QUALITY ENHANCEMENT PLAN (QEP) IMPACT REPORT

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA—COLUMBIA, LANCASTER, SALKEHATCHIE, SUMTER, AND UNION

Initial Goals and Intended Outcomes

The University of South Carolina's QEP, USC Connect: Integrating Learning Within and Beyond the Classroom, focuses on two institutional goals:
1. Developing a university culture that supports students' integrative learning, and
2. Developing the infrastructure to support, facilitate, and enhance students' integrative learning opportunities.

Developing an integrative learning culture is operationalized as creating an *effective administrative structure, assessing and providing professional development for faculty and staff, and assessing and orienting students* to integrative learning. Developing a supportive infrastructure is defined as developing and enhancing technology and other delivery systems to facilitate students' ability to *engage in, reflect on, and apply within and beyond the classroom experiences.*

Learning outcomes state that students will:
1. Provide examples of beyond the classroom experiences in which they have engaged and ***describe how one or more beyond the classroom experiences has contributed to their learning.***
2. ***Articulate examples of beyond the classroom experiences that illuminate concepts/theories/frameworks presented in their coursework*** including a clear description of elements of the beyond the classroom experience that are consistent with or contradictory to the identified concept.
3. ***Thoughtfully connect examples, facts, and/or theories*** from more than one experience, field of study, and/or perspective such as describing the similarities and differences across experiences, fields of study, or perspectives.
4. ***Pose solutions to problems (i.e., make recommendations) that incorporate learning from both beyond the classroom and within the classroom experiences***, articulate how their decisions are supported by what they have learned through their experiences and content preparation, and implement those solutions (if appropriate).

Changes Made to the QEP

Changes to the QEP were minor and primarily involved shifting responsibilities, resources, and timelines.
- We found it more effective to bring faculty and student affairs professionals together through the primary governing body, the USC Connect Council, rather than having input dispersed through smaller standing committees as originally planned. We increased the size of the USC Connect Council and streamlined the standing committees. Plans generated by the smaller groups were then brought before the Council.
- Students were originally envisioned as sitting on a variety of committees, but we found they provided more substantive feedback when meeting together. We created two USC Connect undergraduate student councils: one for USC Columbia and one for the Palmetto College Campuses. (Note: The QEP references the "Regional Campuses" which have been renamed the "Palmetto College Campuses"—the wording used throughout this document). A student representative from the Columbia Student Advisory Council remains on the USC Connect Council.
- We reconfigured our plan to support faculty development. After one year of implementation, we replaced the Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE) Associate Director for Integrative Learning position with two Integrative Learning Faculty Fellows housed in USC Connect. The Fellows continue to collaborate with the CTE but are closely integrated within USC Connect. In addition, the half-time position of assessment coordinator was expanded to fulltime with increased responsibility for supporting faculty and staff.
- While the overall budget remained as proposed, total funds were reallocated within USC Connect to best meet goals. Support for student engagement and learning was found to be most effectively supported through:
  - three fulltime staff within the Office of USC Connect who work directly with students and facilitate the coordination of engagements across university offices.
  - a trained, cadre of instructors (faculty and professional staff) to teach an integrative learning course with over 25 sections per year offered over the last two years.
- The technology plan for USC Connect shifted as we adapted to new and emerging technologies. In addition, we took the time needed to implement comprehensive and long term solutions. For example, we concluded that a simplistic calendar would not meet the university's broader needs and undertook an extensive study, selection, and implementation process that resulted in a university-wide calendaring system going live in Year 5 (rather than Year

1 as proposed). The calendar is integrated into the university's web redesign and features electronic feeds based on individual interests (initially envisioned as being delivered through a student portal). Also note that students were involved in experimental projects (as originally planned), but solutions were ultimately found through other means. For example, engineering students developed an USC Connect app, but our new mobile-friendly web management system (OU Campus) was selected as a more comprehensive solution to mobile delivery.

- Our assessment plan shifted with the success of our graduation distinction and the related increase in e-portfolios which provided a rich source of data. Our purchased assessment technology worked well for assessment of first-year student work samples and senior e-portfolios which became our primary sources of data on student learning.

Impact of the QEP

This section describes the impact on the environment supporting learning and provides data demonstrating impact on student learning.

Environment Supporting Learning (organized by institutional action steps in the QEP)

Goal One: A culture of integrative learning. We have evidence of a strong culture of integrative learning at USC as proposed in the QEP. Elements include a well-established administrative and governance structure including faculty, staff and students; on-going investment in professional development of faculty and staff focused on integrative learning; and a focus on integrative learning in admissions, orientation, and first-year experiences.

