

UCF: (Y)our (E)ssential (S)kills to Career Readiness!

University of Central Florida
Quality Enhancement Plan Concept Paper

The University of Central Florida has the unique capability to serve as a national model for career-readiness. We will harness our power in leadership training, simulation, avatar-based learning, and partnerships to increase the career-readiness of our students. This QEP will capitalize on these rich and diverse resources to build career success within the curriculum and in co-curricular community activities.

Data from numerous national sources clearly indicate that graduating students lack specific job, life, and career skills. In a poll taken by Northeastern University (2013), the public expressed concern about graduates' preparedness for the workforce. Business leaders indicate the need for graduates to be broadly educated beyond learned content to solve problems, think critically and creatively, communicate effectively, and work well in teams (Berrett, 2013; Supiano, 2013; Tugend, 2013). In a recent student survey, Zogby Analytics report that students no longer want to complete majors that are not tied directly to job-related skills (2014). Our QEP will directly address these issues and needs.

Four pillars identified as essential to the success and career readiness of all UCF graduates are: 1) communication, 2) self-management, 3) critical thinking, and 4) teamwork (see Figure 1). These skills may not necessarily be secured from traditional coursework. The UCF YES! QEP will provide a university-wide framework that will enable students to gain professional, social, and life skills essential for career readiness beyond graduation. To ensure the success of this framework, the QEP will also incorporate an assessment plan reflective of the student's discipline.



Figure 1: Pillars of (Y)our (E)ssential (S)kills!

Vision

The framework within the proposed UCF YES! QEP uses experienced-based methods to provide students with a set of essential skills that are not typically acquired through traditional teaching methods. The students will access an individual activity portal for tracking progress towards the achievement of goals. UCF students will be provided opportunities within the classroom and through co-curricular activities to develop the set of YES! skills.

Our vision is to outfit students with core skills that will ensure their employability, career readiness, and success in post-UCF endeavors.

Congruence with the university's mission and plan

Our objectives are aligned with the university's mission of providing the best undergraduate education in the state of Florida and becoming *America's leading partnership university™*.

Student learning outcomes and assessment methods

Goals and objectives

Through the UCF undergraduate experience, growth in or mastery of skills will occur through a variety of courses and/or in capstone experiences that capitalize on existing UCF resources (volunteer experiences, externships, club activities, internships, team projects and simulations, situational judgment tests, written and oral examinations, self-reporting). UCF resources and activities will be supplemented by the provision of new training and development materials as needed to meet students' career readiness skills. Specific products will include: 1. pre-course modules, 2. self-management modules, 3. capstone activities and projects, and 4. simulations (see Appendix A). Baseline assessments will be taken and repeated over the course of the UCF program to show improvement and sustainment over time.

To measure and assess learning outcomes, we propose the use of milestone exercises during a student's academic career to demonstrate mastery of the four essential pillars (communication, self-management, critical thinking, and teamwork). We will leverage curricular and co-curricular opportunities to reach the milestones that are discussed in more detail below.

Examples of student learning outcomes

Communication - Communication skills are rooted in identifying and using interpersonal skills that serve to achieve individual goals (Wiemann, 1977; Salas *et al.*, 2008). This skill set entails listening and then clearly and effectively delivering messages to ensure that messages are correctly interpreted (Wiemann & Backlund, 1980). Written communication requires yet another set of sub-skills (e.g., active voice; clear, concise writing) that we will elucidate, develop, and assess. Essentially, students should be able to formulate clear thoughts, convey those thoughts to others, clearly process responses, and make decisions about how to proceed based on those interactions.

Self-management – Self-management refers to the ability to manage personal abilities, values, and weaknesses and relationships, time, financials, and life goals. Frayne and Geringer (1994) developed a framework for self-management that includes self-assessment, goal setting, self-monitoring, self-evaluation, written contracts, and maintenance or relapse prevention. Research has shown that there is a positive relationship between employability and a well-developed concept of goals based on one's own skill set and the ability to self-manage (Eby, Butts, & Lockwood *et al.*, 2003). Furthermore, self-management has been associated with higher career success (Bridgstock, 2009; De Vos & Soens, 2008). Monitoring one's behaviors to present one's self in the most positive light possible is important in professional contexts (e.g., professionalism, appropriate behaviors in sensitive professional contexts).

