Description of the Quality Enhancement Plan

As part of a sweeping overhaul of the general education program, UMW established a First-Year Seminar requirement in 2008. This three-credit course, required of all first-year undergraduates, was designed to help students cultivate the knowledge, skills, and habits of mind necessary for liberal learning through the in-depth study of a topic in a seminar setting. One core expectation of the course is the provision of instruction on how to gather and analyze information for the purpose of formulating and defending an opinion.

While the 2008 FSEM requirement established general course goals, it had ill-defined student learning outcomes and insufficient support for faculty who were tasked with implementing an ambitious introductory college-level experience that includes the development of skills in oral communication, written communication, and information literacy. Consequently, UMW’s Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) was designed to enhance the existing FSEM as a foundational liberal arts educational experience. At the onset, the plan establishes a rigorous and clearly defined set of integrated FSEM learning outcomes in the areas of information literacy, writing, and oral communication.

The impact of UMW’s QEP will be felt through increased resources and development in three core areas. First is the development of on-line learning modules designed to move introductory and developmental material out of the classroom and into a high-quality on-line delivery method. New FSEM courses are expected to integrate these learning modules with existing course content. Funding for both the technical and creative development of these modules is key to the QEP’s success. Over a four-year period, the plan envisions the creation of at least twelve modules distributed among the three skills areas. Starting in fall 2014, there will be three such modules: The CRAAP Test, Communication Apprehension, and The Writing Process.

Second, the QEP works toward enhanced peer-tutoring provided to support first-year students in the Writing Center, the Speaking Center, and the Simpson Library. New FSEM courses should utilize these resources by finding creative methods for staff in these centers to work directly with the students in the FSEM courses. This could include classroom presentations by the staff in these centers and/or required visits to the centers either individually or as a class.

Third, the QEP will work to diversify UMW’s offerings of courses satisfying the FSEM requirement. Summer development grants and adjunct support are both part of this effort. Working with the QEP Director, faculty from departments across campus will use the resources of the QEP to develop new courses or enhance their existing courses to meet the goals of the new student learning outcomes.