Administrative and governance structure. The Provost **established the Office of USC Connect in Fall 2011** (3 months prior to final QEP acceptance by SACSCOC). The executive director reports to the vice provost/dean of undergraduate studies and indirectly to the vice president for student affairs. The office is responsible for leading and coordinating efforts to advance integrative learning through work across academic and student affairs. As noted under changes to the QEP, **the office grew to six full-time staff members (more than doubling proposed staffing).** USC Connect staff work with existing university offices, colleges, schools and committees (e.g., Associate/Assistant Deans Council; Associate Vice Presidents of Student Affairs; Faculty Senate; Offices of Study Abroad and Undergraduate Research; the Leadership and Service Center; Residential Life; Carolina Leadership Initiative; University 101 Programs; Center for Teaching Excellence).

USC Connect's web presence is an extension of the office and provides further evidence of administrative support and continuous improvement. The 2012 website (about USC Connect, councils, pathways, integrative learning, FAQ) was updated regularly with a major upgrade each summer. Major additions included the **searchable database** of opportunities (2012**); resources for faculty and staff** and **USC Connect recommendations by major** (2013); and **e-portfolio support** and an **on-line orientation and application system for the graduation distinction** (2014). When the university moved to a new state of the art website design (2015), USC Connect's website was prioritized as one of the first to be transformed including a **mobile-friendly platform**. The addition of the **USC Connect calendar** (2016) provides easy access to date-specific opportunities. Web analytics show **page views of the USC Connect website grew from about 800 per month in 2012 to over 12,000 per month (2016).**

A **USC Connect Council** comprised of approximately 20 **administrator, faculty, staff, and student** representatives met 1-2 times per semester from December 2011 - April 2016 and continues to meet at least once annually. The council includes **representatives from Columbia, the Palmetto College Campuses, and an external consultant**. The council provides global oversight and direction for the continuous development of USC Connect. It has been instrumental in guiding the implementation of key components including professional development opportunities, collaboration across colleges and schools, a graduation distinction, and on-going assessment. Standing committees focus on specific components of USC Connect (e.g., engagement, technology, professional development, assessment, and first-year experiences) and involve approximately 25 members of the USC community. **The engagement committee has been particularly successful** in coordinating efforts related to student engagement, professional development, and the promotion of integrative learning. The engagement categories of USC Connect were solidified and named over time. They are now referred to as the USC Connect Pathways: Community Service, Diversity and Social Advocacy, Research, Global Learning, and Professional and Civic Engagement (including both Internship and leadership experiences). The engagement committee is now titled and comprised of "Pathways' Directors".

USC Connect Student Advisory Councils were created mid-way through the first year of USC Connect when we realized the need to engage more students in development/implementation. Students apply for membership to join either the Columbia or Palmetto College Campus (PCC) Student Council. The Councils meet monthly with the Columbia Council meeting in-person and the PCC Council gathering via conference call. Outreach to the broader student population includes **USC Connect on Twitter (1,565 followers)**, Facebook (374 likes) and Instagram (441 followers). **Students registered with USC Connect (currently over 1,300**) receive **e-mail updates every other week** highlighting up-coming events and deadlines.

Professional development. Professional development has been guided by input from multiple sources. University-wide surveys of faculty/staff in the first two years showed a need for clarification of the meaning of both USC Connect and integrative learning. For example, **2012 and 2013 data showed faculty confidence in describing integrative learning and USC Connect was low (averaging approximately 38% for each)**. The lack of confidence was also reflected in meetings with the USC Connect Council, subcommittees and other groups. **By 2015 and 2016, faculty confidence in describing integrative learning had risen to an average of 71% (an increase of 33% from the early years).** Confidence in describing USC Connect rose to a lesser extent averaging approximately 60% (an increase of 22%).

