

# THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA®

## Quality Enhancement Plan Executive Summary

### LEARNING IN ACTION

#### Developing Real-World Problem Solvers through High Quality Experiential Learning

The University of Alabama Quality Enhancement Plan focuses on improving students' real-world problem-solving skills and their ability to connect academic knowledge to real-world contexts and situations through high quality Experiential Learning Opportunities (ELOs). This focus is consistent with The University of Alabama's vision of becoming "the university of choice for the best and brightest students in Alabama and a university of choice for all students who seek exceptional educational opportunities."

An experiential learning opportunity (ELO) is an in-depth, typically semester long, field experience related to one's academic program of study (i.e., practicum, internship, co-op, clinical, field-work, research apprenticeship, student teaching, public art exhibition or arts performance, etc.) that engages the student in the application of classroom learning to real-world problem solving under the supervision of an experienced practitioner with structured opportunities for learning from that experience.

Research supports experiential learning as an appropriate method for assisting students in gaining real-world problem-solving skills, in providing opportunities to apply academic knowledge to real-world contexts and situations, and in strengthening reflection and other lifelong learning skills. Research also demonstrates that professional development provided to faculty and staff has a positive benefit on teaching and learning beliefs and practices.

UA will engage faculty and staff in professional development opportunities that identify the practices of exemplary ELOs and demonstrate how to effectively incorporate these practices into existing ELOs or new ELOs. QEP committees will certify exemplary courses based on the implementation of identified best practices. Other committees will assess the reflections and products generated in ELOs to determine what impact these practices have on students' abilities to apply knowledge and skills in real-world problem solving, one of three goals of the QEP. The other two goals are increasing the quantity and quality of ELOs at UA, and improving and increasing students' perceptions of excellence in educational preparation.

This assessment approach for evaluating UA's QEP emphasizes authenticity and rigor. The assessment plan includes baseline student and faculty assessments, pre, mid- and post-semester reflection assessments; direct assessments of outcomes of students' learning by faculty and knowledgeable others; surveys of student, faculty and employer perceptions, and qualitative data obtained through student, faculty and employer focus groups. These assessments will provide formative and summative data for evaluating the efficacy of the QEP, and for evaluating the QEP's contribution to actualizing the mission, vision and strategic goals of the University.

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