VALDOSTA STATE UNIVERSITY

SECTION 1: INSTITUTIONAL MISSION AND STUDENT BODY PROFILE

Mission:

As a comprehensive institution of the University System of Georgia, Valdosta State University is a welcoming, aware, and vibrant community founded on and dedicated to serving our communities' rich and diverse heritages. Through excellence in teaching, basic and applied research, and service, VSU provides rigorous programs and opportunities that enrich our students, our university, and our region. The VSU mission consists of three interrelated parts: Student Mission, University Mission, and Regional Mission. VSU awards associate, bachelor's, master's, educational specialist, and doctoral degrees. [See full VSU Mission Statement.]

Geographic Service Area:

As a comprehensive university, VSU is charged with meeting the general and professional educational needs of its South Georgia service area, which stretches from the Atlantic Coast to Alabama, encompassing forty-one counties and 31 percent of the land area of the state.

Composition of the Student Population

In Fall 2021, VSU served 11,573 students (headcount) with FTE of 9,854 of which:

- 75.8% undergraduate students; 24.2% graduate students
- 69.0% female
- 64.6% enrolled full-time
- 48.3% white, 36.5% black, 1.5% Asian
- 1,711 enrolled as beginning first-year

SECTION 2: YOUR STUDENT SUCCESS INVENTORY

Activity/Project Name	QEP
Momentum Area (select all that apply)	• Pathways • Mindset
Activity/Project Overview or Description (what this is?)	VSU's Quality Enhancement Plan (Experiential Learning) Pilot year completion SP 2022
Activity/Project Activity Status (where is this in process? E.g., studying, initiating, piloting, scaling, maintaining, retiring, etc.)	Scaling: Year 1 of a 5-year process. The Experiential Learning initiative has been very successful, as demonstrated by our endorsement numbers for course activities during FY 2021-2022. Over 700 total students participated in courses endorsed for Experiential Learning during this pilot year for our QEP. There were 34 different Experiential Learning endorsed course activities which represented 50 total course sections at VSU.
Evaluation/Assessment plan (Key Performance Indicators, assessment plan, anticipated time period, reporting and review)	**Evaluation Plan and measures:** Early Pilot activities for upper and lower division classes FY 21-22 Rubric designed for student reflections, assessed by instructor and review team **Baseline measure** - initiated courses, recruited QEP Ambassadors

	Goal or targets – Embed Experiential Learning in lower and upper division courses in all departments and within the CORE curriculum courses. Target of 10 sections Fall and Spring Here is an example of a quote from a reflection that all students are required to write as part of an Experiential Learning endorsed course activity: "Having those physical limitations and material restrictions made me rethink my design ideas and forced me to be more creative with how I approached my work. I had to think about what I wanted to stand out most within my work and what I could do to fit in the rest, if I wished for it to. I think for any future projects, I will reflect back to this project to remember where I ran into problems and how I could solve them…I definitely took these for granted when creating digitally, but I will work harder to challenge myself in both fields to become a better artist." (ART 3091 Student)
	Time period/duration – 5 years
Progress and Adjustments (what has been accomplished and what changes do you feel you need to make)	Appointed QEP Ambassadors across colleges in Fall 2021. Expanded workshops and called for additional faculty volunteers. New engaged learning proposals from faculty. Significantly exceeded benchmarks for course offerings.
Plan for the year ahead (What steps will you be taking in 2022)	Expand experiential learning activities imbedded in courses. Recruit new QEP Ambassadors from across campus. We also launched an Experiential Learning Seed Grant program. 10 total seed grants were awarded in FY 2021-2022 for a total of $31,029.40. These seed grants led to the purchase of resources for students to complete Experiential Learning activities in Experiential Learning endorsed courses. We are speaking with numerous programs throughout campus to continue encouraging faculty to apply for Experiential Learning endorsements for course activities. Our team of Experiential Learning Faculty Ambassadors are also facilitating workshops for faculty. Some of these workshops are recorded and posted to QEP.valdosta.edu, along with other resources for faculty to learn more about Experiential Learning and approaches to consider in their own courses.
What challenges will affect your ability to do this activity? What support do you need from outside your institution (e.g., the System Office or other institutions) to be successful?	Operational resources across academic units involving travel for students. Permanent appointment of QEP coordinator. Financial resources for administrative assistants, seed grant support, and development of the Terry Center for Experiential Learning.
Project Lead/point of contact	Dr. Colin Walker – Interim QEP Coordinator Dr. Michael Savoie– Dean of the Honors College.

