



QUALITY INSTRUCTION AND STUDENT SERVICES

Snow College Strategic Plan White Paper

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Background

All elements of Snow College's mission statement – a tradition of excellence, a culture of innovation, and an atmosphere of engagement – affirm that quality matters at this institution. This longstanding commitment to quality in academics and in student support is apparent as the College has evolved over 125 years from a small, church-based academy to a nationally recognized, two-year institution that emphasizes liberal arts and applied technology and that offers a bachelor's degree as well.

Recently, this commitment to quality has been noted in several national rankings. The Aspen Institute has twice recognized Snow College's achievements in student success with a place in the top ten percent of American community colleges.¹ Additionally, *Washington Monthly*,² CNN Money,³ and TheBestSchools.org⁴ have all ranked Snow as one of the top ten community colleges nationally, citing a number of academic, financial, and student support service factors.

As gratifying as this recognition is, Snow College is working to ensure that this tradition of quality continues. Challenges must be faced as Snow College envisions its place in the future of Utah higher education and as it plans for changes in student body demographics and in higher education practices. To continue offering a quality educational experience to its students, Snow College should define quality as teaching and administrative practices that are valued by advancement and tenure expectations and procedures, affirmed through assessment, and in line with discipline-specific standards established by accrediting bodies and national organizations. Furthermore, quality instruction and student services must be supported with the strategic investment of resources, and Snow College must continually reassess the ways in which it is ensuring quality.

Lessons Learned

High-Touch Education. High-touch education that consists of personalized academic and student support experiences, face-to-face interaction, and a faculty and staff investment in student success is a highly valued component of Snow's tradition of quality. Surveys of and discussion groups with students, faculty, staff, and alumni strongly identify Snow's high-touch style of teaching and serving students as an essential factor in delivering a positive, highly satisfying college experience. For example, year-end student surveys repeatedly show that an average of 80% or more students who responded rate their interactions with staff members, faculty and fellow students as very positive. Making significant changes that would compromise the College's high-touch tradition is strongly viewed as a threat to Snow's mission and identity. Furthermore, as the College continues to grow, this focus on high-touch education needs to be kept in mind.

Online, Concurrent, and Broadcast Classes. Although high-touch education has been important for Snow College, both legislative dictates and student interest have made it so that Snow College must offer classes in a variety of formats that include *online*, *concurrent enrollment*, and *broadcast*, which are

¹ "College Excellence Program: 2013 Eligible Community Colleges," The Aspen Institute, accessed 16 September 2013, <http://www.aspeninstitute.org/policy-work/aspen-prize/2013eligibleinstitutions>; "2011 Eligible Community Colleges," The Aspen Institute, accessed 16 September 2013, <http://www.aspeninstitute.org/policy-work/aspen-prize/2011eligibleinstitutions>.

² "2013 Community College Rankings," *Washington Monthly*, accessed 16 September 2013, http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/college_guide/rankings_2013/community_rank.php.

³ "How Does Your Community College Stack Up?" CNN Money, accessed 16 September 2013, <http://money.cnn.com/pf/college/community-colleges/>.

⁴ "The 50 Best Community Colleges in the United States." TheBestSchools.com, accessed 16 September 2013, <http://www.thebestschools.org/blog/2013/05/28/50-community-colleges-united-states/>.

different than the small, face-to-face classes taught on campus. These non-traditional classes are more difficult to offer in a way that ensures quality; however, recent focus groups and student surveys suggest that students want a broader range of online class options and more consistent quality in classes, no matter what format they are offered in. More could be done by College personnel to address concerns about technology support for these classes as well to develop and to share effective educational practices in online, concurrent, and broadcast environments.

Consistency and Technology. Using technology solutions to deliver high-quality learning experiences and student services requires a commitment to consistent quality, to functionality, and to intuitive design. There is an expectation that the College will continue to improve its use of technology to support its tradition of excellence in teaching and serving students. A patchwork-quilt approach of departments and offices choosing various methods and applications for everything from online course delivery and use of *learning management software* (including the various features available in Canvas) to providing web-based services and functions often leaves students and other patrons confused and frustrated.