Strategies that may have impacted these positive increases and that continue to promote integrative learning include:
- USC Connect as a regular component of **new faculty orientation** since 2012.
- A semester long **e-mail series** Spring 2013 asking faculty/staff for "30 seconds a week": Messages defined terms and key components of USC Connect. Messages linked to articles, websites, and videos on integrative learning.
- An annual **USC Connect Faculty Conference** added (May 2014) with attendance **over 125 faculty and staff each year with 158 attendees in 2016**. The conference highlights students and faculty speakers on the value and challenges of integrative learning. As a result of attending the 2016 conference, survey respondents reported a better understanding of undergraduate education at USC (69%) and of integrative and experiential learning (also 69%). A total of 89% agreed information at the conference was valuable. In 2016, the conference became the Provost's Undergraduate Summit for Faculty with a continued focus on integrative learning.
- **74 workshops** and conferences on integrative learning through the Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE) with attendance of more than **800 faculty and staff from all campuses**: More than 95% of attendees reported the workshops were helpful to their teaching.
- Grants to support faculty in developing integrative learning opportunities for students began spring 2012. To date, **53 faculty grants totaling $170,443.25** have been awarded (including 30 departments in 12 USC Columbia colleges/schools and six grants to Palmetto College faculty). Survey responses from grantees consistently show they valued and learned from grant co-hort meetings. Grant reports described learning about students (knowledge, skills, developmental levels) and strategies to support integrative learning. Reports revealed a need for assessment support which was provided. A USC Connect Faculty Fellow leads the grant co-hort each year.
- **69 faculty and staff have been trained to support and assess students' integrative learning through e-portfolios in relation to capstone experiences**. Trainings and support are provided throughout the year. A USC Connect Faculty Fellow and the Associate Director lead training and support the effort.
- USC Connect is a featured component of UNIV 101 with over 200 sections per year. **UNIV 101 instructor training (3 full days and an annual conference day) includes an emphasis on engaging students beyond the classroom and supporting students in reflecting on learning** from beyond the classroom experiences. In addition, 85 UNIV 101 instructors teaching 125 sections have participated in assessments of first-year students' ability to integrate learning and received additional support materials on developing integrative learning assignments. Another 66 faculty and staff have been trained in assessing integrative learning in UNIV 101 student work.
- In 2015, the University established a new Advising Center to oversee and coordinate academic advising including a focus on USC Connect. **Advisors are trained on USC Connect** through in-person sessions and on-line modules. The advisors' educational role in student engagement is also addressed through meetings with the University Advisors' Network, listserv messages, inclusion of the student engagement distinction in advisement software, and the annual advisors' conference (initiated January 2014). Support materials including posters, information tents, and electronic announcements are widely distributed to advisors to highlight the importance of integrating learning within and beyond the classroom and provide specific recommendations for students.

- The Office of USC Connect has continually engaged in **outreach to faculty and staff in academic and student affairs**. Hundreds of faculty and staff have engaged in meetings on the development of integrative learning in their areas. Collaboration has included one-on-one and small group meetings, department/school meetings, work sessions on program development attended by faculty and staff from multiple areas, and USC Connect guest presentations at larger meetings. In addition to increased coordination and emphasis on reflection, this outreach resulted in beyond the classroom recommendations for students being posted on-line for 68 majors at USC Columbia and all four Palmetto College Campuses (a total of 72 areas represented).
- USC Connect and its graduation distinction have been **highlighted by the university president** and others in appearances on and off-campus. Articles and features in print and web publications have further supported the message and highlighted **the national recognition of USC Connect through three national awards.** The presence of USC Connect leadership in national organizations, and inquiries from other institutions of higher education on our work, has helped build credibility with faculty and staff "at home".
- In 2016, **a new faculty fellows program** was launched that brings together **10 faculty members** from across the university who are engaged in integrative learning through direct support of small groups of students, assessment of student work, shared scholarship opportunities, and messaging to the greater university community.

These efforts have kept integrative learning as a key focus for faculty and staff throughout the last five years.

Assessing and orienting students to integrative learning. USC's message on the value of beyond the classroom opportunities in students' education begins before students are enrolled. USC Connect is featured in university print and web publications for prospective students and is a **primary message point in recruiting efforts**. Pre-matriculation materials regularly feature students engaged in peer leadership, community service, research, internships and global learning. Campus tours for visitors include beyond the classroom engagement and USC Connect in talking points. USC Connect is part of **new student orientation** as a featured initiative in presentations, information fair, and small group sessions led by student orientation leaders. Palmetto College Campuses integrate USC Connect into messaging as well. For example, USC Lancaster established a Research Club and USC Sumter recruits incoming students into a leadership program focused on USC Connect pathways. Both programs encourage student engagement beyond the classroom and pursuit of USC Connect's graduation distinction.

As proposed, USC Connect is linked to the First-Year Reading Experience (e.g., promotional slides during the main event and a component of discussions when appropriate). In addition, we created a USC Connect specific event during students' first week on campus to increase visibility. The **annual *Get CONNECTed Fai*r** began August 2012. It includes over 60 faculty/staff presenters and consistently draws nearly 500 student attendees. Pathways offices line the perimeter of the student union ballroom with representatives of colleges/schools in the center. Students circulate to learn about beyond the classroom opportunities while getting their "USC Connect passport" stamped. USC Connect staff distribute a brief survey and promote the database, USC Connect social media, and the graduation distinction. Attendee survey responses (50%+ response rate) found that **100% have consistently agreed the fair provided helpful information about opportunities and 90% reported they are more likely to participate in an event or organization.** In 2015 and 2016, responses to new questions on pathways revealed students were most interested in study abroad (53% and 48%, respectively), community service (47/52%) and internships (45/50%). About half (48/53%) were interested in the graduation distinction.

