

POTENTIAL QEP THEME: FACULTY AND STAFF/STUDENT COLLABORATION

Abstract:

There is a considerable body of research that indicates that student-faculty interaction is an important predictor of student satisfaction and retention. Radford University has emphasized such collaboration informally for at least the past decade, with dozens of students currently engaged in professional activities alongside faculty and/or working with Student Affairs professionals in co-curricular organizations. Formalizing and publicizing this theme, the implementation of which would involve multiple divisions at the University, has the potential to give the University a special “niche” in student and faculty recruitment and enhance the University’s academic reputation. More important, it has the potential to make our students into well-rounded graduates who are more marketable to employers and graduate schools.

Overview of Theme:

Student-faculty interaction is one of the five benchmarks of student engagement, and it has been correlated in a number of pieces of research with enhanced student satisfaction and retention. This is true especially if the interaction begins early in the student’s academic career. There is also evidence that student learning is greatly enhanced when a student works cooperatively with a faculty or staff mentor in scholarly research, creative activity, or in the planning and delivery of co-curricular activities.

Current Status of Theme at RU:

The adoption of this theme would not result in the creation of a new initiative at Radford University. To the contrary, many students currently collaborate with faculty in producing scholarly and creative works; they present papers at professional meetings, serve as co-authors of articles and book chapters, compose music, choreograph dance performances, and engage in other similar activities. Hundreds of additional students collaborate with mentors in Student Affairs in leading student organizations and in planning and executing events.

Ways Adoption of this Theme might Move RU Forward:

In its Admissions materials, RU “advertises” that our students will have the opportunity to do interesting things in collaboration with faculty who are leaders in their disciplines; we also note that our students can (and are encouraged to) get involved in extracurricular activities. The adoption of this theme could take the University to the next level in this area. Developing a close professional relationship with a member of the faculty or staff could change from an “opportunity” to an “expectation,” with all the benefits (in enhanced institutional reputation and attracting motivated students) that would result. The implementation of this theme could also make RU more attractive to new faculty and staff and possibly have an impact upon student retention rates.

Who Might be Involved in Implementation of this Theme:

This theme has great potential for the involvement of virtually every unit in both Academic Affairs and Student Affairs. There appear to be as many different implementation possibilities as there are potential ways to view “interaction” or “collaboration.” For example, some departments might, through enhanced capstone or research class expectations, alter their curricula in ways that benefit students;

others might enhance student-faculty collaboration by improving the quality of academic and career advising services provided by faculty. Professionals in Student Affairs, who interact with students regularly and continually outside of the classroom, would have the opportunity to enhance their mentoring efforts.

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

There are multiple potential benefits of enhanced student-faculty collaborative efforts for RU students. Among them:

- it can enhance the students' deeper understanding of the discipline/topic/area in which the collaboration is occurring;
- it can enhance students' interest in and capacity for pursuing graduate work;
- it can give students experiences that will make them more attractive as potential employees and better prepare them for the world of work