

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN'S QUALITY ENHANCEMENT PLAN: SIGNATURE COURSES

The Quality Enhancement Plan, *Signature Courses*, is an effort to strengthen the core curriculum while establishing a shared intellectual experience for students at UT-Austin. The first-year signature course is designed to introduce the University's undergraduates to academic discussion and analysis of issues of contemporary real-world importance from an interdisciplinary perspective. The program aims to provide each first-year student at the University with a course that develops the intellectual maturity expected of good college students.

Signature courses will achieve this through:

1. Increasing the accessibility of distinguished faculty to first-year students.
2. Teaching certain skills directly—oral communication, writing, reasoning, and the interpretation of data—deemed necessary for our students to make good use of the instructional resources of the University, so that, on graduation, they may compete well in the global market.
3. Introducing first-year students to the unique resources of the University, such as libraries, research facilities and museums.
4. Providing first-year students with a broad understanding of inquiry across disciplines that may be new to them.
5. Giving students course content that has real-world transferability.
6. Enhancing the intellectual climate on campus through first-year attendance at, and discussion of, a common series of lectures.

Why Signature Courses?

Signature courses will provide each new generation of students a strong foundation for college-level learning by providing them in their first year with interdisciplinary perspectives, direct instruction in important skills, and acquaintance with the unique resources of the university. A coherent intellectual experience is recognized by many to be a determinant of quality and effectiveness for a research university. The signature course goals reflect the University's commitment to excellence in line with the findings of the *Boyer Commission on Educating Undergraduates in the Research University*, the Commission of 125 (over 200 friends of the University who developed recommendations for the next 25 years on the 125th anniversary of the University), and the University's Task Force on Curriculum Reform.

The QEP includes a comprehensive strategy for assessing student learning outcomes, auditing measures of institutional success, and including faculty feedback. As required by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools' Commission on Colleges, the QEP is an institution-wide commitment to enhancing quality. That commitment is reflected in the financial and staff resources committed to signature courses, the inclusion of faculty governance in the approval of signature courses through curriculum reform and in the collaboration with various campus agencies to provide support for the QEP initiative. The QEP is available at: <http://www.utexas.edu/provost/sacs/qep.html>.

Contact:

Dr. Paul B. Woodruff
Dean, School of Undergraduate Studies
ugs@uts.cc.utexas.edu