The primary vehicle for outreach to first-year students at all campuses is our **first-year seminar** (over 200 sections per year). USC Connect has partnered with the Office of University 101 Programs since the development of the QEP. **USC Connect** is **featured in the UNIV 101 textbook** for students, *Transitions*, and in professional development materials for instructors. One of the emphases of UNIV 101 is for students to become familiar with opportunities for engagement. All course sections **require students to engage in at least one beyond the classroom experience and complete a related reflection** activity—an introduction to integrative learning. **Over 200 campus partner presentations that include a USC Connect component** are made to individual UNIV 101 sections each year through the Offices of Student Success, Undergraduate Research, Study Abroad, and the Leadership and Service Center. These special presentations are in addition to each instructor's own emphasis on integrative learning.

While students have always rated UNIV 101 highly on supporting beyond the classroom engagement, end-of-course evaluations (years 2011-2015) showed 8% **increase in agreement** (81.2%-89.8%) to the question, "This course **encouraged me to participate in learning experiences outside of the classroom**" and a 8.8% agreement increase (81.7%-90.5%) to the

question, "This course **helped me to understand the role outside of the classroom learning experiences play in contributing to my overall learning**". These numbers are consistent with the added emphasis in UNIV 101 on USC Connect.

Over 140 USC Connect presentations were made to student organizations and sophomore-senior classes 2013-2016. In addition, **3606 baccalaureate students and 121 associate degree students have completed an on-line orientation to integrative learning** as they investigated the possibility of pursuing a graduation distinction in community service, diversity and social advocacy global learning, research, or professional and civic engagement. The orientation includes a video of students sharing the significance of their learning across experiences.

In summary, integrative learning is a major component of the educational culture at the University of South Carolina. Thousands of faculty, staff and students have been engaged in exploring integrative learning. The structures supporting their involvement are comprehensive, stable, and active (e.g., governance, professional development opportunities, annual events, on-line resources). Messaging through website, publications, social media, and orientations is longstanding and well-established. Assessments provide evidence of increased faculty/staff confidence in describing integrative learning and increased awareness and engagement from students.

Goal Two: Infrastructure to support and enhance integrative learning opportunities. Proposed action steps included building an infrastructure through (1) technologies and (2) a clear path of encouragement for students' selection and engagement beyond the classroom and their integration of learning across experiences. In implementation, we found the two steps were interwoven. This section summarizes technologies developed under "innovative technologies" with further details on technology presented in the section on "policies, procedures, structures and offerings to provide a clear path of support and encouragement."

Innovative technologies. **Nine major technology advances** have been developed that meet the needs of USC Connect: web redesign including mobile-friendly platforms; assessment software facilitating on-line review of student work and collation of data; integration of beyond the classroom experiences into student planning and course selection (searchable database, course tagging, and DegreeWorks advisement software); an integrated space reservation and calendaring system; e-portfolios and related support; a student experiential reporting system within an on-line application to graduate with distinction; and an on-line tracking system to record and verify student engagement entitled Beyond the Classroom Matters (BTCM). Many of these systems serve multiple purposes and are integrated into the university's overall development plan.

The USC Connect Executive Director and a University Technology Services (UTS) Project Manager have worked together to lead the development of technology systems serving USC Connect including coordinating with other units. Technology team members varied by project and included UTS staff, pathways' directors, representatives from Institutional Research and the Division of Student Affairs (e.g., registrar, assessment directors), and USC Connect staff. University-wide projects (web redesign, space reservation and calendaring, DegreeWorks, Beyond the Classroom Matters) are headed by other units that work closely with USC Connect to ensure implementation. Ongoing feedback on technology developments from faculty, staff, and students has been provided through the USC Connect Council and Student Advisory Councils.

Policies, procedures, structures and offerings to provide a clear path of support and encouragement. Activities in this section were organized under two steps in the QEP Proposal: (1) Providing an *ongoing inventory to facilitate students' selection of experiences* and (2) Building s*ystems to support students' selection, reflection, record-keeping and recognition* related to beyond the classroom engagements.

Ongoing inventory to facilitate students' selection of experiences. After considering the best options to create an inventory of experiences, we created the **USC Connect Database** in 2012. Anyone with a USC ID and password can submit a beyond the classroom opportunity to the database. Entries are approved for publication to the web by USC Connect. Recurring or on-going opportunities were originally emphasized and sought from academic and student affairs at all campuses. The database has had a total of **1,062 entries** submitted over time with 800 or more "live" at any one time. Students, faculty, and staff can search the database by USC Connect pathway or other parameters. Entries include descriptions and directions for involvement. Web analytics show **approximately 1,000 visits per month** to the database webpage in 2015 and 2016.

