

Institutional Capacity

NRCC's plans for a first semester experience are ambitious, but a variety of factors also makes this project not only feasible, but also practical. In addition to the organizational structure, timeline and budget capacity outlined in subsequent sections, a few other stars have aligned to make this plan a natural next step in the College's student success initiatives. These alignments are not happenstance with respect to the development of the proposed first semester experience. They are key elements that supported the development and planning for the project.

One of the key factors for developing the capacity to succeed in such an ambitious program is the recent (2015) creation of the Accountability in Student Learning Program (ASLP). This program was staffed with a new full-time director, a full-time position repurposed as the associate director, several new part time connection specialists, and a part time administrative assistant. Each of these individuals has worked over the past two years at establishing an intentional engagement model of student support – from caseload management to orientation programming to other student success initiatives. The caseload management system, in addition to other initiatives, is vital for ensuring a successful first-semester experience. While the ASLP team will not be planning or implementing the First Semester Experience alone, it will provide valuable, experienced support in a variety of capacities in its implementation timeline and budget.

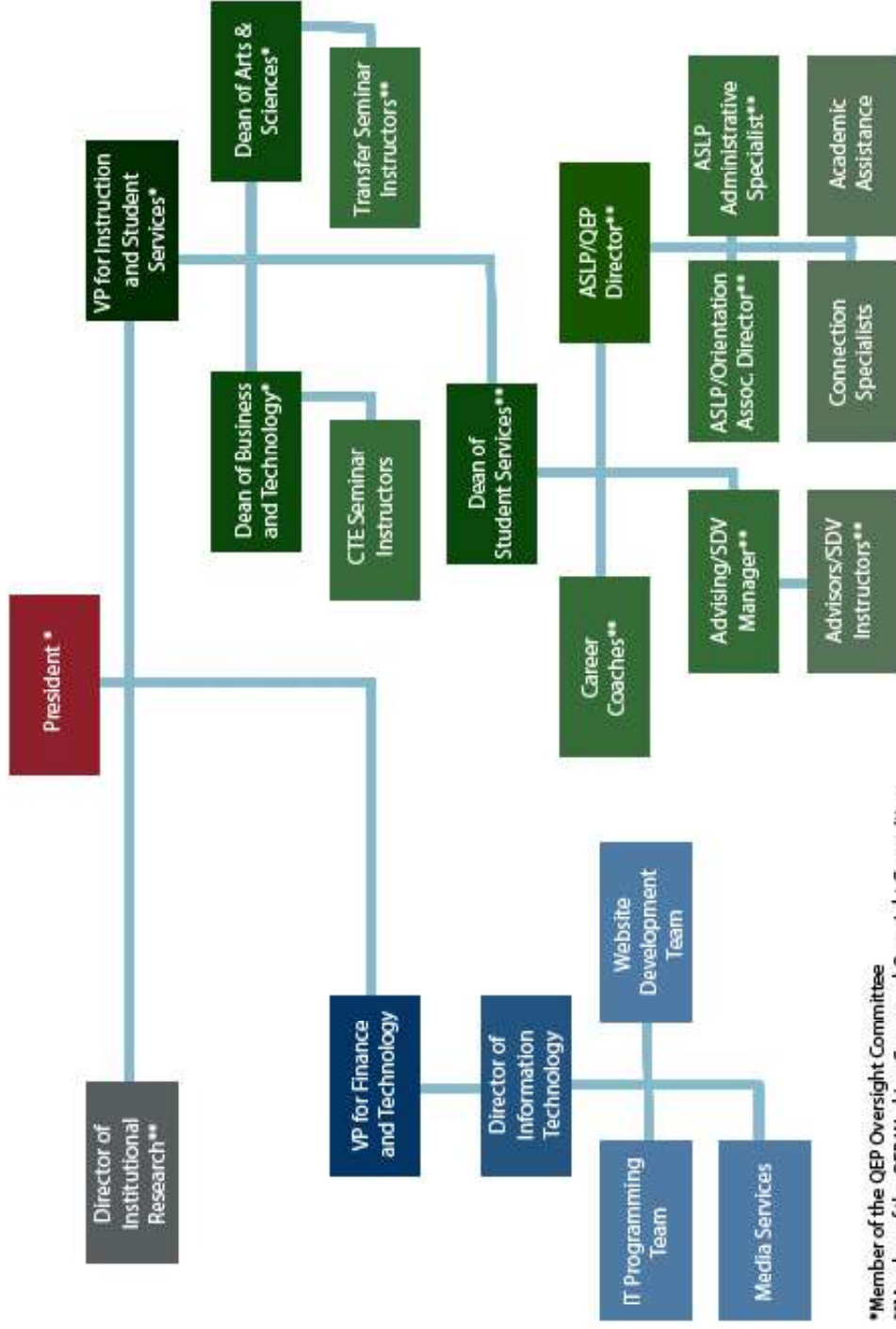
Also supporting the feasibility of this QEP is the fact that some of the components are already in place, albeit in a limited capacity. For example, the College already requires students to attend an in-person orientation session. Furthermore, all first semester students should be taking the college success skills course as well as common first semester courses for their programs of study. That being said, a variety of factors currently make it possible for students to avoid these useful pathways for success. The problem that the QEP seeks to solve is that there is no intentional connection between the orientation program and the college success skills course, much less other common first semester courses. This fractured approach means that

