preparation in high school sciences (especially physics) that is found in UAB students. They are also very concerned about the lack of preparation of too many UAB students in “early competencies”—those acquired prior to entering the major.

The group expressed strong support for maintaining high academic standards at UAB. Graduates should communicate effectively, be able to apply acquired knowledge to real-world situations, have solid professional and ethical attitudes in the work environment, have good reasoning and math skills, process and use information technologies and read/understand/apply professional and academic literature in their respective fields of study. UAB graduates should understand the value of diversity in society.

The group discussed the issue of fostering and measuring competencies in their current courses. Consensus was that, especially due to professional academic program accreditation requirements, SHRP is measuring outcomes of these competencies in a satisfactory manner.

School of Natural Sciences and Mathematics

This group was very committed to improving the quality of teaching in their undergraduate programs and enjoyed the opportunity to meet with colleagues to share best teaching practices. They were concerned that the university would need to acquire significant resources to significantly improve the quality of the undergraduate core curriculum experience. They thought the university should pursue a model that elevated teaching and learning in the UAB undergraduate program. For this group, improving teaching meant not only providing professional development and rewarding excellence in the classroom but also improving UAB's physical facilities. They were well aware that Birmingham Southern and Samford have an advantage over UAB, because they have better-equipped laboratories and classrooms. They wanted central administration to build improved teaching facilities into the priority list. They liked the idea of improving the core and improving student quality but wondered what would give in order for this to happen in a time of limited resources.

School of Nursing

The participants of the nursing focus group reviewed the early competencies found in the faculty survey. They expressed support for those competencies. In addition, members were very concerned about students having an understanding of society—both locally and globally, as well as self-management skills and early skills that would help them be successful in the workplace.

In regards to competencies at the point of graduation, members felt that UAB graduates should be well skilled in the areas of (1) professional responsibilities and (2) social and personal responsibilities. The UAB graduate should also highly value a liberal arts education.

Participants reviewed how they currently evaluate these competencies in specific courses. They expressed confidence that outcomes assessment, required by the nursing accreditation standards, facilitates this kind of evaluation.

School of Social and Behavioral Sciences

The SBS faculty focus group identified a number of competencies that UAB graduates should have, which were then put into the following groups.

- A. *Life Skills*: Financial understanding; Written and oral communication skills, effective listening; Time management, especially learning to structure one's own time; Ability to work collaboratively; Socialization suitable to the community we find ourselves in; Value for learning.
- B. *Evaluating information and solving problems*: Ability to evaluate and analyze information and claims critically; Ability to actively formulate hypotheses and questions; Ability to synthesize knowledge; Understanding of how scientific knowledge is produced (scientific method; nature of statistical truth); Ability to know how to evaluate truth claims; Ability to think abstractly; Recognition of how a principle is implicated in a situation; Recognition that two situations that seem different may call into play the same general ideas.

- C. *Connecting (responding) to world outside of individual*: Sense of public service; Openness to new knowledge and perspectives; Understanding of global issues; Ability to apply knowledge to community or public service; Global awareness to understand others' perspectives; Understanding of and respect for diversity.
- D. *Know something*: Knowledge from course of study; Ability to use library and locate information); Ability to write an exam answering what is asked; Value for learning (also A)

How to teach A: Group projects; Public oral presentations

How to teach B: Research papers; Assignments that require taking a claim made in public media, then finding scientific evidence related to it (Goal is to show that scientific method is more reliable and to use library); Critiques of bad research

- 100-level: just write
- 200-level: group project, each brings something, and group makes a whole

How to assess B: Grade independently on different skills (use a grid); overall grade is a composite of grades in each area.

How to teach C: Internships (Political Science); Journals; Letter from supervisor (assessment); Trip to U.N. (for example): Exposure to other perspectives (more support for such things is needed at UAB)

Tabular Summary

The following tabular summary was prepared based on the focus group summaries (shown above) as well as the original detailed and contemporaneous records prepared by the recorders during each focus group.

