

QEP Project Name: “Building an Inclusive University, Pursuing a More Just World”

QEP Abstract: This QEP proposal contributes to Southwestern’s strategic plan and to students’ learning by mapping a path toward a more diverse and inclusive community. It pursues three major goals through a set of scaffolded initiatives. The first goal is for all students to learn about structures and practices that further social injustice and oppression, especially those related to social categories of difference. This goal outlines four connected initiatives: a) a First-Year Seminar module provides a foundation and begins students’ learning journey; b) an annual campus-wide common reading about diversity-related social issues, with connected co-curricular activities, broadens students’ exploration of these issues over their four years at SU; c) a Social Justice Distinction Pathway provides an optional structure for students who want to deepen and integrate their learning about social justice and diversity across the curriculum; d) and a Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation Campus Center provides a home and structure for these initiatives and for ongoing programs. The second goal is to create inclusive classrooms. The initiative for this goal is an e) Inclusive Teaching Certificate Program that provides a faculty development pathway to support inclusive courses. The last goal is to foster an inclusive climate *beyond* the classroom. Its associated initiative is f) co-curricular activities and cultural events that will foster interactions among students from different backgrounds.

QEP Project Student Learning Outcomes

1. Students will experience inclusion and social justice as integral to our academic mission and campus experience.
2. Students will encounter inclusive courses and learning environments that enable them to learn effectively, feel a sense of belonging, and succeed in courses and co-curriculars.
3. Students will learn about structures and practices that further social injustice and oppression, especially those related to social categories of difference, and learn about the implications of injustice, such as social problems, social stratification, the intersection of systems of oppression, interpersonal and structural discrimination, and unequal distribution and access to power and resources.
4. Students will practice having difficult conversations about human differences, where active listening and openness enable sharing with and learning from each other and beginning processes of transformation.
5. Students will engage actively in campus practices that promote the reconciliation of social differences and increase the sense of belonging to the Southwestern community, on and off campus.

QEP Project Description

Introduction

This QEP seeks to ensure that all Southwestern graduates are prepared to work towards a more just and inclusive society and world. We aim to fulfill the university’s purpose and values, which attest that a liberal arts education does not focus solely on an individual’s own benefit, but should “encourage contributions toward the well-being of humanity” and “encourag[e] activism in the pursuit of justice and the common good.” This plan would strengthen student learning by expanding and deepening students’ engagement with issues of social injustice and oppression, especially structures and practices related to social categories of difference. In doing so, we will help our community understand how higher education institutions reproduce societal inequities, and we will work to collectively address issues of injustice.

A QEP focused on inclusivity will also help address structural and social elements that have led to experiences of discrimination and exclusion at Southwestern. In the last decade, Southwestern’s student population has become significantly more diverse in a variety of ways. For example, the percentage of first-year students coming from “underrepresented populations” (defined as “Asian,” “African American,” “Hispanic,” and “Other”) has grown from 23.2% in 2009 to 40% in 2019. This increased diversity enriches the learning experience for all of our students and strengthens our community; both faculty and staff have celebrated it. Campus climate studies, however, have shown that a worrisome number of students, mainly from underrepresented groups, do not see the university as fully welcoming and inclusive (see Lowe, Byron et al. 2013, 2016).¹ Retention of underrepresented students also remains a challenge. Similarly, Southwestern has hired diverse faculty but has struggled to retain them. In addition, according to our 2020 NSSE results, one of our lowest areas of performance relative to peer and aspirant institutions is in “emphasis on encouraging contact among students from different backgrounds.” We know we need to improve in these areas.

Broader Historical Context

Higher education has a particular need for a greater focus on justice and inclusivity. A college education is key to social mobility. People of color with bachelor's degrees earn almost twice that of those with only high-school degrees. Yet racial and ethnic disparities in college enrollment and completion have increased in the last fifty years. During that time, the gap between students of color and white students' attainment of bachelor's degrees has doubled, even as the US population's diversity has increased. Six-year graduation rates are higher among whites and Asians than students of color, even after considering family income, and students whose parents had bachelor's degrees are twice as likely as first-generation students to earn bachelor's degrees.² We know that social factors other than academics influence these outcomes.