Ongoing Questions. Because Snow College wants to ensure a quality experience for its students, the campus community has dealt with significant questions that are productive to consider and, at the same time, hard to answer definitively. These include deciding on the right mix of face-to-face and electronically mediated classes in all of their forms; questioning the impact of *MOOCs* and other free, online educational offerings; calibrating the tension between growing numbers of students and high-quality, personal attention for those students; weighing the benefits versus the costs of high-impact educational practices; and deciding how to structure the introductory college course offerings: what can be taught to high school students (through broadcast classes, on campus concurrent enrollment, and high school adjunct enrollment) and in college classrooms (including developmental material).⁵ This final question's importance is amplified by the pending *proposal by rural district superintendents* that Snow College be funded to provide a broad slate of GE courses available via IVC to the rural high schools in the state. Still, conversations on all of these issues should continue because of their complexity and because of their value as part of the strategic planning process.

National Trends/External Picture

As Snow College examines its strategic plan and faces changes in student demographics, we must also keep in mind national trends in higher education.

Challenges. Some of these trends present challenges for the College in terms of quality:

- To lower costs, higher education continues to shift faculty positions from full-time, tenure track to part-time, non-tenure track positions.
- Studies like the ones documented in the book *Academically Adrift* find that college students are spending less time than previous students in preparing for class and that they are asked to read and to write less than previous generations.⁶

⁵ This final question reflects the competing mandates that higher education increasingly faces: expanding on-campus developmental programs to help underprepared students prepare for college work and expanding concurrent enrollment and broadcast classes (IVC) to enable increasing numbers of students to earn college credit while enrolled in high school.

⁶ Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa, *Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011.

Neutral Issues. Others represent important changes that may either build or erode quality:

- With the development of mobile computing devices, higher education has focused on more flexible delivery of educational content. Increasing numbers of students want to learn any subject at any location and any time through any medium. They also want to interact with faculty and fellow students through social media both within and outside of learning management software.
- The national discourse is increasingly questioning the cost of higher education and the value of non-*STEM* degrees and those that do not lead, in defined ways, to workforce needs. At the same time, others have argued for the value of a broad, liberal arts educational experience, including the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, which recently concluded a high-profile study on the value of the humanities (defined broadly).⁷

Encouraging News. Other developments present encouraging opportunities:

- Having education delivered in a more flexible way has also led to innovative teaching techniques like *flipped classrooms*, which move activities like lectures to online, out-of-class environments and use class time for individualized practice, instruction, and problem-solving. Other innovative techniques include *adaptive learning* and a wide assortment of strategies that make use of the unprecedented amount of information available on the web.
- Higher education increasingly values curriculum that uses authentic, real-world applications and assessment and that rewards flexible thinking. For example, the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) conducted a survey of employers finding that employers want college graduates that can apply their learning to real world problems, demonstrate clear communication and critical thinking skills, work effectively in groups, and function ethically in a diverse and globally interconnected world.⁸

A survey of these trends demonstrates the changing world of contemporary higher education. The College needs to carefully examine these and other trends and respond in ways that ensure quality.

Strategic Themes

The information above shows that Snow College has a culture of quality that must be maintained as America questions the model of higher education and as Snow College faces a changing student body and explores emerging educational technologies. However, for Snow to maintain its reputation for personal attention to students and high quality transfer and terminal programs, it must innovate in curriculum and in student services. Institutions that are not nimble enough to adjust their offerings and services will most likely face diminishing enrollments and will struggle to remain relevant in the higher education landscape. As strategic decisions are made by the College to address these issues, the impact on quality should be one of the main factors considered.

Options

Because resources are scarce, Snow College must be strategic in allocating time, money, and space to ensure the quality of the educational experience it offers. Still, all decisions regarding budgets should be assessed by considering their impact on quality. Below are some options that may be prioritized for their impact on quality instruction and student services.

