QEP Terms & Definitions

Active Learning
Active learning is an umbrella term that refers to pedagogic methods that involve students in their own learning. According to Prince (2004), “The core elements of active learning are student activity and engagement in the learning process” (p. 223). Within the context of a college classroom, active learning strategies can most concisely be defined as “instructional activities involving students in doing things and thinking about what they are doing” (Bonwell & Eison, 1991, p. 1). In their 1987 article, “Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education,” Chickering and Gamson assert:

Learning is not a spectator sport. Students do not learn much just by sitting in class listening to teachers, memorizing pre-packaged assignments and spitting out answers. They must talk about what they are learning, write about it, relate it to past experiences, apply it to their daily lives. They must make what they learn part of themselves. (p. 3)

More information about active learning can be found on pp. 16-18 of the QEP.

Assessment (defined by type)
Direct Assessment: Measures that show the student’s knowledge, skills, or values at the end of a successful learning experience. For example, the student might be asked to identify or recall information, solve a problem, demonstrate a skill, or design or construct a product that indicates what he or she has learned.

Indirect Assessment: Subjective measures of opinions that might be associated with learning, but do not by themselves indicate it. For example, students’ opinions about a course they have completed or measures of student engagement would be indirect assessments. Other indirect measures are “output” or quantitative measures of what is produced. Examples of output measures include numbers of graduates, enrollment or course retention figures, PGR rates, etc.

Formative Assessment: Assessment activity done during a learning activity (class, course, or program) for the purpose of monitoring and guiding learning while it is still in progress. Assessments that occur during a learning activity are also referred to as embedded assessments.

Summative Assessment: Assessment activity done at the end of the learning process to judge the success of that process at its completion.

CAT
CAT stands for Critical Thinking Assessment Test. It is a national testing instrument that focuses on the application of critical thinking to real world problems. The test requires short answer essay responses that give students more latitude to demonstrate critical thinking abilities than an objective format.

CCSSE
Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) is an assessment tool used to evaluate quality in community college education. Palo Alto College administers the CCSSE in the spring of odd-numbered years.

Goals
Goals are the general aims of the program or curriculum. They are the broad, long-range intended outcomes.
**Problem-based Learning**

Problem-based learning (PBL) is an educational strategy that attempts to connect course concepts and content to the real world. PBL traditionally involves a small group of students working together to solve a challenging, multifaceted problem related to a specific discipline. Students work collaboratively to analyze their problem, research their problem, and generate a workable solution. More information about PBL may be found on pp. 20-30 of the QEP document.

**Productive Grade Rate (PGR)**

The PGR is the percentage of students in a course who earn an A, B, or C.

**QEP**

QEP stands for Quality Enhancement Plan. As a SACS reaffirmation requirement, Palo Alto College has been required to develop a QEP. The QEP must be implemented over a five-year period and must address an area that will enhance students' education. Data will be collected at the end of each semester to provide documentation on the effectiveness of the continuous improvement processes.

**RREAL**

RREAL is the acronym that is part of PAC's QEP slogan. The components of the acronym are: Relevance + Reflection + Engagement = Active Learning.

**SACS**

SACS stands for Southern Association of Colleges and Schools; it is the regional accrediting agency that authorizes PAC to award degrees. PAC's accreditation also allows students access to federal financial aid and ensures students' credits transfer to other institutions.

**Student Engagement**

Student engagement is the student's degree of involvement and integration, amount of psychological and cognitive effort involved, commitment to time on task, and interaction with the environment. Engaged students are "connected" to the material they are learning and the social and physical context in which this learning occurs. According to D. Simonet (2008):

> The research on student engagement strongly supports its relationship to student persistence and achievement (Kuh, 2007, 2005; Tinto, 2006; Astin, 1987, 1992). Engagement, by definition, is described as "commitment," "involvement," "participation," "attraction," and "active." In higher education, engagement tends to be conceptualized as an index of student time and energy invested in educationally purposeful activities, such as class discussion, active learning, and independent studies. These activities are rooted in the culture of the campus and grow through participation, interpersonal relationships, and/or intellectual advancement.

**Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)**

SLOs are what the student will master: the knowledge, skills, attitudes and/or behaviors of the learner at the end of the learning activity. It is a statement of what a successful student will be able to do that will demonstrate learning. Good SLOs begin with verbs like "identify," "explain," "interpret," "analyze," "solve," "apply," "define," etc. Words like "understand" or "appreciate" do not lead to strong SLOs because they are not easily measurable.