In response, many colleges, including Southwestern, have sought to create more equitable institutions. In 2007, the university adopted a Diversity Strategic Initiative, later included in the 2010-20 strategic plan, that focused on diversifying the student body. In 2016, the university reframed its institutional mission, core purpose, and core values to emphasize "fostering diverse perspectives," "respecting the worth and dignity of persons," and "encouraging activism in the pursuit of justice and the common good." However, these statements dropped explicit reference to learning about different cultural perspectives. In 2017, we approved a new curriculum that does not require an intercultural course. Though it retains the social justice course, this curricular commitment to social justice is relatively minimal, and a social justice committee no longer oversees how aspects of social and cultural difference are examined in curricular and co-curricular activities. As Lowe, Byron et al. point out, "because students view the curriculum as a reflection of institutional priorities, curricula that do not incorporate multicultural perspectives may adversely impact students' views of their institution's climate" (2013, 571).

Now is the time to implement a strategy that promotes inclusive and justice-oriented learning. In her August 2020 "State of the University" address, President Trombley announced that we have reached the threshold required to apply for "Hispanic Serving Institution" status. This juncture coincides with a global movement to address systemic racism and injustice, including within education. By building upon a 2012 QEP proposal focused on Social Justice, Diversity, and Inclusion and complementing other recent university initiatives, such as the Diversity, Inclusion, Belonging, and Equity (DIBE) Task Force, this QEP charts a path to a more inclusive and justice-focused university.

Connections to Mission and Strategic Plan

This QEP directly supports Southwestern's mission, purpose, and values. By creating opportunities for inclusive learning, it will enhance our institutional values, including "fostering diverse perspectives," "respecting the worth and dignity of persons," "encouraging activism in the pursuit of justice and the common good" as well as our core purpose of "encourag[ing] contributions toward the well-being of humanity."

The QEP also takes from our strategic plan key goals that focus on diversity, inclusion, and social justice and it provides a road map for achieving them. For instance, one action of goal 2 of our Strategic Direction states that we will "Continue our commitment to inclusive pedagogy and relationship building across our diverse community." Initiative five's Inclusive Teaching Certificate Program will equip faculty to foster inclusive and successful learning experiences for all students. Likewise, the rest of our initiatives address some of the actions in goals 3 and 4 that seek to "Build and sustain a diverse, inclusive community grounded in mutual trust and respect that promotes shared commitments, accomplishments, accountability, and responsibility for achieving institutional goals" and "Enhance our collective efforts to secure new funding to support our commitment to being an inclusive and diverse intellectual community."

Initiatives: The following initiatives complement and build upon one another in pursuit of three goals.

GOAL 1: Ensure that all students learn about structures and practices that further social injustice and oppression, especially those related to social categories of difference, and learn about the implications of injustice.

Initiative 1: Enhance the FYS diversity module - *Foundation in Students' First Year.*

As students' first encounter with SU's values on diversity, equity, belonging and inclusion, the FYS diversity module should be updated. It should also be shifted out of Welcome Week, expanded to offer deeper learning opportunities, offered to all students (instead of being optional), and coordinated with other initiatives in this QEP such as the annual campus reading and the TRHT Campus Center activities. The re-designed FYS diversity module will set the tone for

students' future conversations on diversity, equity, belonging, and inclusion. It will also enable them to begin mapping their options for engaging in additional co-curricular and experiential learning on social justice at SU. We see the FYS module as the starting point from which students will anchor their learning about inclusivity at SU.

Initiative 2: Develop an annual common reading focused on a diversity-related social issue, with connected co-curricular activities - *Incremental Learning Across All Four Years*

We propose that all students, regardless of major, learn about structures and practices that further social injustice and oppression, especially those related to social categories of difference - beyond the required SJ course. Each year, we propose that the university engage in an annual common reading, creating at least four such engagements across a student's college years. A committee of faculty and staff will select the annual book, and the entire university community will engage in discussions about the book and participate in connected co-curricular activities. First-year students will be particularly engaged through the FYS diversity module and in programs offered after regular FYS classes have ended. A speaker related to the book topic will be invited annually, and connected programming, including community engagement opportunities, will extend learning. Students will engage in reflection and connection-making about how the common reading / theme connects to their own personal development, major(s), and goals through scaffolded activities, especially in years 1 and 4 of their SU education.

Initiative 3. Design a curricular path for a Social Justice Distinction - *Deeper & Integrative Learning*

While initiatives 1 and 2 ensure that *all* students engage with diversity and social justice, Initiative 3 offers an optional pathway for those who would like to deepen and integrate their learning in this area. The distinction will provide a curricular framework, guiding students to create a learning narrative for themselves based on their own college experiences. The framework could include multiple elements: a) FYS diversity module (initiative 1), b) the four common readings and co-curricular activities (initiative 2), c) two Rx Racial Healing Circles (initiative 4), d) at least two SJ courses, e) at least two RES courses, f) at least one community-engaged learning or study abroad experience; g) a portfolio documenting their experiences, including, h) a written reflection about how the student's understanding has developed, and i) a public presentation (for example, at the Research and Creative Works Symposium).

