

*Executive Summary: Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) of Austin Peay State University*

*Title: Enhancing Student Retention and Success: First-Year Seminar, Advising, and Student Life*

The Quality Enhancement Plan for Austin Peay State University (APSU) focuses on improving student retention, an area of weakness identified by institutional data analysis and a major concern for the University. While important to all universities, retention is of special concern to APSU. For the past six years, APSU's fall to fall retention rates have been consistently 10 percent lower than the other four-year institutions in the Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR) and University of Tennessee (UT) systems. These comparative data sets isolate on first-time, full-time freshmen, which diminishes the impact of part-time student enrollment patterns. Further, APSU has the lowest six-year persistence-to-graduation rate in the TBR and UT systems for first-time, full-time students, falling 10 percentage points below our cohort schools. In actual numbers, APSU is losing about 350 to 400 students from the beginning of the freshman year to the end of the six-year window within which students are expected to graduate. This data on APSU's retention and persistence problems indicated a need for investigation and provided the incentive for placing retention at the heart of our QEP.

Campus-wide input was instrumental in the development of a three-part plan for improving student retention and success. First, a QEP planning subcommittee has developed plans for a freshman seminar designed to both orient students to the University and enhance our liberal arts mission. Entitled "Introduction to the Liberal Arts and University Life," this course will combine aspects of a traditional freshman experience course (e.g., emphasis on study skills, health and wellness, introduction to the library and student support services, etc.) with an overview of the content, goals, and value of a liberal arts education. Second, an academic advisement subcommittee researched best practices in advising and recommended possible improvements to current advising procedures at APSU. Among this group's recommendations are renewed emphasis on training for faculty advisors, new advisor incentives and accountability measures, the use of student peer mentoring to supplement faculty advising, and the development of an advisement center to handle the advising of undecided students. Third, a student life and support services subcommittee is reviewing current programs and operations that have an impact on retention, researching best practices in the field, and exploring recommendations for new plans and programs that have a potential to positively impact student retention and success. Finally, representatives from all three subcommittees formed a group that investigated early alert procedures and recommended such actions as the establishment of an Office of Student Success to oversee intervention procedures for at-risk students.

The reports and recommendations of these QEP planning subcommittees will be utilized in completing a final draft of the QEP, including a calendar of action, during Fall 2003. Two new positions, a Director of Retention Services and a Minority Retention Coordinator, have been created to provide leadership for implementing and sustaining the plan. Given the complexity of the retention issue and the multifaceted approach we are recommending in our QEP, we anticipate that multiple phases sustained over the course of several years will be needed to complete the implementation and assessment of the plan.