Activity/Project Name	First Year Seminar Experience (FYSE)
Momentum Area (select all that apply)	• Pathways • Mindset
Activity/Project Overview or Description (what this is?)	FYSE courses of instruction. FYSE 1101 - "A seminar course focusing on contemporary and enduring questions that engage students in intellectual inquiry and academic life while encouraging critical thinking skills and metacognitive reflection"
Activity/Project Activity Status (where is this in process? E.g., studying, initiating, piloting, scaling, maintaining, retiring, etc.)	We have piloted FYSE courses in several disciplines over the past two academic years. Piloting to continue in 2022-2023. The pilot is currently in preparation to enter the scaling phase which is expected to continue as the pilot transitions to full implementation estimated in fall 2023. The General Education Committee is currently reviewing changes to our Area B requirements to allow for easy integration of FYSE courses into the VSU curricula.
Evaluation/Assessment plan (Key Performance Indicators, assessment plan, anticipated time period, reporting and review)	**Evaluation Plan and measures:** Assessments • Pretest/posttest (summative assessment) • Section assignments/activities (formative assessment) • AAC&U value rubrics (summative assessment) • Inquiry and Analysis VALUE Rubric (Inquiry Assignment) • Integrative Learning VALUE Rubric (Signature Assignment) **Baseline measure** – Initial Pilot courses and expanded offerings to a larger group – post Covid Expansion of the offering of FYSE pilot courses beyond the fall to the spring and summer, and the development of a suitable rotation for the number of course offered each semester. **Goal or targets** – Continue to expand Experiential Learning experiences in both lower and upper division courses in all departments and within the CORE curriculum courses. As a high impact practice, FYSE 1101 integrated components of experiential learning into the initial course design. **Time period/duration** – ongoing. Ultimately, the course/s should be a component of the re-visioned General Education Curriculum for the University Exploring the placement of FYSE courses into the VSU degree pathways and the development of common experiences that connect what students are learning and experiencing in FYSE courses with what they are learning and experiencing in their academic majors and extracurricular activities on and off campus.
Progress and Adjustments (what has been accomplished and what changes do you feel you need to make)	Progress: Increased interest from key stakeholders in all major divisions. Development of a predesigned FYSE course that allows for the inclusion of discipline-specific content. Exploration of interconnection with other institutional initiatives. Increased engagement from departments regarding the use of the pre-designed FYSE course and the design of FYSE courses that can be taught by any instructor in the department.

