



Catch Fire: Higher Order Thinking at Union College Union College, Barbourville, KY

Executive Summary

The focus for Union College's Quality Enhancement Plan was determined by a campus-wide selection process, reflecting a broad consensus about a particular student need at the present time. **Catch Fire: Higher Order Thinking at Union College** is an institutional response to the shifting needs of our students and the demands of the professional world they will enter. Fostering the development of "higher order thinking"—which, in our conceptualization, encompasses critical thinking, creativity, and metacognition/self-regulation—is essential to the mission of the College and has long been a stated goal. Institutional assessment data, however, indicate a need for significant improvement in students' use of skills in these areas. Our QEP reflects our efforts to define more precisely and improve this vital area of student learning. Implementation and assessment of the QEP center on three broad student learning outcomes:

- Outcome 1.** Union College students will demonstrate their ability to think logically and critically at a proficient level.
- Outcome 2.** Union College students will demonstrate their ability to think creatively at a proficient level.
- Outcome 3.** Union College students will demonstrate their ability to think metacognitively at a proficient level.

The QEP encompasses three areas: the curriculum, co-curricular activities, and faculty/staff professional development.

Curriculum: Research on effective instructional practices suggests that the best results occur when thinking skills are taught very intentionally and embedded in meaningful content. To this end, higher order thinking will be addressed explicitly in a newly-created freshman-year course that will introduce students to basic elements of critical and creative thinking and metacognition/self-regulated learning. As implementation of the QEP unfolds over the course of the next five years, additional courses within each program of study will be identified and updated with the goal of extending the concepts introduced in the freshman course to disciplinary content. Finally, each program of study will use a capstone course or experience to provide further application of higher order thinking and assess achievement of the learning outcomes at the end of the undergraduate experience.

Co-Curricular Activities: Co-curricular activities include a lecture series and a creative thinking showcase, a competition for which students will be invited to submit works that reflect the application of higher order thinking skills in their fields of study or areas of interest. Individuals who work with students in co-curricular capacities will be included on QEP leadership teams and invited to participate in professional development opportunities.

Professional Development: Faculty and staff will have multiple opportunities to expand their knowledge of effective ways to teach higher order thinking through on-campus workshops, work groups, and conference attendance.

Assessment of the QEP will include a combination of a nationally-known survey (*National Survey of Student Engagement*), a standardized measure of critical thinking (the *Critical Thinking Assessment Test*), course-embedded assessment, and informal student surveys.

Please contact Dr. Melinda Rice, QEP Director, for additional information (mrice@unionky.edu)