In 2013, when we realized we needed time to develop the calendaring system, we modified the database to include date-specific events as a temporary substitute. In 2015, we imported opportunity entries into the database from Beyond the Classroom Matters tracking system (being developed by Student Affairs) as we moved toward integrating the two systems.

The USC Connect Database has been particularly successful in cataloging beyond the classroom experiences overseen by offices and programs offering opportunities to students university-wide. It was initially challenging to receive entries from academic units. We investigated practices at other institutions and invited input (e.g., students advised USC Connect would be more meaningful if information was highlighted by major). We developed an alternative approach asking **faculty and staff to describe how they integrate beyond the classroom opportunities in the major** (i.e., via coursework) and for beyond the classroom recommendations to enrich students' educational experience. Information was summarized in a flyer for each program and posted online as **USC Connect Recommendations by Major**. Palmetto College Campus information is organized by campus rather than major and is presented as **Recommendations by Campus**. In addition to electronic flyers on 72 programs, information by major/campus appears on the website in html and is uploaded to the database.

Courses relevant to the pathways are electronically tagged in the academic bulletin and course schedule. Tags were developed in conjunction with the development of our graduation distinction in community service, diversity and social advocacy, global learning, research, and professional and civic engagement (including internships and peer leadership tags). Courses that count toward the distinction are identified for each pathway. Courses may or may not require beyond the classroom experience (BTC) as a course component. Those including BTC experience receive an additional tag. Students can search the course schedule for tagged courses.

Another vehicle for communicating beyond the classroom opportunities is the **online calendar**. A university-wide process to select and implement a calendaring system was co-sponsored by the Office of the Provost (including USC Connect), Student Affairs, and University Technology Services (UTS). Following initial review of systems nationally, it was determined that the calendar needed to include a space reservation system (adding a great deal of complexity to the project). Once the platform (i.e., 25Live) was selected, the Provost hired a manager to implement the system. The USC Connect calendar was the first calendar published using the new system (spring 2016). **Users can search the calendar by pathway** and the system has the potential for users to receive personalized feeds to their devices based on their interests.

Selection, reflection, records, and recognition. The story of our implementation of the systems, policies, and procedures to increase integrative learning are best told in the context of an unanticipated success of one particular component. **A graduation distinction awarded for demonstrating integrative learning** was originally envisioned as a small component of the QEP. However, it ultimately **became a major impetus for progress**. The honor was approved by Faculty Senate in June 2013 following a year of development. To earn the distinction, students meet engagement requirements (within and beyond the classroom), complete a public presentation of learning, and **meet expectations for the four learning outcomes of USC Connect as demonstrated in an e-portfolio**. The distinction was originally approved in the areas of **community service, global learning, research, and professional and civic engagement (which combines internship and peer leadership experience)**. In April 2016, Faculty Senate approved an additional pathway of **diversity and social advocacy**. In creating the distinction, USC Connect collaborated with the Carolina Leadership Initiative which recognized the significance of USC Connect's fourth learning outcome to leadership (i.e., applying learning from within and beyond the classroom to solve problems). The distinction appears on students' transcripts and diplomas as "with Leadership Distinction in [the appropriate pathway]" and can be earned at the associate or baccalaureate level.

Progress in engaging a critical mass of students, faculty, and staff in USC Connect was proceeding slowly until Graduation with Leadership Distinction (GLD) raised interest to a new level. Students are initially attracted to the distinction for the recognition (i.e., transcript, diploma, honor cords, recognition ceremony). However, once completed, students highlight **how much they learn** through the process including **a deeper understanding of the value of their education and clarity on their plans for the future**. At the May 2013 USC Connect Faculty Conference, GLD students from the first-graduating class spoke enthusiastically about the program's impact on their learning. A video featuring seven of the first 89 graduates was widely disseminated (over 3,000 on-line hits) and momentum continued to build. Faculty and staff were encouraged to help students see a path to complete the distinction in their areas. Offices sponsoring opportunities for students developed handouts on how their beyond the classroom engagements could lead to graduation with distinction. Departments and

colleges requested meetings to learn more and obtain assistance in developing plans for student progression toward GLD in their majors. Over the last three years, **2,375 students have registered intent to pursue Graduation with Leadership Distinction (GLD), 686 have earned the distinction, and over 1200 are currently progressing toward completion.** GLD completers represent every college/school at USC Columbia and each Palmetto College Campus.