	Adjustments: Continued development of the interconnection with existing institutional initiatives (e.g.: QEP objectives), greater cross-disciplinary activity, development of a variety of models and modalities. Development of a clear communication pipeline between divisions that impact student awareness of the availability of FYSE courses and the course content, and facilitate student enrollment in FYSE courses and students' understanding of how the course fits into their degree plan.
Plan for the year ahead (What steps will you be taking in 2022)	Expanded training for interested faculty to incorporate standard course shells (somewhat aligned with course shell designs designed through eDegree) Discuss further cross disciplinary applications Increased collaboration with First Year Programs - Continued collaboration with the Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching to offer first-year seminar experience learning communities for faculty and staff. - Implementation of the FYSE vetting process for instructor-designed courses, edits to the Inquiry section of the predesigned courses. - Expansion of the types of FYSE courses including design, modalities, and student population focus. - Increased collaboration with departments to identify and assign faculty to teach FYSE courses. - Finalization and implementation of the model that facilitates the teaching of FYSE courses by nonexempt staff.
What challenges will affect your ability to do this activity? **What support do you need from outside your institution (e.g., the System Office or other institutions) to be successful?**	**Challenges:** - Expansion from Pilot courses to involve all colleges. Experimentation with classes of larger enrollments - Faculty responsibilities and teaching loads within some programs. - Staff classifications and contract specifications make it challenging to assign staff to teach FYSE courses. - Continued demands from campus support areas including CELT and eLearning, library services, Academic Support Center, Student Affairs (Career Opportunities, Counseling Center, etc.) - Support services for courses including peer mentors, graduate teaching assistants, etc. - Securing long-term funding to sustain the initiative, since FYSE courses are more expensive to operate than the existing Perspectives courses, which are often very large enrollment. - Identifying where in the existing degree plan FYSE courses will reside. **Outside Support Needs:** - The presentation of a consistent and coherent description of what the course is, what it does, and how it aligns with institutional and student goals, in the short and long term. - Assistance with the development of data dashboards, access to institutional data, and other related analytical tools. - Guidance and informal feedback related to questions regarding FYSE course placement and other related processes. - The identification of community partners that can assist with experiential learning opportunities, providing guest speaking and other course related needs, assist with securing funding to allow for the equitable provision of student access to the activities associated with FYSE courses, and to provide guidance related to best practices in fields/disciplines in which

	the students are interested in learning more about and/or pursing their careers.
Project Lead/point of contact	Dr. Shani Wilfred - General Education Coordinator

Activity/Project Name	Division of Student Affairs - Blazer Ready Student Engagement
Momentum Area (select all that apply)	• Purpose
Activity/Project Overview or Description (what this is?)	The Blazer Ready initiative is an effort to connect many of the essential skills identified by employers for a new college graduate hire. The initiative is aligned with National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) guidelines. The program uses certification incentives and scaffold levels of recognition for students Certification / Training in the areas of: • Communication • Equity and Inclusion • Leadership • Professionalism • Teamwork • Technology Student Affairs has made great strides preparing our students to excel after graduation using the Blazer Ready platform. The program has shifted direction from the initial overview. Instead of using the previous listed areas, we have aligned the new tenets with high impact student engagement opportunities within the division. The tenets are Leadership Development, Diversity and Inclusion, Career Preparation, Health and Wellness, and Volunteer Services. Each of the tenets have scaffold levels that include explore, focus, and achieve. The completion of these levels is tied to participation in campus events and involvement in student groups. We created pathways to most events so students are developing skills and competencies by staying involved
Activity/Project Activity Status (where is this in process? E.g., studying, initiating, piloting, scaling, maintaining, retiring, etc.)	Piloting: partial launch in the current academic year. Full launch anticipated for Fall 2022. Since our launch, there have been 73 experiences and 933 skills earned
Evaluation/Assessment plan (Key Performance Indicators, assessment plan, anticipated time period, reporting and review)	Early Implementation of the web site and Presence system
	Baseline measure - Site activity and initial student engagement with the system. By using the Presence platform, data collection from student involvement shows throughout the 5 tenets there are 993 students working through the explore level, 3,355 students working through the focus level, and 2,698 students working through achieve level.
	Goal or targets – Embed Blazer Ready actions within academic coursework and student life activities (Aligned with the QEP)
	Time period/duration – Beginning Spring 22 – Through QEP cycle
Progress and Adjustments (what has been accomplished and what	Launch of system