Graduation Competencies Identified by the School-Wide Faculty Focus Groups

Competency	A&H	BUS	EDU	EGR	HRP	NSM	NUR	SBS	Count
Knowledge and Skills									
Speak & write effectively	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	8
Analyze & evaluate truth claims, etc		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	7
Apply acquired knowledge to real-life	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	7
Be informed about scientific ideas & methods			X	X	X	X	X	X	6
Be informed about the nation & world	X	X	X	X		X		X	6
Find, use, & document sources appropriately	X		X			X	X	X	5
Process & use information technologies			X		X	X	X	X	5
Evaluate dimensions of ethical & moral choices		X	X	X	X	X			5
Think critically	X	X	X				X		4
Think conceptually	X	X						X	3
Analyze & solve multi-step problems			X			X	X		3
Demonstrate quantitative literacy			X		X	X			3
Understand probability and statistics						X			1
Values and Attitudes									
Value learning	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	8
Value diversity			X		X	X	X	X	5
Take personal responsibility		X		X		X	X		4
Give back to community, nation, & world			X	X			X	X	4
Desire to improve				X		X			2
Possess multiple & broad cultural perspectives	X						X		2
Life Skills									
Work collaboratively & independently	X	X		X		X	X	X	6
Manage time (punctuality, deadlines, calendar)		X	X	X			X	X	5
Demonstrate professional behavior & attitudes		X	X		X		X		4
Manage personal finances		X			X		X	X	4
Self-assess objectively	X		X				X		3

Appendix IV. Honors Student Focus Group

The Honors Student focus group was structured similarly to that of the Graduation Competencies Faculty Focus Groups. The group met on August 31, 2004. As in the faculty focus group, the focus was on competencies that every graduate should possess, regardless of major. Discussion was organized around three questions:

Question # 1 – Graduate competencies

Students identified the following competencies/traits that every UAB graduate should possess: Written and oral communication skills, basic knowledge of science and history, awareness of what's going on in the world, creativity, ability to analyze and synthesize ideas/concepts, ability to think independently and work on a team, employability (knowledge in a field plus basic skills such as resume writing, reading comprehension), organizational skills, personal accountability, self-direction.

There was discussion about whether the need in today's world was for a liberal arts education or for specialized skills. Although there did not appear to be consensus on this issue, some participants felt that graduates need both. "You need an awareness of what's going on in the world regardless of which set of skills you have."

Students stated that there is no motivation to value the current core curriculum. Some core courses are "very high school." Homework in these courses is busy work, classes are not stimulating, and exams require only the regurgitation of facts. An exception was PHL 115 (Contemporary Moral Issues), which was praised as "a great course" for learning to construct an argument and for developing listening and speaking skills. Based on the experience in PHL 115 they recommended that "everyone should take 2-3 philosophy courses."

Question # 2 – Comments on the list of competencies derived from faculty focus groups

Students noted that being able to objectively assess yourself and your actions is a very important life skill, although undergraduates may not realize how important. They were not sure it is the responsibility of a university to teach personal financial skills; however, one student commented that FIN 101 is a practical and useful course. They suggested that students have to be shown how a course applies to their lives for the course to be relevant to them.

Students were also uncertain whether valuing diversity can be taught; however, students have a unique opportunity to experience it here at UAB. They especially recommended small, open discussions as the way to learn about diversity.

Question # 3 – Ways to develop competencies

Honors students described a number of approaches that they felt would be most useful in helping students to develop targeted competencies. However the importance of an interactive environment that stimulates students was the overriding theme in this discussion, regardless of the specific method used. Small discussion groups are needed; this is a setting where you can learn, especially early in your undergraduate experience. They felt that UNIV 101 is not the best

course, but staying with a small group for all 4 years of your undergraduate career is beneficial. Recitation sessions of certain courses are often the best part of the course, more interactive and more relevant than the lecture portion. Freshman seminars are valuable because you know you will be questioned about what you present so you take more responsibility for the information you convey. Professors should ask more questions in class and wait for an answer. "We learn from participating and from being wrong." Teachers should assign less busy work, give more writing assignments, and use more class discussion.

Students noted that working with individual faculty develops both communication skills and discipline-specific skills. "Faculty open your eyes to possibilities." They emphasized the importance of having introductory courses taught by faculty who have a passion for teaching and who can convey that to students. They noted that students like it when instructors relate the material, in whatever discipline, to their lives.

Students need to be challenged by putting them in situations where they can learn to work as a team. Volunteer activities outside the classroom can promote organizational skills, provide practice in oral and written presentation, build teamwork, and illustrate discipline-specific concepts. Working in groups should be utilized more.