information is covered unevenly – some information gets delivered many times unnecessarily and other information never gets covered, perhaps because everyone thinks someone else has already taught it. Moreover, much of the information that could help students learn how to perform better in their studies is woefully abstract when covered in a stand-alone student success course. When presented in the context of a more traditional academic course, these student success skills become much more salient and better learned and applied than they would in the stand-alone course as evidenced by success and retention. Another problem is that the current model keeps everyone in an information sharing mode ('talking at' students and each other) rather than creating opportunities for community building and goal setting/tracking.

The most significant component of the QEP is to move these programs from their independent siloes and to help staff and faculty across the campus and across disciplines work together to deliver a seamless first-semester experience. As the timeline and budget below demonstrate, doing so will be a significant undertaking both in the form of creating new or revised programs/courses and in terms of tackling the logistical hurdles to managing an online pre-orientation module or a co-enrolled four to nine credit bundle of courses. Faculty and staff work on each of these components as they currently stand (as isolated components); moving beyond the first couple of years of logistical problem solving and program/course development to implementing the QEP will not require additional capacity in the form of financial or staffing resources.

QEP Organizational Structure

All NRCC staff will, in some way, touch the QEP over the next five years. The following chart represents the key staff members responsible for core aspects of the QEP implementation, assessment and oversight.



*Member of the QEP Oversight Committee

**Member of the QEP Working Group and Oversight Committee

Glossary of QEP-Related Staff

Many of the positions at NRCC are similar to those at other colleges, so the reader will understand intuitively what is meant by “President,” “Vice President for Instruction and Student Services,” and “tutor.” But the College has a few departments and positions that are unique. These positions also tend to be the ones at the center of much of the proposed QEP. Following is a quick guide to these positions and their functions.

Accountability in Student Learning Program (ASLP) – This is the program tasked with evaluating, developing and implementing new student success initiatives. Currently, some of the initiatives led by the ASLP team include the new student orientation program, Graduation Acceleration Program (GAP), and support for current ACCE (Access to Community College Education) students. This program is also responsible for training and implementing the CLAS (Connecting Learning Assets and Students) system and oversees the Academic Assistance program. Given the overlap in goals, it is fitting that the ASLP Director is also the QEP Director and that ASLP team members (associate director, administrative specialist and connection specialists) are so integral to the First Semester Experience.

Connection specialists – All NRCC students are assigned to a connection specialist whose job is to intentionally engage students who may be in need of academic advising, tutoring, career services, or help in overcoming obstacles to student success such as lack of books, computers, or internet access at home. When instructors or other staff raise concerns on a student in the CLAS system, connection specialists reach out to the student to find out what is going on and to offer support. connection specialists also reach out to students when data indicate that they may benefit from a resource (like scholarships) or when they may have confusing paperwork to decipher (like financial aid related forms). Connection specialists are also among the SDV-100

(College Success Skills) instructors and orientation leaders and will therefore play key roles in the QEP. Finally, connection specialists help to staff the Advising Office during peak times of the semester.

Advisors – On most college campuses, it seems like any work with students that is not explicitly related to a course or to financial aid/business processes gets labeled “advising.” At NRCC, students are assigned to faculty advisors and the College has an Advising Office with professional advisors. Like connection specialists, these professional advisors support students in a variety of proactive ways as well as through traditional drop-in academic advising. All of these professional advisors also serve as connection specialists, managing a caseload of students in particular programs of study. Some advisors also teach SDV-100 (College Success Skills), and all advisors support new student orientation programs. There is great overlap between connection specialists and professional advisors. The long-term plan is to merge these two roles into one.

Career coaches – Career coaches are NRCC employees who are located primarily in seven of the nine regional high schools. Their role is to support high school students and their families in career and college planning. Because they know a majority of the new students, they will play a key role in the QEP, helping to develop and implement programs to support first-generation families as well as staffing orientations and open houses. One career coach will serve on the QEP Working Group.

QEP working group – This group will meet monthly to manage the implementation of the QEP. Some of the components of the QEP still need to be fleshed out (e.g., plans to support first-generation families, logistics around coenrolling students in a first semester seminar, creating and implementing the pre-orientation online module, etc.). This group will take the lead on this work, with support from the ASLP/QEP Director and ASLP Administrative Specialist. The working group

will include the director of institutional research, the academic advising manager, the dean of student services, a career coach, the assessment coordinator (who is also a faculty member) and the ASLP associate director.

Oversight committee – This group will include the working group members as well as the president, vice president for instruction & student services, vice president for finance and technology, the academic deans, and the registrar. Its role will be to meet each semester to review the progress of the QEP.