

POTENTIAL QEP THEME: CITIZEN SCHOLARS: CREATING AND APPLYING KNOWLEDGE FOR LOCAL COMMUNITIES AND A GLOBAL SOCIETY

Abstract:

While the Radford University Core Curriculum includes instruction in national and international perspectives, the focus is largely upon the conveyance of information. The adoption of the “Citizen Scholars” theme would add a focus on the *synthesis and application* of that knowledge toward complex and multifaceted public issues, a public scholarship, so that RU graduates would be prepared for responsible citizenship and civic leadership in their local, national, and global communities. A Citizen Scholars theme would also provide cohesion and synergy to numerous existing RU efforts that already involve public scholarship.

Overview of Theme:

The Citizen Scholars theme proposes an emphasis on student learning that situates academic skills and knowledge in real-world settings at both the local and global levels – particularly those settings which foster social and civic responsibility. This public form of scholarship can significantly enhance learning as students acquire, *synthesize and apply* knowledge in settings that are personally meaningful and represent the complexities of modern life. This theme furthers the aspirations of the core curriculum to help students develop a “love of learning and a range of intellectual skills that enable them to meet the challenges and realize the promise of living in a complex, multicultural, and ever-changing world.” Through this, the Citizen Scholars theme would reflect a renewed RU commitment “*to the development of mature, responsible, well-educated citizens*” (RU Mission Statement). This theme further supports the RU 7-17 plan by “investing in society – globally and locally,” recognizing that learning within these contexts “fosters academic opportunities, good citizenship, ethical behavior, and civic engagement.”

Current Status of Theme at RU:

Public scholarship is already being conducted in every college and many departments at Radford University. What is lacking, however, is the recognition that these efforts collectively represent a movement in higher education to connect university scholarship with society’s most pressing challenges. Many faculty already incorporate the ideas and practices of public scholarship into their teaching, research, and civic engagement. Beyond these efforts, a sampling of other programs, departments, and initiatives involved in this work include: the Center for Social and Cultural Research; Appalachian Regional Studies Center; International Education Center; COBE’s Global Innovation Tournament; the Office of Academic Engagement and Community Partnerships; and RU’s Sustainability Initiative. The School of Social Work’s Field Program suggests a common thread of these programs: *A place where critical thought and community informed practice meet*. Without the recognition that public scholarship ties these disparate programs together, we may be missing an opportunity to create a more powerful learning environment and culture across campus.

Ways Adoption of this Theme Might Move RU Forward:

This theme can bolster RU’s image both in the eyes of potential students as well as citizens of the Commonwealth. First, the opportunities for local and global awareness and engagement will be highly attractive to students as it extends their educational experience beyond the University into society and

better prepares them to deal with the complexities and challenges of a global society. This theme also responds to an increasing expectation for public universities to be more accountable and more responsive to public issues and needs, from the local level and beyond. The American Association of State Colleges and Universities, for instance, suggests an important role for state colleges and universities as “stewards of place,” institutions who can “aggressively and creatively engage in society’s most pressing challenges.” The Citizens Scholars theme positions RU within this emerging discourse.

Who Might be Involved in Implementation of this Theme:

The challenge to implementation might be in developing a campus environment and culture that orients learning, research, and engagement more intentionally toward the challenges and complexities of contemporary society. The multiple departments and programs that are currently involved in public scholarship would likely serve as the foundation for a broader campus dialogue. But to meaningfully advance this QEP theme, and likely any theme, would require on-going forums and activities that engage multiple stakeholders, on campus and beyond, in learning and dialogue around the possibilities of public scholarship.

Benefits for RU Students Resulting from the Adoption of this Theme:

The intersection of knowledge and society, both locally and globally, can contribute to powerful learning that prepares RU students for lives of deliberative and active engagement in local, national, and global communities. Situating student learning within real-world contexts more effectively engages students cognitively, affectively, and socially, increasing the potential for more transformative learning. Within these complex contexts, students will have opportunities to not just acquire, but also to synthesize and apply a diverse body of knowledge and range of intellectual skills. Through these experiences, students will leave RU further along the path of being “mature, responsible, well-educated citizens.”

Resources: [Lafayette College Takes a Liberal-Arts Approach to Community and Economic Outreach](#)