changes do you feel you need to make)	Presentations to Academic Areas Plans for further deployment SP 22 and 22-23 academic year
Plan for the year ahead (What steps will you be taking in 2022)	Expanded use of system, introduction to colleges and departments. Invitations for Faculty to use the system as a component of their course content A committee has been formed to aid with the progression and growth of Blazer Ready, which focuses on campus partners, divisional engagement, and student engagement. The committee assisted with completing the website, changes to the platform, marketing, and an incentive program for students. Blazer Ready will also be integrated with the QEP by allowing the completion of a Blazer Ready certificate as a type of experiential learning. As we continue this effort, we anticipate increased outreach, communication, and cross campus collaborative support from campus stakeholders. Additionally, we are working toward improved integration with other campus platforms such as Civitas and Blazer Handshake, which will assist in efficiency and effectiveness.
What challenges will affect your ability to do this activity? What support do you need from outside your institution (e.g., the System Office or other institutions) to be successful?	Communications through Academic Advising and Faculty Mentoring
Project Lead/point of contact	Sandra Y. G. Jones – Deputy Chief Officer for Engagement and DEI Dr. John Wright – Associate Director of Student Life

1.2   Your Big Idea

2021 Big Idea:

Our overarching Big Idea is the alignment of a number of critical initiatives (QEP – experiential learning, Gateways to Completion, First Year Seminar pilot, Concierge Coaching) under the umbrella of Momentum Approach. Students have benefitted from the aspects of this that we have already implemented and are already excited about our expansion of experiential learning.

As noted earlier in the report, progress within Experiential Learning is on schedule and initial responses have been very positive. Ways to connect experiential learning within existing institutional activities including Undergraduate Research, First Year Student Experience courses, Mentoring, and integrated student engagement through the division of Student Affairs continue to inform conversations across institutional units and to serve as the basis for action steps that will become part of the new institutional Strategic Plan.

Each of these programs has worked with the other ones to connect these initiatives:
The First-Year Seminar Experience (FYSE) initiative continues to work collaboratively with existing initiatives at VSU. As a high-impact practice, each FYSE course integrates experiential learning opportunities into the course. Thus, the QEP Coordinator and the General Education Coordinator have worked together to endorse first-year seminar experience courses under the undergraduate research experiential learning designation. Subsequently, students who successfully complete a first-year seminar course will receive credit toward the experiential learning program at VSU that is part of VSU's current quality enhancement plan (QEP).

The FYSE course also facilitates students' engagement with several resources provided by units in the Division of Student Affairs/Success such as the integration of peer mentors in the courses, participation in student success-related sessions, and opportunities to develop an understanding of the connection between the curricular and extracurricular activities in which they participate. In addition, the new VSU Strategic Plan 2027 includes the participation of all incoming students in a first-year or transfer experience course and/or a learning community as one of the measurable outcomes for fulfillment of Goal 1 of the plan. Subsequently,

the General Education Coordinator and the First-Year Program Coordinator continue to collaborate to expand the first-year seminar experience course. Learning community strategies ensure that the outcome is achieved within the timeframe specified.

The Blazer Ready Initiative is also being integrated within the QEP as a type of experiential learning.

1.3   Global Momentum Work

In reflecting on your work above, what units on campus would have the opportunity to be more engaged in your Momentum Work? If so, in what ways and in what areas?

- Alignment of Campus Units and Resources to better support academic units, student affairs, student success, and auxiliary services is critical in a period of limited resources.
- Understand the role of DEIB concepts within all areas of practice within an institution, from individual and professional interaction to organizational and regional interactions and communications.
- Along with student success, efficiencies in how the campus operates and how units interact should be the focus of the goals and objectives of the new Strategic Plan.
- Expanding Pilot or early-stage activities designed to promote student success such as the FYSE and Experiential Learning Initiatives. Find ways to integrate data regarding student participation in Experiential Learning activities to inform advisors, faculty, and students. Such data integrations could also lead to recognitions of this participation in a student's final transcript.
- Student Engagement Strategies and training provided through Student Affairs using tools like Modern Campus and integrating those resources with academic areas
- Carefully and critically examine data gathered from all areas of campus and sharing this information, interpreting it within the context of the entire institution, and using it to determine what priorities will be supported on campus and what priorities may have to wait to be realized