The number of USC Connect **advisors and related courses supporting students in reflecting on the totality of their undergraduate experience has grown steadily in relation to the graduation distinction**. Students may elect to complete the GLD e-portfolio through UNIV 401 (a capstone seminar open to all majors), a discipline-based seminar, or by completing workshops and individual meetings provided through USC Connect. Most students (currently over 300 per year) complete the e-portfolio through course support. Another 100 students develop e-portfolios through direct work with USC Connect. Besides USC Connect staff, GLD e-portfolio advisors now include trained faculty/staff from across campus who mentor up to four students each and participate in e-portfolio assessment.

E-portfolio support through course work grew from one section in 2014 to over 25 sections a year serving 350 students. Instructors are trained with a focus on supporting student learning through e-portfolio development and assessing learning through the GLD rubric (which is based on the four learning outcomes of USC Connect). UNIV 401 has been highly rated by students with evaluation questions receiving an aggregate score of 4.2 or higher on a 5-point scale. Seven academic majors have integrated support for reflection and GLD e-portfolio development into discipline-based seminars to some degree (Mass Communications, Middle Level Education, Music Education, Public Health, Retailing, Social Work, and Sport and Entertainment Management). Mass Communications went a step further and created a new degree aligned with GLD.

Review and feedback from seniors earning the distinction have indicated that students need more opportunity for in-depth reflection earlier in their collegiate careers. We have increased sophomore/junior support through a series of **UNIV 201 classes** in which students reflect on learning from BTC experiences in each pathway. **These courses are in addition to the 59 integrative learning courses supported through USC Connect grants serving over 1,000 students.** Support for reflection is also provided through leadership coaches in the university's Leadership and Service Center (established 2014) and is an integral part of culminating requirements in many areas (e.g., reports on grants through the Office of Undergraduate Research and internship analysis as required by the Career Center and academic programs). Work with faculty has led to an increase in reflection opportunities embedded in academic programs.

Support for many of the initiatives described in this report (e.g., calendar, database, course tagging) came from enthusiasm for the graduation distinction. The distinction also created a concrete message for advisors to communicate to students: "YOU can graduate with distinction! Here's how . . ." This message has been a focal point for academic advisors and advisors in pathways offices. **Advisement software** (DegreeWorks) allows academic advisors to see students' GLD pathway of interest which can be used as a starting point for discussion on beyond the classroom engagement.

The design of systems to record student engagement initially focused on cataloging and verifying student progression toward the distinction. For example, **an electronic record and application system allows students to record key information about their beyond the classroom experiences** as they complete GLD requirements. Engagement is verified by USC Connect through offices overseeing the experiences. Verification has primarily been accomplished by sending student reported information to offices for approval, but we have now begun to use the **Beyond the Classroom Matters (BTCM) System** in which verification of student engagement is recorded on an on-going basis. BTCM is designed to record beyond the classroom engagements for _all_ undergraduate students, regardless of whether or not they are pursuing the distinction. The system is completely built and implementation (i.e., entering verified student engagements into the system) is being phased in. The opportunity for students to create a co-curricular transcript based on verified experiences is being piloted.

The year prior to the approval of the distinction (2012-2013), three pilot projects on e-portfolios involving 268 students were conducted. The pilots included review of students' e-portfolios and feedback from students through surveys and a focus group. Results were analyzed by the Technology and Pathway Directors Committees and led to two significant outcomes: (1) we changed technology platforms to be more user-friendly (from Bb Outcomes to GoogleSites) and (2) we designed e-portfolio requirements to more clearly focus on learning and application (as opposed to descriptions of engagement). In summer/fall 2013, the development of e-portfolio criteria and guidelines focused on creating the

culminating requirement for completing the distinction. However, the result was a model that has been used to help faculty, staff and students understand the meaning and significance of integrative learning in general. As of 2016, **686 students completed e-portfolios for the distinction and 1240 more students are pursuing the process.**

The graduation distinction also supported the **expansion of opportunities for students to articulate and share their learning through public presentations**. USC's annual **Discovery Day** expanded beyond its original research focus to include presentations of learning from all USC Connect pathways. Presentations from students from all campuses **grew from 252 (2011) to 619 (2016)**. **Total attendance grew from 888 to 2034** in the same time period. Student presentations judged as part of Discovery Day's USC Connect Showcase sessions are rated on the *extent and depth of connections between beyond the classroom experiences and broader concepts*.

Benefits to all students have been realized through interest in the graduation distinction even though all students are not completing the distinction itself. Conversations between USC Connect staff and university partners (i.e., faculty, staff) may start with "tell us how our students can complete GLD", but ultimately results in developing integrative learning strategies to work with all students. **Faculty and staff supporting and assessing students in e-portfolio development reach new levels of understanding and apply what they have learned to other components of their work.** For example, two faculty in Languages, Literatures, and Cultures were asked to assist with the assessment of e-portfolios related to the distinction in global learning. The next year, they became instructors of the senior seminar for the graduation distinction (UNIV 401) which led them to rethink their other courses. One added a 4-part reflection component to a multiple-section 100-level course she supervised. With encouragement from the original two faculty members, eight members of the department attended the next USC Connect Faculty Conference. They later met with their department chair about helping their students learn in the context of broader experiences and presented their work at two national conferences.

