

## POTENTIAL QEP THEME: PROFESSIONALISM

### Abstract:

College graduates across the nation are often criticized for engaging in behaviors that are not appropriate in the work of work. At Radford University, there are a variety of ongoing curricular and co-curricular activities designed to turn our students into competent and mature professionals. Selecting “Professionalism” as our QEP would give RU the opportunity to formalize and enhance those efforts across campus. This emphasis has the potential to enhance the reputation of RU, to attract more qualified and “serious” students, and to yield graduates who are well-prepared to take their place in society.

### Overview of Theme:

Employers frequently complain that so-called “Millennial” students are not adequately prepared to begin employment. While their transcripts indicate that they have sufficient aptitude (i.e., they have completed appropriate coursework with high enough grades), they have difficulty linking the study of their discipline in college with the practice of their discipline in the workplace. In effect, they are ill-prepared to take their place as “professionals”—not so much because their skills or knowledge are inadequate but because they bring with them immature and inappropriate behaviors that are perceived to limit their employability or ability to function effectively in positions of responsibility. Radford University should teach and foster knowledge and behavior that enhance one’s professionalism in their interactions with coworkers, supervisors and work-related cohorts in a variety of settings.

### Current Status of Theme at RU:

UNIV 100 and Residential Life programming spend some time trying to help students develop an awareness of others as well as self; warning students about appropriate ways to use social media (and the devastating effects that can result from inappropriate postings); encouraging students to engage in their classes responsibly and with civility and to meet all academic and personal responsibilities, etc. The Core Curriculum places a heavy focus upon the development of written and oral communication skills that students will carry into the workplace and upon the development of a personal code of ethics that will guide decisions and actions. Many academic units, especially those with capstone courses and professional work experiences try to assist students in recognizing unacceptable actions and to develop responsible and otherwise ‘professional’ conduct. Increasingly, students collaborate with faculty mentors on scholarly and creative projects that model “real-life” applications, and in so doing learn professional conduct in those settings. It is not so much that students intend to be unprofessional but often the case that they fail to recognize how some words or actions are interpreted by others.

### Ways the Adoption of this Theme Might Move RU Forward:

Adopting “professionalism” as a QEP should resonate with prospective students and serve to develop existing efforts into a more comprehensive and cohesive effort. More important, it will excite their parents; there is a significant body of evidence that, in guiding high school seniors to college, parents are highly concerned about institutions’ capacity to place students in good jobs. They should be reassured if RU is formally committed to producing the kinds of professionals that will stand out among graduates

competing for jobs. Theoretically, enhancing our students' professionalism should also result in better job placement rates, which should enhance the prestige of RU among its peers.

#### Who Might be Involved in Implementation of this Theme:

Virtually every individual and unit at RU could participate in a QEP focused upon professionalism. One obvious means of participation would be for individuals to model professional behaviors at all times: by behaving civilly and respectfully towards others and by meeting teaching, mentoring, administrative, and other responsibilities. In both academic and residential settings, greater expectations could be placed upon students who are currently too frequently given a "free pass" when they engage in behaviors that are clearly inappropriate and would not be acceptable outside of academe (e.g., arriving late for or cutting classes; submitting work after the deadline; posting inappropriate comments or pictures on social media, not showing up for meetings). Simultaneously, RU might enhance what it is currently doing to prepare students for careers, both in offices like Career Services and in academic units that foster student-faculty collaborative work or expect students to work as interns.

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

The benefits for students that the adoption of "Professionalism" as a QEP topic would have are alluded to in the foregoing: specifically, RU graduates would be more employable and less likely to be viewed as immature and unready for responsibility once in their jobs. Improved performance by RU graduates in the workplace could lead to the desire of employers to recruit more RU students in the future; it may also lead to a situation in which ever-more-prominent employers participate in RU-sponsored recruitment events.