⁷ American Academy of Arts and Sciences, “The Heart of the Matter,” accessed 16 September 2013, http://www.humanitiescommission.org/_pdf/HSS_Report.pdf.

⁸ “Top Ten Things Employers Look for in Recent College Graduates” AAC&U, accessed 16 September 2013, <http://www.aacu.org/leap/students/employerstopten.cfm>.

Use of High Impact Educational Practices. The AAC&U and the Center for Community College Student Engagement (CCCSE) have identified a series of innovative and engaging educational opportunities that have a track record of improving quality.⁹ Some of these include *service learning/community engagement* opportunities, experiential learning, a global scholars program, improved student success courses (perhaps even ones paired with core GE classes), and refined assessment of and placement for developmental classes. Snow College could develop or improve these on campus. Furthermore, Snow could survey other freshman orientation programs to develop a more effective academic portion of the freshman orientation experience, perhaps including learning portfolios. Finally, Snow could develop a *learning community* program.

To enable faculty efforts in these and other areas of the strategic plan, the faculty workload document will need to be revised. Possible changes to general education, including interdisciplinary and perhaps team-taught courses, as well the implementation of high-impact practices require investments of faculty time and much collaboration with student support staff.

Faculty Development. To ensure the highest quality instruction possible, Snow College can continue to focus on recruiting and hiring faculty who are first and foremost educators, and job ads should value experience in *high impact educational practices*. Also, to retain quality personnel, Snow should find ways to increase salaries in an effort to keep up with cost of living increases and to move closer to national salary benchmarks. Finally, faculty development cohorts, occasional course releases for course or program development, or summer stipends for development projects could help provide the incentive and time for faculty to improve the quality of Snow's educational offerings. Funds can also be made available for faculty to pursue terminal degrees, receive sabbaticals, and to work on summer projects designed to support the development of four-year degree programs in strategic areas. Finally, faculty should be encouraged to make use of proven educational technologies.

Teaching in Multiple Venues. Snow College prides itself on offering high quality classes, and an emphasis on quality must be expected and developed not only in face-to-face classes but also in online and broadcast classes. To this end, we should consider increasing the staff of the Teaching and Technology Center (TTC) to provide more design support of online and broadcast classes. This could be accomplished by creating student, intern, part-time, and/or full-time staff. Additionally, deans and chairs can continue to oversee (and work to improve where needed) the quality of all classes, including developing procedures to overcome the difficulty of observing online and other non-traditional classes. We may consider more training and incentives for developing best practices for broadcast and online instruction and to establish an in-house certification for faculty teaching online and broadcast classes to make sure they have access to strategies that work in those teaching environments. Policies should also be reviewed to ensure that class sizes and number of class sites in broadcast classes is optimal for the discipline. If a proposal from rural school districts that Snow greatly expand its broadcast offerings continues to gain traction, Snow College should convene a planning committee to propose parameters for the initiative including class sizes, staffing, support staff, etc.

We may also consider ways that flipped classrooms, adaptive learning, and other educational technology can improve online, broadcast, and traditional classes. The initial buzz about MOOCs seems to have passed, and second-generation experiments on this front continue; Snow should be aware of these experiments, especially ones that could improve how students access textbook materials, learn from discipline experts, and interact with student peers. Finally, course evaluations for online and broadcast

⁹ See "High Impact Educational Practices," AAC&U, accessed 16 September 2013, <http://www.aacu.org/leap/hip.cfm>, and "Developing and Promoting High-Impact Educational Practices in Community Colleges," Center for Community College Student Engagement, accessed 16 September 2013, <http://www.ccsse.org/center/initiatives/highimpact/index.cfm>.

courses should be redesigned to reflect the needs of those classes, and these evaluations should be reviewed by a committee charged with ensuring the quality of these offerings.

