

COLLEGE OF CHARLESTON

Executive Summary

The College's new QEP, Sustainability Literacy as a Bridge to Addressing 21st Century Problems seeks to add to the storied history of the College of Charleston (CofC and "the College"). The College recognizes there is a confluence of "21st Century Problems" that will require rigorous critical thinking skills, systems competencies, and interdisciplinary fluency to address. The 21st century problems CofC students will have to address are social (for example, institutional racism, sexism, LGBTQ+ rights), economic (increasing debt, wage disparity between men and women, poverty), and environmental (climate change, sea level rise, biodiversity loss). Where these three domains--the economic, environmental, and social--meet and intersect is known as the "Triple Bottom Line" (TBL) of sustainability. This QEP places the College at the forefront of higher education in addressing these 21st century problems by equipping students with sustainability literacy.

The College will provide QEP learning opportunities structured around developing critical thinking skills, synthesizing knowledge across disciplines, contributing to creative problem solving, cultivating analytical reasoning, and fostering awareness about sustainability literacy. Students' exposure to these learning skills will serve the important function of helping them better understand and comprehend the interdependent synergies of the systems that interact to make the Triple Bottom Line. Because sustainability literacy is based upon understanding how social, economic and environmental systems interact, these learning opportunities will provide the entryway into students advocating for addressing 21st century problems.

Developing empowered citizens who are able to think critically and bring ingenuity to solving challenges is central to the mission, purpose, and strategic plan of the College. This is seen most clearly in the third goal of the College's strategic plan, which is to "provide students the global and interdisciplinary perspectives necessary to address the social, economic, environmental, ethical, scientific and political issues of the 21st Century." It also is part of the College's mission, which is to develop responsible, productive members of society. This QEP will help the College meet its mission and Strategic Plan by focusing on sustainability literacy. This focus adds to the current institutional context of providing CofC students with perspectives needed to address social, environmental and economic problems.

In order to enhance student learning at the College in regards to sustainability literacy, five key goals and seven student learning outcomes structure this QEP. Addressing these five goals will occur through curricular and co-curricular opportunities for student engagement including sustainability literacy course infusion, the development of a Sustainability Literacy Scholars Program, creation of an undergraduate certificate in Sustainable Businesses and Communities, creation of an Honors College Sustainability Literacy cohort, and co-curricular alternative breaks and campus-wide events. These goals will also be met programmatically by generating new institutional opportunities for student, faculty, and staff engagement around sustainability literacy, most notably by the institutional development of a Sustainability Literacy Institute. These initiatives will be assessed by multiple direct and indirect measures.

By focusing on the development of sustainability literacy afforded by this QEP, CofC students will be able to advocate for a more just, sustainable society - one where they can apply their passions and hard-won knowledge in helping create a more resilient, equitable future for all. The College is honored to present this QEP on "Sustainability Literacy as a Bridge to Addressing 21st Century Problems" to SACSCOC and to embark upon the exciting new era for the College of Charleston.