Initiative 4: Create a Truth, Racial Healing, & Transformation Campus Center - *Home & Framework*

Initiative 4 provides a home for the entire QEP and a framework for applying what students have been learning in the other initiatives. Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation (TRHT) Campus Centers are a national effort on college campuses to help communities embrace racial healing and uproot conscious and unconscious beliefs in the hierarchy of human value. Funded by the Association of American Colleges & Universities and the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, the initiative has created centers in twenty-four institutions of higher education, from liberal arts colleges to state universities. TRHTs create positive narrative change about race in the community, promote racial healing activities on campus and in the community, and erase structural barriers to equal treatment and opportunity. Institutions organize a team, which then participates in an annual TRHT institute, and the institution becomes eligible to host a TRHT campus center. This process would allow SU to sustain and expand this QEP's initiatives even after the QEP's five-year-plan ends. A central element in TRHT Institutes are Rx Racial Healing Circles. Attendants experience this methodology and co-facilitate simulated circles at their institution. These circles could be implemented in the Inclusive Teaching Certificate Program, as co-curricular activities during the annual common reading, or as monthly activities.

GOAL 2: Create inclusive learning experiences for all students by fostering inclusive classrooms.

Initiative 5: Create an inclusive teaching certificate program for faculty.

Whereas Goal 1 ensures that students learn *about* diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice, Goal 2 aims to create inclusive courses regardless of the subject matter through a faculty development program for inclusive teaching. It would include multiple workshops on inclusive teaching, a course revision project, and a reflective portfolio. Participants would receive feedback on course revision efforts through a consultation process. Participation would be voluntary but incentivized: a) pre-tenure faculty would receive a stipend upon completion of the program; b) the certificate would be viewed positively in faculty reviews and in applications for tenure and promotion, especially as evidence related to the categories of "teaching" and "contributions to the university community."

GOAL 3: Create co-curricular activities that foster an inclusive climate for student learning and development.

Initiative 6: Organize co-curricular activities and cultural events to foster interactions among students from different backgrounds.

This initiative complements the academic focus of the first two goals by extending the QEP to the co-curricular domain. Liberal arts colleges cultivate learning in all areas of a students' lives, not just in the classroom, and this initiative engages the many offices and programs that work with students to create a holistic campus learning environment. It will increase opportunities for engagement across different positionalities and backgrounds and for learning about and across difference through additional, coordinated programming.

Assessment

- *Goal 1:* After four years, students would have completed the FYS module as well as 4 years of common reads. We envision helping them to reflect on their learning in this area through a reflection activity or even a small portfolio, to be completed in their Capstone course or Paideia Seminar, or as a final piece of their Mosaic engagement. Students who participate in the Social Justice Distinction pathway would complete a reflection as a part of the program. The NSSE also asks questions in years 1 and 4 about students' engagement with events and activities related to social issues, providing quantitative data.
- *Goal 2:* The Inclusive Teaching Certificate Program can be directly assessed by reviewing course revision projects submitted for the certificate. To show a direct impact on student learning, we could also develop a study of student classroom experiences, benchmarking in year 1 and then doing longitudinal comparisons to measure whether students are experiencing increased usage of inclusive teaching practices.
- *Goal 3:* NSSE survey questions related to students' engagement with social issues and cross-cultural exchange.

QEP Project Resources / Participants

Resources for Goal 1:

- **Common Read & Activities:** The program would be led by faculty and staff co-chairs. With a committee, they would select the book / theme each year. Funds would be needed for the annual speaker and associated co-curricular programming, the faculty co-chair's course release, and books.
- **FYS Module redesigned and overseen** in coordination with relevant offices and committees.
- **Social Justice Distinction pathway:** The TRHT Chair (a faculty member) would require a course release in order to track, advise, and lead students interested in this program.
- **TRHT Center:** The TRHT team would be led by faculty and staff co-chairs and conformed by the program leaders of the other initiatives in this plan including faculty fellows, student workers, and staff. The center would be the home of diversity, belonging, and inclusion initiatives of the university.

Resources for Goals 2 and 3:

- The Inclusive Teaching Certificate Program would be offered through the CTLS and led by faculty and staff with expertise in inclusive teaching. Two CTLS Faculty Fellows could serve as program co-leaders and would receive course releases or other compensation for their time.
- For Goal 3, existing offices would contribute programming. These offices include the offices of Diversity Education and Cross Cultural Center, Student Life, MOSAIC, Residential Life, Advising and Retention, Study Abroad and International Student Services, Community-engaged Learning, and Student Activities.