Several specific topics and competencies were suggested as important for further emphasis in the undergraduate curriculum. These included public speaking, computer skills, library skills, and knowledge of contemporary world issues. Honors students also indicated a need for courses that teach writing for specific disciplines.

Finally, honors students suggested that their peers would get more out of their undergraduate education if they took advantage of activities outside of the classroom. The focus group generated a freshman checklist of "8 things you must do during your Freshman year":

1. Attend a cultural event
2. Participate in a volunteer activity
3. Do a library research assignment
4. Prepare a resume for Career Services
5. Take FIN 101 Personal Finance
6. Complete CS 101 (the revised version with no class and better labs and better faculty)
7. Take a small class where you are forced to talk
8. Participate in SHAPE (Sexual Health Awareness and Peer Education)

Appendix V. Graduate Program Directors Survey

Directors of graduate programs at UAB were considered to be a useful source of information about core competencies of UAB graduates who enter their programs, as well as competencies generally important for advanced study in various disciplines. A focus group was planned for graduate program directors, but Hurricane Ivan closed the university on the scheduled date. To expediently obtain relevant information, directors were asked to respond in writing to the focus group questions. Responses were received from graduate program directors in only four departments (Communication Studies, Forensic Sciences, Occupational Therapy, and Public Administration). The occasional contradiction in the comments is partially explained by the differences between the student groups in each graduate programs.

What are the academic and personal competencies you believe are critical for students to be successful in your graduate program?

Academic Competencies

- Knowledge of library skills- ability to search databases, locate on-line and in-house journals, distinguish between primary and secondary sources of information
- Good computer skills – ability to use word processing programs, cut and paste, send files through the internet, know and use Power Point and Excel
- Ability to write – knowledge about how to format a paper, follow APA, spelling, and grammar rules, write complete sentences, logically organize and develop thoughts into classroom requirements
- Presentation skills – ability to stand up in front of a group and confidently present a talk in logical order using audio-visual skills
- Study skills – ability to study either alone or in a group, take notes in class and use them to study, follow through on reading assignments and use the material as a basis for classroom discussion
- Ability to take class exams in all formats (multiple choice, essay and other kinds of questions) and finish tests within designated time frames
- Interactive classroom skills – ability to answer and ask questions, assimilate instructor feedback, discuss material with classmates and instructor
- Writing Skills - We expect students to know the basics of writing including how to properly cite references. We have been spending a lot of time with some students to teach them critical writing skills. Some of them have good GPAs or GREs.
- Critical thinking - Too many of our undergraduate students come into the graduate program viewing things from the perspective of right/wrong, much like they're taking a

multiple choice test. We have to get them to shift out of that mentality and start looking at things from a critical perspective.

- Writing. Although our students are not great at taking standardized tests, they seem to be excellent at taking tests on material covered in classes. However, writing skills vary in quality. Our students tend to be very good at writing related to their discipline (e.g., journalism writing, broadcast writing, PR writing), but have trouble shifting to the academic style of writing necessary for success in grad school.
- Obviously, past grades are an acceptable indicator of whether the student will be able to understand and complete the required coursework. In my experience, it is rare that a student will understand the material well, but be unable to demonstrate it through decent grades. GRE scores also give the student an opportunity to demonstrate academic skills, although I'm uncertain how good of an indicator these tests are. I only know that most of my friends are bright and have done well on standardized tests. Because I am new to UAB, I have not yet had the opportunity to compare students' performances on their applications prior to admission, to their performances after they entered our graduate program.
- I think some students fail to differentiate undergraduate from graduate school with respect to the extent that graduate school is much more research oriented. This is especially true in the sciences. Undergraduate education is becoming so commonplace, I feel some students believe that graduate school is simply a continuation of paying universities to teach them material that will help them in their career. They can fail to comprehend the system of scientific research they are entering. A major focus of graduate level studies is wisely using university and government money to help their field advance. I speak from experience, as I was somewhat in this boat when I was applying to graduate schools. Although students finishing undergraduate degrees are adults responsible for fully understanding the path they choose, I think it could be helpful for students considering graduate school if undergraduate programs provided coursework or workshops that helped clarify what to expect.
- In our forensic science program particularly, students must have excellent presentation skills as they will likely be required to testify throughout their career. I imagine this ability is difficult to evaluate from an application. Much of public speaking involves a personal comfort that can't really be taught, but must be learned through experience. Communication with professionals in the students' field is important in all areas of graduate school. It helps if students have experience completing research at the undergraduate level as this gives them experience talking about their studies on a professional level.