Critical thinking – Critical thinking is the use of logic to engage in effective problem solving and decision making and to foster adaptability, thus enabling students to overcome obstacles and make sound decisions (Halpern, 1996). Professional environments are often riddled with choices that require critical thinking (hire/fire decisions; decisions regarding public perception of a company, product, or service; conflict resolution strategies). As such, critical thinking is a basic, but crucial, component for success.

Teamwork – Teamwork is a set of interrelated actions, thoughts, and feelings required for a group to function effectively as a collective unit (Salas, Sims, & Burke, 2005). Individuals displaying high teamwork capabilities will exhibit adaptability, awareness, leadership capabilities,

interpersonal skills, coordination, effective communication, and high-quality decision-making abilities (Cannon-Bowers *et al.*, 1995; Salas, Burke, & Cannon-Bowers, 2000). Given the increased prevalence of teams in organizations, this competency is generally required for effective performance on the job (LePine, Hanson, Borman, & Motowidlo, 2000).

Outcomes and measures (assessment tools and instruments, schedule to be followed)

The pillars will be assessed prior to students beginning their coursework at UCF, during their undergraduate tenure, and through tracking after graduation by the QEP office or other appropriate university units (see Appendix A). For each pillar we will provide a set of specifications that includes principles, guidelines, and advice for developing and evaluating the essential skill. To ensure that skill attainment is tracked over time, we will follow a before-during-after framework for assessment. The programmatic aspects of the QEP can be assessed through existing processes and expansion of UCF-developed tools. This QEP can easily be incorporated within UCF's three components of the Academic Learning Compacts: communication, critical thinking, and discipline-specific knowledge and skills. By providing tools and rubrics, faculty members will be able to incorporate the QEP into the fabric of each academic program. While ambitious, we believe that UCF is well equipped to achieve these goals.

In order to evaluate long-term career success and employability, several measures can be used. Many UCF students engage in internships and experiential learning opportunities during their undergraduate careers. Such experiences may include volunteer activity, externships, undergraduate research, club activities, and working with different organizations. The extent to which students are involved in these various areas may constitute an additional measure of success. We have the opportunity to catalog and document activities through our KnightConnect system that is managed by the Office of Student Involvement. We have courses in leadership that provide credit, supervision, and learning assessment for appropriate experiential activities. Students can provide self-report perceptions on an employability scale (Rothwell, Herbert, & Rothwell, 2008). They can also indicate success in entering and/or completing graduate programs. The percentage of students employed or entering graduate school should increase following full implementation of the program.

This existing infrastructure can be leveraged to obtain performance ratings and assessments of essential pillars of career readiness from supervisors during these various learning opportunities, including a host of experiences such as volunteer activity, internship involvement, club activity, and others. As many of these opportunities are provided by local organizations that employ UCF graduates, their feedback and assessments are also a valuable resource for gauging the success of the QEP's aims. Finally, in cases where students are not continuing with further education, relevant data on career success can be collected, such as salary and time-on-market for new alumni.

In addition to the overarching assessments, each individual pillar will be individually assessed. These assessments will occur in a number of ways depending upon a variety of variables within each discipline. For example:

- To capture improvement in communication, simulation activities will be available to embed within the curricular programs to establish student progress.
- To assess improvement in self-management skills students will be asked (though not required) to complete a self-managed project (e.g., volunteer effort) that requires the enactment of the essential sub-skills that characterize this pillar.

- To measure critical thinking skills any number of instruments can be used, including the California Critical Thinking Inventory (Facione, Facione, & Giancarlo, 2001), the Watson Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal (Watson, 1980), and the Minnesota Test of Critical Thinking (Edman, Bart, Robey, & Silverman, 2000).
- To evaluate teamwork skills a combination of peer review, professor reviews, self-report, and simulation technology can be used.

Implementation and Scope

Possible activities/projects

The QEP will capitalize on rich and diverse resources at UCF to build career success within the curriculum and in co-curricular community activities. Specifically, we aim to leverage existing course infrastructure to develop these skills, supplementing this base with appropriate training modules. UCF resources that will be leveraged for this QEP include the following in leadership training (Career Services, LEAD Scholars, Eli²), simulation (CATME Teamwork Training), avatar-based learning (TeachLivE), and partnerships (the Office of Student Involvement, the Writing Center, Experiential Learning) to increase the career-readiness of UCF undergraduates. Most students will also participate in a cornerstone or capstone course that will synthesize all of the pillars.