Our success in facilitating student engagement and reflection (i.e., creating an environment supportive of integrative learning) was further substantiated through results from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) in 2015. NSSE found that USC seniors scored higher than other AAU institutions on indicators related to higher-order learning (p<0.05), student-faculty interaction (p<0.05), effective teaching practices (P<0.05), and supportive environment (p<0.05).

Student Learning

In 2011, USC Connect pathway partners agreed to ask students two common questions on surveys following the completion of student engagement in study abroad, service learning, and research. These questions remained on student surveys for the next 5 years with consistent results. **Just 33-47% of students agreed they could connect their experiences to specific theories, concepts, and ideas from classes and apply what they had learned in experiences to solve real life problems**. These results are consistent with what we found as we worked with students in specific courses and experiences to support integrative learning: Making these connections is challenging and is typically <u>not</u> accomplished without specific support.

From 2012-2015, random samples of integrative learning assignments from our **first-year seminar** were electronically distributed to trained reviewers (a total of 652 work samples across all years; the 2016 review is currently in process). Each sample was evaluated by two reviewers on USC Connect Learning Outcomes 1 and 2. Ratings were on a 4-point scale where 3 equaled "meets expectations". Student scores were highest on criteria focused on the identification of BTC experience(s) (2.8) and how BTC experiences contributed to learning (2.7). Assignments scored lowest in criteria specific to students' ability to explain/connect BTC experiences to concepts, theories or frameworks (2.1). **These data show that given an introductory integrative learning assignment, students' integrative learning early in their collegiate careers is limited.**

In contrast, **faculty grantees creating integrative learning opportunities through course/program development, consistently reported students ability to integrate learning across course concepts and beyond the classroom experiences** (e.g., "The students were able to observe actual children's art making and form a deeper and more concrete understanding of scholarly research that they had to read and discuss every week"). Faculty provided excerpts from student work to support their conclusions and highlighted students' ability to demonstrate a variety of skills: Applying learning to create solutions (whether through dance, engineering projects, lesson plans for K-12 students, or mapping solutions for private companies); constructing knowledge/skills that related to future professional employment (e.g., specific content knowledge, interviewing skills, team work); and/or developing personal attributes (e.g., confidence, self-awareness).

We also sought the perspective of beyond the classroom experience providers (i.e., community internship supervisors, research mentors, and study abroad experience providers). In their survey responses, 89% stated students are generally able to articulate learning from beyond the classroom experiences while 68% stated students are generally able to make connections between academic coursework and beyond the classroom experiences. These data points mirror what we have identified through other USC assessments (including what is shared below)—students' are able to describe the significance of beyond the classroom experiences but are more challenged to make learning connections across within- and beyond-the-classroom environments.

The most convincing evidence of students' ability to integrate learning comes from the analysis of e-portfolios of students pursuing the graduation distinction (see Table 1). E-portfolios contain sections on developing key insights informed by within and beyond the classroom experiences; making connections across multiple experiences, disciplines, or perspectives; and recommending solutions/solving problems in ways supported by within and beyond the classroom learning. **Analysis of GLD e-portfolio performance shows students consistently meet expectations across all four learning outcomes.** E-portfolios are assessed by trained reviewers applying the GLD integrative learning rubric. Analysis of scores according to the type of support students receive in developing their e-portfolios found no significant differences in their scores. There is a difference in completion rate with students who enroll in a course having a much higher success rate (approximately 95%) than students who pursue completion through the workshop and advisement (approximately 58%).

Table 1: Graduation with Leadership Distinction (GLD) E-portfolio Student Learning Results

Learning Outcome	Focus	GLD E-portfolio Section	Mean scores (4-pt. scale, 3=meets expectations)			Overall Mean
			S2014 N=89	2014-2015* N=216	2015-2016 N=370	
1	Articulate learning from beyond the classroom experience	Key Insights	3.45	3.26	3.32	3.32
2	Describe how BTC Learning relates to course/major concepts or theories	Key Insights	3.30	3.08	3.17	3.16
3	Make complex connections	Analysis	3.37	3.02	3.09	3.10
4	Make recommendations based on learning	Leadership	3.17	2.90	3.00	2.99

*Reviews based on a revised GLD rubric designed to increase reliability.