Personal Competencies

- Work ethic – willingness to put in the time and effort it takes to complete graduate assignments in a timely fashion and at a level expected of graduate students

- Organization – ability to judge workload and designate appropriate time and resources to complete assignments in a timely fashion
- Interpersonal skills – ability to interact with classmates and faculty in an adult manner; that is, to be positive, give and receive constructive feedback, take responsibility for their own actions, be punctual and responsive to classmates and faculty

How well do UAB graduates match up with students from other universities in terms of these competencies?

- UAB students measure up fairly well. For the most part, they are aware of campus resources, although usually they are familiar with only one library, not both. Most can use computers and email, and know how to search databases and use on-line resources. They know how to use Power Point, although not often Excel, and commonly do a nice job presenting in class. Academically they appear to know how to study and take tests. Overall their writing skills are not as polished as students from Auburn, Samford University, Birmingham-Southern, and out-of-state programs in Georgia and the northern states. I hate to say this, but African-American students are generally not as well-prepared – this is true of African-American students from other programs as well as those from UAB. I gather this is a national problem.
- We receive students primarily from UAB, Samford, BSC, UA, other schools in Alabama (small %), out of state (GA, FL, Michigan, NY, etc). I would rate them as follows: BSC, Samford, out-of-state schools, UAB, UA, other schools in AL
- Our students match up well with those from other universities, except for test-taking skills.

What enhancements could UAB make to its undergraduate preparation that would give its graduates a better chance of success in graduate school?

- I would put writing skills at the top of the list. By this I mean basic writing skills – grammar, spelling, sentence construction, paper organization. Ours is a professional program where written documentation is a primary form of communication, so writing skills are key.
- Generally UAB students have good personal skills; however those who do not and those with limited work ethic are the ones that linger in memory. Sometimes it is not clear whether the problem is work ethic or study skills. I don't know what UAB offers in the way of study skills guidance, but that is an area where students could use help.
- Better preparation on writing and critical thinking. They should pass a test or write a final project that reflects their writing skills.
- I think the biggest help would be to give students considering graduate school an opportunity to identify the differences between undergraduate and graduate level education. Most just assume the coursework will be more intense, but I don't really think

this is true. Classes, workshops, talking to professors and graduate students in their field are all good places to start. Everything else (studying, communicating) will be learned throughout their four years in undergraduate school and demonstrated somewhat accurately in their grades and test scores.

- More required papers for classes.

Appendix VI. Alumni Survey

The Alumni Survey was conducted to determine which competencies UAB alumni believe to be most important for individuals to possess by the time they graduate. To make this survey less burdensome and more comprehensible to a broader audience, a smaller number of competencies were tested and a brief description was provided for each:

Written Communication	Ability to communicate effectively an argument or position, with supporting documentation, in written form at the college level.
Verbal Communication	Ability to express oneself coherently in oral discourse, including the ability to present well-reasoned arguments.
Reading Comprehension	Understanding and ability to evaluate information, evidence, and arguments presented in college-level texts.
Critical Thinking	Ability to identify, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate evidence and arguments as they occur in your own work and that of others.
Statistics	Understanding of and ability to use basic statistical methods to summarize and analyze data.
Mathematics	Understanding of and ability to use basic mathematical techniques (other than statistics) to solve problems.
Information Management	The ability to use computers, library and internet resources, and basic information technologies.
Natural Sciences	Understanding of major phenomena and methods in at least one of the natural sciences.
Social Sciences	Understanding of major phenomena and methods in at least one of the social and behavioral sciences.
US History	Knowledge of the political, economic, social and cultural history of the US.
World Civilization	Knowledge of the distinctive features or language of a culture other than your own.
Diversity	Appreciation of diversity in American society and understanding of how social and cultural context affects interpretation of events.
Humanities	Knowledge of major figures and ideas in at least one of the humanities (e.g., literature or philosophy).
Fine Arts	Understanding and appreciation of one of the principal forms of aesthetic expression -- music, theatre, dance, art, etc. -- and the creative processes inherent therein.
Ethics	The ability to evaluate ethical arguments, to show an appreciation of moral reasoning, and to apply ethical perspectives in decision-making.