Efficient and Logical Campus Processes. To improve the quality of staff and faculty interactions with students, more should be done at Snow to automate, clarify, and simplify campus processes. *Degree Works* is now operational, and resources could be devoted to publicizing the program and training students and faculty on how to best use it. Many forms that are currently being printed and carried around campus could be turned into web forms. Additionally, the Snow College webpage, which has had an effective redesign in its appearance, could also use clarification, simplification, and standardization in terms of its content.

Projected Costs

A commitment to quality requires resources, and attention should be paid to the costs as well as the benefits of pursuing the options detailed above. While some of the options can be implemented quickly and cheaply, other options available to the College are costly in terms of development time and required budgets. The College must be strategic in which initiatives it pursues. See the Appendix for a table of projected costs.

Short-Term Goals

- Create job ads that mention AAC&U high impact educational practices.
- Provide faculty development incentives (including summer grants) for developing best practices, courses, or programs.
- Design course evaluations for online and broadcast courses redesigned and reviewed by a committee charged with ensuring the quality of these offerings.
- Create more campus forms that can be submitted online.
- Improve student success courses (perhaps paired with core GE classes).
- Create policies to ensure that the number of sites and the number of students in broadcast classes is optimal for the discipline.
- Use innovative teaching strategies such as flipped classrooms, adaptive technology, and other educational technology.
- Implement training for broadcast class pedagogy and perhaps an in-house certification.
- Update webpage content so that it is clarified, simplified, and standardized.
- Revise the workload document.
- Ensure more oversight by deans and chairs of online and broadcast classes.
- Establish a committee to recommend quality initiatives for the rural superintendents' proposal.
- Advertise and train faculty and students on Degree Works.
- Increase the number of sabbaticals regularly offered.
- Encourage faculty to use proven educational technology.
- Establish a global scholars program.

Long-Term Goals

- Provide more funding for service learning/community engagement.
- Increase funding for experiential learning/engagement.
- Allocate more resources for undergraduate research.
- Revise freshman orientation experience to include an academic component.
- Establish a learning community program.

- Implement an assessment of and placement for developmental classes.
- Salary increases.
- Increase the staff of the TTC to provide more design support and overview of online classes.
- Monitor developments in MOOC practices.

Recommendations

Snow College is a place where students receive a quality education because of the excellence of its faculty, staff, and administrators as well as their willingness to innovate and engage students in their disciplines and communities; the campus community should be proud of this and maintain those practices and programs that have enriched the education of so many students. At the same time, the College is at a crossroads and decisions about the future must consider issues of quality. When quality, efficiency, and cost-effectiveness align, the decisions are easy. When quality requires resources and time, strategic decisions must be made; it is clear that quality can only be expected within the parameters of the College resources, but it should be a priority. Ultimately, the administration, staff, faculty, and stakeholders should work together to pursue avenues that continue to make a high-priority commitment to a quality college experience for our students.

**Appendix
Projected Costs**

Low Cost Options	Medium Cost Options	Higher Cost Options
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job ads that mention AAC&U high impact educational practices • Course evaluations for online and broadcast courses redesigned and reviewed by a committee charged with ensuring the quality of these offerings • More campus forms that can be submitted online • Revised faculty workload document • More oversight by deans and chairs of online and broadcast classes • Establish a committee to recommend quality initiatives for the rural superintendents proposal • Monitor developments in MOOC practices • Advertise and train faculty and students on Degree Works • Encourage faculty to use proven educational technology • A global scholars program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved student success courses (perhaps paired with core GE classes) • Policies to ensure that the number of sites and the number of students in broadcast classes is optimal for the discipline • Use of flipped classrooms, adaptive technology, and other educational technology • Training for broadcast class pedagogy and perhaps an in-house certification • Webpage content that is clarified simplified, and standardized • Increasing the staff of the TTC to provide more design support and overview of online classes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More funding for serving learning/community engagement • More funding for experiential learning • More resources allocated for undergraduate research • Revise freshman orientation experience with an academic component • A learning community program • Assessment of and placement for developmental classes • Salary increases • Faculty development incentives (including summer grants) for developing best practices, courses, or programs • Sabbaticals