

QEP MT-Engage Focus Groups with Alumni and Community Members

Two focus groups were held with 15 participants including 12 MTSU alumni, administrator from Murfreesboro City Schools, Rutherford County School teacher, and business representatives from the Chamber of Commerce, Leanfield Sports, Saint Thomas Rutherford Hospital, Legal Aid Society, Dell Inc., UPS, Stewart Title Company, First Tennessee Bank, Bob Parks Realty, and a retired Human Resource Manager.

Student Engagement / active learning.

- **What do you think of when I say student engagement ? What comes to mind - what does it mean to say that a student is engaged?**

Responses included: Hands-on learning, Cooperative Learning, Participative, Fully Involved, Volunteering, Job Shadowing, Partnerships and Connections, Outside the classroom – internships, volunteering, community service, Student life – being engaged in the college experience, Not lecture – more interaction in the classroom; more experimental than note taking, Real life experiences, Applications of what they are learning, Study abroad, Business speakers in classroom

“Fully involved. Not just consumers. Not just going to class”

“Being a member of the community includes service, social activities, etc.”

“Interpersonal skills are developed by social engagement”

- **What types of activities do you think of as active learning - that would be beneficial or important for students?**

Responses included: Apply to self, Internships, Bringing in outsiders, Job exploration/shadowing, Making the connection between theory and application

- **What are the benefits of engagement / active learning to students:**

All respondents indicated that engagement and active learning was very beneficial and students should have these experiences in the classroom as early as possible.

Responses included:

The earlier we can engage students on campus, the less opportunities they will miss.

There is a value in full engagement in and out – enriches their lives through a full balance in life. Networking opportunities can arise.

Life skills could arise that they don't realize at the time will be beneficial.

Reflection

If students are engaged and are involved in active learning, is it important for students to be able to reflect on what they are learning?

Respondents indicated that reflection was an important part of the student's learning.

Responses included:

I think any time I pause and reflect on a situation to analyze what worked and didn't work is always beneficial. I find it helpful.

Reflection (debriefing) is built into the internships we offer, I think it is very important.

I wonder if they don't learn the skills to speak to others and think about what they are learning, they won't be able to communicate.

Writing is a lost art. Students need to be taught how to put on paper what they are thinking.

Documenting student learning

- **Is it important for students to be able to document what they are learning through their engagement / active learning activities?**
- **What are the benefits of students documenting what they are learning?**

ePortfolios

What should be included in an ePortfolio? As a potential employer, what would you want to see in an ePortfolio?

- Reflective statements based on applying their learning with the theory or classroom assignment
- Reflective statement about what the student took away and how they grew personally and professionally
- Focus on industry specific requirements; should tailor it to the field you are in
- Products or artifacts that demonstrate their knowledge/work
- Professional photo
- Validation of information provided in the eportfolio
- Evidence of their reliability, drive, and integrity
- Statement of philosophy/life's goals
- Areas you feel you could improve
- Examples of being an active member of a team
- Objective professor evaluation of student
- A short (30 second) video explaining who they are and what they want to accomplish
- Service learning
- Social aspects in your life that makes you marketable
- Recommendation letters
- Academic achievements
- Evidence of problem solving/ability to think on their feet

The QEP MT-Engage

Comments? Initial impressions?

Overall, responses were all positive. Responses included:

Yes keep pursuing this

I like it.

I think it's great. I agree with everything.

Overall return on investment would be very good.

Tough to get freshman to understand the importance of this.

It will give you an edge.

Suggestions?

- Use potential employers or alumni to judge ePortfolios.
- Judge/review ePortfolios earlier than the sophomore year.
- Students should present ePortfolio to an interview panel.
- Recruit students who may be underprepared or less likely to participate.

- Include this as part of a work ethic class. “Students are lacking in the basics – being on time, getting their work done, and other everyday requirements.”
- Award 1 hour of elective credit to help students complete this.
- Recruit MT alum to mentor students and help them through the freshman and sophomore years.
- Create an expectation of engagement when students enroll. Create a new culture.
- Require the program for all students.
- After the program begins, show parents and potential students the ePortfolios
- Testimonials would be beneficial.
- Show the value of MT Engage to potential employers