Participants

An internet survey was developed by the QEP Committee and the link to the survey was distributed by e-mail. A total of approximately 6400 such e-mails were sent, and 317 responses were obtained. Although this represents a very low response rate, it is important to note that recipients included alumni of all programs (including graduate, medical, dental, etc.) and many of the addresses were unverified. Only alumni of UAB undergraduate programs were invited to respond.

Respondents represented 48 different majors, though by far the largest response (just under 1/3 of respondents) was from alumni of the School of Business. A large majority (85%) had completed at least half of their undergraduate hours at UAB. About one-third graduated since 1999, one-third graduated between 1989 and 1999, and one-third graduated prior to 1989. University Honors Program graduates accounted for about 10% of the sample.

Survey Format

The survey began with the following general prompt:

UAB is currently engaged in a major effort aimed at improving our Undergraduate Core Curriculum. A significant focus of this effort is identifying key knowledge, skills, and abilities that every student should acquire by the time they graduate from UAB with an undergraduate degree. The purpose of this survey is to obtain input from alumni with regard to what these essential competencies should be, and whether and how the undergraduate experience at UAB is contributing to their development.

Your input as a UAB alumnus or alumna will help to guide our thinking as we try to enhance the UAB undergraduate experience for future generations of students. We greatly appreciate your assistance.

Respondents then answered the following questions about each competency:

How important would you rate this competency?

How much did your UAB education contribute to improvement in this category?

If your UAB education contributed to this competency, what component contributed the most? (major course, core course, elective course, dept. honors, UAB Honors, extracurricular activity, internship)

What aspect of that component contributed most? (faculty, advisor, course content, paper/assignment, group project, other)

Results

For purposes of the QEP, the most important question was the first, concerning the importance of each competency for a UAB graduate to possess. These importance ratings were numerically

coded (0=Not important, 1=Important, 2=Very important, 3=Essential) and mean values across all respondents are given in the following table:

Competency	Mean Importance Rating
Verbal Communication	2.61
Reading Comprehension	2.57
Critical Thinking	2.56
Written Communication	2.54
Information Management	2.43
Ethics	2.36
Mathematics	1.95
Diversity	1.88
Social Sciences	1.65
U.S. History	1.51
Humanities	1.44
World Civilization	1.44
Natural Sciences	1.41
Statistics	1.36
Fine Arts	1.13

Appendix VII. Parent Survey

The Parent Survey was conducted by the office of the Associate Vice Provost for Enrollment Management, which successfully e-mailed the link to the survey web page to 332 parent e-mail addresses. Responses were received from 155 parents. This puts the response rate somewhere between about 23% and 47%, depending on whether one assumes that each e-mail contact reached one parent or two. We considered this a reasonably good response rate for an e-mail survey.

Survey Format

The list of competencies assessed was identical to that developed for the Alumni survey.

Two questions were asked of respondents to identify the characteristics of the sample respondents: 1) How many of your children are enrolled at UAB? 2) What is your child's current year in college? The modal respondent was a parent of one freshman enrolled at UAB. Such parents (n=128) comprised about 83% of the total sample.

Parents received the following instructions for ranking the competencies:

Below you will find a list of 15 domains of knowledge, skills, and abilities that may be acquired in college. Through a series of focus groups and surveys, we have identified these competencies as important for every UAB graduate to have, regardless of his or her major.

From your perspective as a parent, please tell us which of these 15 competencies are the MOST important for your child to gain as a result of their undergraduate education at UAB. Specifically, we'd like you to tell us:

- *which 5 competencies are MOST important*
- *which 5 competencies are LEAST important*
- *which 5 competencies fall in the middle, and are neither most nor least important*

Results

Results of the Parent Survey are shown on the next page. Results for each competency are shown two ways: as a mean rank (3 = most important, 2 = middle importance, 1 = least important) and as a distribution of responses across each of these three categories.