Assessment of GLD e-portfolios on USC Connect learning outcomes has been mapped to Carolina Core (general education) learning outcomes. Results from e-portfolio reviews thus provide evidence of students meeting Carolina Core outcomes to identify and analyze issues; develop logical arguments; clearly communicate ideas; and apply, analyze, interpret, evaluate, apply, and/or problem solve in relation to a particular domain (e.g., global citizenship, scientific literacy). USC was recognized by the Association of General and Liberal Studies with a 2014 Exemplary Program Processes Award in Co-Curricular General Education Learning for this analysis.

USC graduates who have completed the distinction have readily attested to the impact of the distinction on their learning with **98% of respondents agreeing they are confident in their ability to articulate their Carolina experience and 88% indicating GLD helped them to better understand the significance of their beyond-the-classroom experiences** (n=172 over two years). Analysis of the annual Career Center survey of graduates has provided further encouraging information on post-graduate performance. The percentage of graduates **employed or admitted to graduate/professional school is 88% for those who completed the distinction as compared to 77% of all graduates.** Taken together, results on student learning from first-year students, seniors, and graduates, clearly demonstrate that while integrative learning is challenging, with appropriate support students can develop skill in integrating and applying learning in meaningful ways.

What We Learned

Our experience reinforced some original assumptions and taught us new lessons. While we knew it would be difficult, **it took more effort than anticipated to help faculty, staff, and students understand integrative learning at a substantive level**. People readily embraced the idea that education is enriched through community service, research, study abroad, peer leadership, and internships. However, most did not realize the level of support needed to help students identify the significance of beyond the classroom experiences. We found students need specific guidance in understanding the *applicability* of academic work and significant support in expressing learning through writing. Creating a culture of integrative learning required great attention to detail and a university-wide approach.

Building on existing strengths was an effective strategy: Leveraging our well-established first-year seminar to introduce students to integrative learning, expanding Discovery Day to encompass all USC Connect pathways, and using existing structures to support implementation (e.g., the Center for Teaching Excellence). Establishing new rituals and opportunities for collaboration took longer, but built community and helped establish the USC Connect identity and culture (e.g., Get Connected Fair, USC Connect Faculty Conference, Graduation with Leadership Distinction Awards Ceremony). The reality that technology is emerging and transitional at all times became very clear. We learned that taking the time to get new technology systems "right" is ultimately a good investment (e.g., e-portfolio platform, calendaring system, web re-development).

USC Connect was built on the premise that **a partnership between academic and student affairs was critical** to developing an effective integrative learning initiative. This turned out to be true. As stated by the director of student life at USC Lancaster, "USC Connect/GLD is truly a program that breaks the dichotomy that seems to exist between academic and student affairs . . . we have been able to build unique and meaningful partnerships between student life and faculty that may not have been possible without [this] initiative". Our 2016 Bronze Medal award from the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) reinforced that although USC Connect is housed in the Office of the Provost, its close collaboration with the Division of Student Affairs and pathways offices throughout campus was key to our success.

While Student Affairs was an early supporter of USC Connect, academic programs' engagement increased significantly <u>after</u> the graduation distinction was in place. Support for the distinction by the highest levels of administration AND students' articulation of the value of the distinction were critical to developing faculty support. As faculty investigated the potential of the distinction, their engagement in assessing student work and/or working with students on e-portfolios effectively promoted discussions on integrative learning. **We learned enthusiasm for integrative learning builds when faculty are immersed in supporting/analyzing student's ability to make connections and apply learning to the future *in the context of a shared structure* (i.e., specific expectations for learning and a common rubric).**

Perhaps our biggest lesson was that it is important to **be flexible and take advantage of unanticipated opportunities**. One critical juncture was when we decided to **merge USC Connect's graduation distinction with the interests of the Carolina Leadership Initiative** (established after the QEP Proposal). Emphasizing the connection between learning and leadership enhanced both initiatives. For USC Connect, leadership discussions clarified that deep learning goes hand-in-hand with articulating what learning means to students' lives and futures. USC Connect's emphasis on learning and application across a wide variety of contexts emphasized the potential for all students to lead.

We did not realize the power of the graduation distinction when it was written into the QEP, but we found that (1) the recognition appealed to faculty, staff, and students, and (2) detailed requirements helped define integrative learning. The success of the graduation distinction even changed the growth pattern of USC Connect. We thought we would start with first-year students, and progress through components for sophomores, juniors, etc. Instead we created bookends (first-year experiences and the graduation distinction for seniors) and then focused on further developing the middle years. Having a clear end goal was important to the development of all years.

We now move forward with confidence that in-depth integrative learning for <u>all</u> students is indeed possible, even at a large research university. We look forward to enhancing integrative learning further at USC with renewed appreciation that the journey to success is not a straight-line, but can be attained with clear goals, collaboration, and openness to unforeseen opportunities.