

University of South Carolina Aiken Quality Enhancement Plan Executive Summary

The USC Aiken (USCA) Quality Enhancement Plan is designed to improve students' Critical Inquiry skills. All USCA first-year students will take a one-credit hour course in Critical Inquiry (CI) based on the First-Year Reading and taught by faculty from across the disciplines. The Quality Enhancement Plan slogan, "Think DEEP," will be a reminder for students to *Discover, Experiment, Evaluate, and Perform* (DEEP) as a means to practice Critical Inquiry and thereby increase their learning.

At USCA, the QEP will simultaneously challenge faculty to become more adept at developing the intellectual curiosity of students. The faculty teaching the CI course will become members of a learning community and will have opportunities through a three day "Think DEEP Summer Institute" and through learning community meetings during the academic year to share approaches to teaching the CI course. Our goal is for most full-time faculty at USCA to teach the CI course at some time during the five-year implementation period. Another aim is for faculty to engage in more intentional development of students' critical inquiry abilities in general education courses, major requirements, and elective credits across the academic disciplines. As USCA faculty integrate CI vertically into the curriculum and students apply CI at every level of learning, we believe our students' college experiences will be enriched.

Because true learning is a process and being proficient at learning requires focused practice, our approach will be to actively engage students as agents in their own education. They will learn by doing as they become DEEPer thinkers. Their ability to *Discover* new ways to see the world, to *Experiment* and gain access to new information, to *Evaluate* the quality of information, and to *Perform*, present, and disseminate their knowledge will increase their confidence, enhance their skills, and instill a desire for a life of learning.

Our intention is to motivate students to reach beyond their accustomed levels of thinking and effort, to look DEEPer into problems and issues related to the First-Year Reading, and to contribute to more meaningful class discussions. As they explore issues and ideas, they will expand their information literacy skills and become more appreciative of the power of civil discourse.

In addition to the CI course, students will be afforded opportunities to participate in co-curricular activities linked to the subject of the First-Year Reading (e.g., blogging and social networking, peer mentoring in the CI course, service learning on campus or in the local community, and collaborative projects suggested by the topic of the First-Year Reading) to create a more comprehensive and fulfilling learning environment for undergraduates, staff, and faculty.

Although the CI course will focus on the fall semester of each student's first college year, the social connections created among students and the students' close interactions with faculty will form a scaffold of collaborative relationships that students will build on throughout their USCA experience.

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