Competency Importance Rankings from the Parent Survey

Competency	Mean Importance Ranking	Percentages		
		% rating LEAST important	% rating MIDDLE importance	% rating MOST important
Verbal Communication	2.88	1.3	9.2	89.5
Reading Comprehension	2.86	1.3	10.5	88.2
Critical Thinking	2.79	2.0	16.3	81.7
Written Communication	2.79	1.3	18.3	80.4
Ethics	2.43	12.4	31.4	56.2
Mathematics	2.43	5.9	45.1	49.0
Information Management	2.39	10.4	39.6	50.0
US History	2.00	22.2	54.9	22.9
Natural Science	1.90	26.8	55.6	17.6
Diversity	1.81	39.0	40.9	20.1
Statistics	1.81	34.4	49.7	15.9
Social Science	1.80	29.6	60.5	9.9
Humanities	1.60	51.0	37.2	11.8
World Civilization	1.57	49.4	43.5	7.1
Fine Arts	1.54	55.2	35.1	9.7

Note: Number of missing responses ranged from 1 to 4 across the 15 competencies. Overall missing data rate was $30/(155 \times 15) =$ about 1.3%.

Appendix VIII. Academic Profile

The Academic Profile is a general test of academic skills and knowledge at the college level. According to its publisher (Educational Testing Service):

The Academic Profile measures college-level reading, critical thinking, writing, and mathematics in the context of material from the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences.... [It] is intended for use by colleges and universities in assessing the outcomes of their general education programs to improve the quality of instruction and learning. The test focuses on the academic skills developed through general education courses rather than on the knowledge acquired about the subjects taught in these courses. It does this by testing college-level reading, and critical thinking in the context of the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. Mathematics and writing skills are tested independently of context areas. (<http://www.ets.org/hea/acpro/>)

During Spring 2004 UAB administered the Academic Profile to 116 graduating seniors. Students were solicited by letter and invited to participate in the testing. They were aware that their scores would not be considered in any grade or graduation decision, but were offered a chance at a valuable prize (one of 5 Apple iPods) if their performance placed them in the top half of the distribution of all students taking the test.

The Academic Profile provides measures of student achievement in two ways:

- *Norm-referenced*: descriptive statistics (means, confidence limits, standard deviations and percentiles) for the skill measures that can be compared to other samples.
- *Criterion-referenced*: percentages of students scoring in the Proficient, Marginal, and Not Proficient ranges on questions classified at one of three proficiency levels for each of the three skill dimensions.

We focus on criterion-referenced proficiency measures because they are tied directly to specified learning objectives. The table shown on the next page provides a summary of the proficiency levels for each of the major skill dimensions and the percentages of the UAB sample scoring in the Proficient, Marginal and Not Proficient ranges on each. Proficiency level summaries are intended to be suggestive but not exhaustive. Note that the Academic Profile conceptualizes critical thinking as the highest proficiency level of Reading, rather than as a separate skill dimension.

Skill Dimension	Proficiency Classification		
	Not Proficient	Marginal	Proficient
Reading Level 1: Understanding of factual material and the meaning of words and phrases in context.	7%	15%	78%
Reading Level 2: Comprehend the meaning of, summarize and interpret significant passages or sections of a passage.	28%	20%	53%
Critical Thinking (Reading Level 3): Evaluate causal arguments. Determine whether required evidence is contained in a text. Evaluate artistic interpretations.	69%	19%	12%
Writing Level 1 Basic word agreement, word choice, ordering of sentences in a paragraph and elements in an outline	3%	15%	82%
Writing Level 2 Word agreement in more complex contexts. Recombination and incorporation of new elements into a sentence or passage.	24%	45%	31%
Writing Level 3 Recognition of proper constructions, appropriate parallelism and correct use of idiomatic language. Detection of redundancy. Identification of best edits.	47%	41%	12%
Mathematics Level 1 Simple word problems, common fractions, percents, squares and square roots, algebraic substitution, interpretation of simple graphs.	9%	15%	77%
Mathematics Level 2 More complex word and algebraic problems, maximization, minimization and trends. Interpreting a more complex graph containing a trend. Basic set problems.	20%	24%	56%
Mathematics Level 3 Complex word problems for which backsolving is not useful, or insight or logical reasoning is required. Generalize about sets and functions. Exponents and roots other than squares and square roots.	52%	28%	20%