



HARDIN-SIMMONS

U N I V E R S I T Y

Enhancing Community: Student Learning in Small Groups through FYSM

Hardin-Simmons University's Quality Enhancement Plan *Enhancing Community: Student Learning in Small Groups through FYSM* has two interrelated goals: 1) to improve students' interpersonal and communication skills that are necessary for learning in small groups, and 2) to develop student appreciation for social diversity and other perspectives in community. The university believes that it is important for students to learn that community – or what Parker Palmer calls the “capacity for connectedness”—does not simply happen, but emerges through intentional personal interaction and appreciation of perspective.

Successful participation in community requires the use of effective communication skills, collaborative skills, and the ability to understand and appreciate diverse perspectives. In this QEP, incoming first-year students will receive intentional skills training and opportunities to engage in small discussion and project groups, building their capacity for successful social connections and academic success. Student improvement in communication and collaborative skills may also lead to broader student engagement and improved retention outcomes.

After consultation with a wide representation of university stakeholders, review of the literature on the subject, analysis of assessment data, examination of institutional planning, as well as consideration of the university's mission and strategic plan, HSU has designed four new initiatives which will use HSU's First Year Seminar (FYSM) to enhance students' values and behaviors related to community. The initiatives are

- Intentional FYSM Instructor Training (iFIT)—faculty and staff teaching the FYSM courses will learn tactics to ground their students in community by enhancing communication and group-decision making skills.
- Community Coffee Hour—though this initiative serves as a weekly, semi-structured, co-curricular experience for social interaction among the campus community, for FYSM students in particular it provides a “laboratory” to practice the application of effective communication skills.
- Cinema Discussion Forum—a series of events featuring films grappling with complex ideas and issues followed by a discussion forum to analyze perspectives on the subject matter.
- HSU Symposium—an annual, day-long event created to focus on the story of university founder James B. Simmons, the challenge the Simmons legacy offers to study perspectival openness, as well as the quest for meaning and purpose he inspires.

The launch of this QEP coincides with the addition of the FYSM as part of the HSU Core Curriculum. With a strategic focus on the academic, spiritual, and social integration of new first-year students into the HSU community, the FYSM becomes the perfect conduit through which the QEP will be implemented, eventually impacting all HSU students with a common and enhanced HSU academic and community experience.

The QEP Director will work with numerous campus constituents, including the Director of First-Year Programs, the Dean of General Education, FYSM instructors, two new university committees created for QEP purposes, and other support staff, to gather data for assessment. Measures to appraise student learning outcome data will include direct and indirect assessment tools, external and internal measures, as well as student self-assessments.

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