In order for this initiative to be successful, there is a need for collaboration across all major divisions at the institution. In relation to first-year seminar experience courses, the need for collaboration is most evident between the divisions of academic affairs and student success/affairs. The coordinators of First-Year Programs and General Education have collaborated on offering first-year seminar courses as part of first-year learning communities and developing strategies to work with at-risk students to assist in the acquisition and/or enhancement of transferable skills that will assist students in being successful in the classroom. The Director of Institutional Research is also working with the General Education Coordinator to develop data dashboards to assist with the analysis of key student success indicators for students enrolled in a first-year seminar experience course, to allow for institutional comparisons of student success on those key indicators. This will assist with the ability to develop and revise strategies that are guided by existing data.

In addition, there are opportunities for the enhancement of existing collaborations and the creation of new collaborations. As the first-year seminar experience initiative transitions from pilot to full implementation, there will be an increased need for instructor development opportunities, revision of student engagement and experiential learning opportunities, integration of peer mentors, clear messaging from application and continuing throughout the degree plan, and other related elements. There will also be opportunities for collaboration with developing initiatives such as common experiences, general education redesign, and forthcoming student success and retention initiatives. As a result, there is the potential for collaborations with numerous units at the institution such as the Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching, eLearning, Office of First-Year Programs, the QEP, our advising centers, units in Student Affairs/Success (e.g., Advising, Enrollment Management, Career Opportunities, Academic Support Center), Institutional Research, Institutional Effectiveness, General Education Council, Faculty Senate, Advancement, and the Rural Development Institute. The pursuit of and the realization of the fulfillment of these potential collaborations is understandably contingent upon the sustained focus of university initiatives and the availability of resources in the areas of time, talent, and treasure.

SECTION 2: REFLECTING ON YOUR MOMENTUM WORK & MINDING THE GAPS

Looking at your student success inventory, campus context and institutional data…

2.1   What are your strengths with respect to student success? Where are you having the greatest success and making the most progress?

- We made great strides in improving retention and graduation rates over the past few years, although retention declined in Fall 2021, likely due to the impact of the pandemic on student engagement. Nonetheless, faculty and staff broadly recognize the importance of engaging every student and the impact of this on increasing retention and graduation rates. We have a particularly

effective Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELT), in terms of providing very engaging experiences for faculty. CELT continues to expand its menu of Faculty Workshops and individual planning activities for learning communities, peer support, and institutional resources for differentiated content delivery. In the past year, we have made strides in implementing a common course shell design (especially in eDegree).

- We have made great progress in the past year on the pilot of the QEP, with most indicators showing that we are significantly ahead of schedule with implementation of course activities and Experiential Learning Ambassadors across the institution.
- We are using the Institutional SACSCOC QEP and the Momentum Year initiatives as springboards to guide some areas of the new institutional Strategic Plan discussions.
- We have also had success at decreasing the time to graduation and the number of credits taken at the point of graduation.

2.2   What are your priority areas for continued improvement and why? Where do you have gaps in performance among student subgroups? What are your plans for understanding and closing these gaps?

Priorities:
Institutional priorities are for alignment of Strategic Plan Action steps across campus
- Foster Student Success
- Cultivate Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging
- Impact Regional Success
- Sustain Institutional Strength

Deploy Student Success Initiatives to different student populations beyond the traditional first year – Full time student

Gaps:
- Real and / or perceived gaps in performance should be addressed within college and departmental planning. This is especially important as we recognize the gaps that students have from the past few years of disrupted learning.
- Coordination and Communication – Integration
- Start – Stop – Continue

2.3   What supports from the System Office would be most helpful in advancing your work?
No new Mandates and reconsider old mandates. It would help to have some room to breathe as we all continue to cope with the learning challenges brought on by the unprecedented disruption of COVID.