Faculty development will be provided through existing venues of summer and winter workshops. Several rubrics (e.g., AACU: Value Development Rubric Project) are available to serve as a starting point for the development of a framework that focuses on employability skills. We will develop a standardized rubric of skills for the targeted areas of communication (oral, written, listening), self-management, critical thinking, and teamwork that students and faculty members can customize to their academic experiences. Furthermore, recent research conducted by OSI suggests that students who are involved in student organizations have much higher self-efficacy when it comes to developing and demonstrating the four pillars of career readiness. OSI already has infrastructure in place (KnightQuest) to provide involvement consultation that assists students in setting goals and choosing appropriate activities to advance their career plans. Moreover, the results of the university's annual employer survey can be leveraged to shape coursework within student activities.

Pre-course modules: At the beginning of their first year, students could complete a non-credit module introducing them to the four essential pillars that will be taught throughout their time at UCF. This module will be included in the standardized requirements for freshman and transfer students (e.g., AlcoholEdu). (See Appendix A for this and the following modules.)

Self-management modules: To ensure that students are learning and applying the four pillars across their undergraduate careers and to ensure that their academic and extracurricular experiences are aligned with long-term goals, we suggest the development of a self-management learning module for students to complete each year. In this module, students will be introduced to and revisit what self-management entails and update their progress toward goal achievements of all four pillars through a personalized activity update portal; this module will track progress in various domains, allowing students to record their involvement with appropriate UCF activities. In doing so, students would both learn and be reminded of the importance of this skill set.

Capstone activities and projects: Appropriate synthesis and evaluation of the four essential pillars for career success can best be done through capstone projects or activities. These would be built on earlier foundational course activities that stress critical thinking skills and are developed individually by degree programs using vehicles such as presentations or papers. Projects (both written and oral) assigned on an individual level ensure that students are not only thinking critically, but also are able to convey ideas on their own.

Capstone activities and projects will be developed that use team projects in which students apply developed critical thinking and communication skills with others in collaborative assignments (at a professor's discretion). While some courses already require team exercises, others will have the opportunity to build on university guidance and incorporate teamwork into their curricula. Faculty members will be engaged in developing discipline-specific rubrics for grading to aid in performance assessment standardization across fields, as well as in common appraisal tools for providing feedback to students on their skill development.

Simulations: Finally, platforms such as TeachLivE™ will be available for integration into capstone courses and/or will be made available to students seeking further development of their employability skills. A student will have to demonstrate each of the four identified essential skills (self-monitoring, communication, teamwork, critical thinking) to perform well and succeed in the simulation.

Resource requirements

Resources will be necessary for development of areas within each pillar. Funding will also be required for faculty development, project development and implementation, and marketing of the QEP to UCF students and the broader UCF community.

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Appendix A

Possible Activities and Assessment Tools

	Before		During		After
Skill	Activities	Assessment	Activities	Assessment	Assessment
Communication	Pre-course module	Simulated activities within pre-course module	Curricular and co-curricular activities; e.g., presentations, writing center	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supervisor ratings • Situational judgment tests • Evaluation of presentation/paper 	
Self-management	Pre-course module	Simulated activities within pre-course module	Self-management learning module	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supervisor ratings • Career identity subscale of the career motivation scale • Self-control and self-management scale 	
Critical Thinking	Pre-course module	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simulated activities within pre-course module • The Watson Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal • Minnesota Test of Critical Thinking 	Case-based and problem-focused learning experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supervisor ratings • Performance on case-based and problem-focused learning experiences • The Watson Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal • Minnesota Test of Critical Thinking 	
Teamwork	Pre-course module	Simulated activities within pre-course module	Capstone activities and projects, TeachLivE™	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supervisor ratings • Peer ratings • Self-report • Situational judgment tests • Teamwork • Knowledge, Skills, and Ability (KSA) Test 	
Career readiness		Self-report perceptions on an			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student and employer satisfaction, increased percentage

		employability scale			of students employed or attending graduate school, salary • Time on market
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