QEP Project Timeline

Year One: Setting Up the project | July 1, 2022—June 30, 2023

- Appoint QEP Director
- Coordinate an evaluation and adaptation of the FYS module.
- Create the reflection assignment to benchmark the SJ Distinction portfolio.
- Call for the Annual Diversity Reading and Co-Curricular Experience (ADRCE) faculty and staff co-leaders.. Committee selects next year's book. Coordinate co-curricular activities. Design Mosaic reflection activity.
- Design the SJ Distinction plan.
- Organize the TRHT team; Apply to and attend the Institute on TRHT Campus Centers.

- Organize Inclusive Teaching Certificate Program (ITCP). Design assessment. Call for CTLS Fellows to lead.
- Organize monthly lunches and cultural events/festivals for the following year.

Year Two: Implementing the project | July 1, 2023—June 30, 2024

- Implement the renewed diversity module in the fall. Assess the first iteration and plan adjustments
- Call for next ADRCE faculty and staff co-leaders. Plan co-curricular activities. Assess the impact with NSSE.
- Implement the SJ Distinction plan
- Apply to host a TRHT Campus Center. Implement Rx Racial Healing Circles. Coordinate Mosaic reflective to assess students experiences with Rx Racial Healing Circles. Assess the impact of these circles in NSSE
- Implement the ITCP. Call for CTLS 2025 Fellow to lead the ITCP.

Year Three | July 1, 2024—June 30, 2025

- Implement the revised FYS diversity module. Assess it and propose improvements.
- Call for the next ADRCE faculty and staff co-leaders. Coordinate the co-curricular activities for each book/year. Assess the impact of ADRCE through NSSE.
- Assess the first year of the SJ Distinction plan in the spring of 2025 and propose improvements
- TRHT team begins concentrating administration of QEP initiatives in the center under the QEP Director's leadership. We hope this position will become permanent and with a senior rank (Chief Diversity Officer) by Year 5 of the QEP.
- Implement Rx Racial Healing Circles. Coordinate Mosaic reflection. Assess circles in NSSE.
- Assess the previous year experience and implement the ITCP. Call for CTLS 2026 Fellow.

Year Four | July 1, 2025—June 30, 2026

- Implement the new FYS diversity module with adjustments in the fall of 2026 and assess it.
- Call for the next faculty and staff co-leaders. Coordinate the co-curricular activities for the common reading. Assess the impact of ADRCE through NSSE.
- Implement improvements on the SJ Distinction plan
- Draft TRHT Center director position. Implement Rx Racial Healing Circles. Coordinate reflective assignment through Mosaic to assess students experiences with Rx Racial Healing Circles. Assess circles in NSSE
- Assess the previous year experience and implement the ITCP. Call for CTLS 2027 Fellow to lead ITCP.

Year Five | July 1, 2026—June 30, 2027

- Implement any adjustments to FYS module in the fall of 2027. Assess it in the spring of 2028. Assess the 4-year impact of the FYS diversity module with the ADRCE 4-year reflection assignments.
- Coordinate co-curricular activities. Propose 4-year reflection assignments. Assess impact of ADRCE through NSSE. Call for the next faculty and staff co-leaders.
- Assess SJ Distinction graduates. Assess prior improvements and propose a final round of improvements
- Transition SJ Distinction program to the TRHT Campus Center. Search for the TRHT Center Director. Implement Rx Racial Healing Circles. Coordinate Mosaic reflective assignment. Assess circles in NSSE.
- Assess the previous year experience and implement the ITCP. Call for CTLS 2028 Fellow to lead ITCP.
- Hire a Chief Diversity Officer.

End Notes

1. Reginald A. Byron, Maria R. Lowe, Brianna Billingsley, and Nathan Tuttle. 2016. "Performativity Double Standards and the Sexual Orientation Climate at a Southern Liberal Arts University." *Journal of Homosexuality* <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00918369.2016.1196994>. See also Maria R. Lowe, Reginald A. Byron, Griffin Ferry and Melissa Garcia. 2013. "Food for Thought: Frequent Interracial Dining as a Predictor of Students' Racial Climate Perceptions." *The Journal of Higher Education* 84(4): 559-600. <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/510625>
2. Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, Office of the Under Secretary, U.S. Department of Education, *Advancing Diversity and Inclusion in Higher Education: Key Data Highlights Focusing on Race and Ethnicity and Promising Practices*, November 2016.

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