2.4   Goal Setting
Reviewing your recent data, what are your overall goals/targets for:

Area	Baseline (year) measure	Time period/Time from now	Goal/Target
Enrollment & Diversity	2017	2024	11,676
Retention & Closing Retention Gaps	2017	2024	76%
Graduation & Closing Graduation Gaps (150% of time/100% of time)	2017	2024	Grad rate up3% 4 yr rate up 2%
Completion of Area A courses in the first year	2017	2024	80%
Credit Intensity for full time students and closing disparities	2017	2024	

SECTION 3: LESSONS FROM THE PANDEMIC

The Pandemic has changed both the context in which students learn and our institutions operate and the students that we serve, in some ways that we can recognize, and others that we still are struggling to understand. We want to understand a bit more about what you have learned from the Pandemic, what the unanticipated consequences of the many changes and adjustments you have made have been, and what we can carry forward from this experimentation and adaptation into common practice.

What changes that you have made in your practices/programs/operations because of the Pandemic improved your effectiveness and you plan to maintain or build upon?

- Institutional Planning and implementation of technology: Expanding remote access and wireless capacity for students and faculty.
- Utilized remote instruction skills and deployment tools to better design and deliver Online College for Career Advancement
- Ability to network across the institution on a larger scale than in the past.
- The VSU (Valdosta State University) IT division discovered that students and faculty were encountering remote access continuity issues due to an operating systems upgrade designed to improve broadband access. After making changes to the system, problems with individuals being dropped have been greatly reduced.
- We have learned to make better use of virtual learning, such as BlazeView (D2L), in all courses, including face-to-face and hybrid, thanks to our crash course in virtual learning during COVID.
- We have greater acumen to communicate with a broad range of constituents regardless of location.

3.2   How has your communications with students shifted since the Pandemic? How did that go? What did you learn?

- We have learned to not always expect rational behavior.
- Much of the communications with students occurs through remote means, (e-mail, dialogue structures within course shells, social media platforms, etc.) While these expanded avenues of contact provide great opportunity, it is important to recognize that the separation of individuals, the ability to observe and interpret nonverbal communications, and to follow up with conversations in real time pose challenges.
- Use of institutional tools for communicating student performance concerns has increased with some faculty and administrators sharing information in more efficient ways to better understand issues, formulate plans to assist, carry out plans, and follow up on actions taken.
- We have learned that the final component of following up with all involved parties (where allowed) is an important part of any efforts to assist individuals within the systems.
- The belief that students no longer use email is false. They are using it often and it became a preferred communication method for many students during the pandemic. This type of communication decreases the connection between the student and the university as it is difficult to gauge tone/intent.

3.3   In what ways, if any, are the students you serve today different from the students you were serving before the Pandemic? What are the implications for your success work and for campus functions in general?

- Preparation and understanding of linear processes and progression:
- Although they state that they are interested in being engaged, newly admitted students are not practiced in engagement skills. This in turn makes interactions that one might have considered routine in the past appear to feel more forced or uncomfortable.
- Students understand changes and deviation from planned itineraries, adaptability, or flexibility.
- The pandemic has exacerbated student mental health issues and we have worked hard to meet the increased demand.
- Most important to note is that not only have students changed in ways we are still trying to understand, but the faculty have also changed as well. Routine interactions and means for engagement "feel" different and are sometimes uncomfortable including interactions with students or colleagues. The lasting impact of this is yet unclear, but we need to be monitoring engagement closely. Moreover, our plan is to significantly increase experiential learning activities, thus positively impacting student engagement.

3.4   What are the questions you are still working on about supporting students in the Pandemic?

- What remote use technologies should we retain and continue to invest resources in that work BETTER than old practices?
- How can flexibility still be viewed as an asset, rather than a distraction from established process and success?
- The institution needs to be prepared to listen and respond to pandemic influenced behaviors we have not yet encountered. Using the pandemic communication teams on campus to serve in new roles related to reflection and sharing observations across the campus should prove helpful.