

**Huston-Tillotson University  
Quality Enhancement Plan  
(QEP)  
2021-2026**

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

- I. **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**
- II. **SELECTING AND DEVELOPING THE QEP**  
Development of the QEP
- III. **IMPROVING STUDENT LEARNING AND SUCCESS**  
Measuring Student Learning Outcomes  
Measuring Student Success
- IV. **WHY CAREER READINESS?**
- V. **LITERATURE REVIEW AND BEST PRACTICES**
- VI. **ACTION PLAN**
  - a. Developing Campus-wide Career Readiness Knowledgebase
  - b. Resource Integration
  - c. Institutional Transformation
- VII. **TIMELINE**  
Marketing Plan  
Timeline of Annual QEP Activities
- VIII. **ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE**  
QEP Advisory Committee  
QEP Management Personnel  
Organizational Chart
- IX. **RESOURCES**  
Budget of Expenses by Category 2021-2026
- X. **ASSESSMENT**  
Assessment of Student Learning  
Assessment of the QEP at the Institutional Level
- XI. **APPENDIX**
- XII. **WORK CITED**

## I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Why should colleges and universities care about the career readiness of their students? Is it enough to prepare students for the discipline area they are interested in without considering why or how they will achieve their goal or success in achieving that desired career? How or should colleges and universities be concerned about whether their students receive jobs in the areas of preparation?

Huston-Tillotson University says yes, we should. The ultimate success of a student is whether they will be able to use what we have taught them to achieve their career aspirations. Sure, many of our small institutions have a Career Services area. These services are usually provided on a "built it, and they will come model" where only those students with the foresight that generally comes at the junior or senior year, decide to start trying to secure a job.

The RAMSS program calls for the infusion of career readiness concepts in three competency areas, 1) Professionalism, 2) Communications (oral and written), and 3) Critical Thinking career readiness. Curriculum content will be delivered through an embedded instructional process through selected courses at various levels. Advisor training in techniques of career readiness is an additional program strategy. The optimization of resources for student success beginning at initial enrollment and culminates with an internship experience. The knowledge and skills achieved by our students gives our students an upper hand in securing career success. HT Believes that can happen. With some fine-tuning of our academic backgrounds, we can integrate transformative innovations that result in significant benefits for our students and their ultimate student success.

Through faculty training in career readiness instructional infusion, advisement, monitoring of outcomes we set for students, and measuring their achievements throughout their matriculation, we can make an impact. We will create a culture that embraces our students' career readiness and generates improved outcomes and employment success.

Every year up to 25 faculty members and 15 staff members will participate in summer summits to receive comprehensive career readiness training. We will work collectively on assessments and common rubrics for measuring student success in career readiness. Students will begin their immersion in career readiness content with the UNVI 1101 course and continue throughout their curriculum culminating in the Senior Seminar/Internship experience. We will be able to observe student improvement and make improvements with our Assessment Day activities each Fall.

## II. SELECTING AND DEVELOPING THE QEP

The QEP selection process began at Huston-Tillotson University (HT) in Fall 2017. President’s Cabinet authorized the Office of Institutional Planning Research and Assessment (OIPRA) to survey stakeholders throughout the University. The survey was developed based on a discussion held with these senior leaders of the University. They identified the critical needs of each of their administrative areas that could lead to student success. The suggested topics are deriving from the cabinet discussion included topic areas such as civic and community engagement, STEM, career pathways, and Environmental Studies. A campus-wide survey helped to identify potential choices. , we collected QEP suggestions from stakeholders of the University. **The QEP Topic Selection Survey (Appendix A)** was distributed to students, faculty, and staff during the Spring of 2018. In addition to the suggestions from

HT SACSCOC LEADERSHIP COMMITTEE	
Colette Pierce Burnette	President & CEO
Archie Vanderpuye	Provost & Vice President for Academic Affairs
Beverly Downing	SACSCOC Liaison
Wayne Knox	
Katrina Montgomery	Vice President, Administration & Finance
Pam Owens	Vice President, Institutional Advancement
Michael Hirsch	Dean, College of Arts & Sciences
Rohan Thompson	Interim Dean, School of Business & Technology
Steven Edmond	Dean Emeritus, School of Business & Technology

the cabinet, participants had an opportunity to provide their suggestions through open-ended questions. Write-in recommendations included: increasing academic capacity, integrating social justice, increasing retention, improving academic support, improve writing skills, and strengthen the curriculum through cross curricular courses and interdisciplinary degrees. The topic area receiving the most votes among the faculty, staff, and students was the Career pathway.

### Advisory Committee

Once we identified a topic of interest, we established a QEP advisory committee in the Fall of 2019. The QEP Advisory Committee is composed of members, includes faculty, staff, and students.

To ensure wide-spread representation, we asked leadership from each area to recommend committee members. The President charged the committee to refine the selected topic into a formidable initiative, oversee the development, and ensure campus-wide support and participation. The committee established a timeline and began its work through campus-wide focus groups, attendance at career-focused conferences, analyses of institutional data and surveys, and the review of relevant

literature to narrow the scope of the selected topic and project. The committee engaged in and promoted stakeholders' engagement throughout the University in the fact-finding process as Career Readiness is not a concept that is indigenous to most institutions of

HT QEP ADVISORY COMMITTEE	
Donald E. Brewington	University Chaplin
Katrina K. Montgomery	VP Administration and Finance
Shakitha Stinson	Adult Degree Program
Ericka Jones	Dean of Students
Steven Hatchett	Director, Career Services
Shelia Hancock	OSP/Title III
Linda Jackson	Director, Community Engagement
Michael Hirsch	Dean, College of Arts & Sciences
Rohan Thompson	Interim Dean, School of Business & Technology
Farzana Hussain	Chair, Mathematics
Josh Ronsen	Instructional Technology
Karen Magid	Director, Sustainability
Danielle McGhee	Head Librarian
Eileen Slaton	Math Faculty
Kathy Schwab	Biology Faculty
Shawanda Stewart	English Faculty
Jason Carter	Business Faculty
Carlos Cervantes	Kinesiology Faculty

higher education. A summary of the many learning experiences is below:

### Focus Groups

During the Fall of 2018, the committee held three **Focus Groups (Appendix B, C, D)** with campus-wide stakeholders (students, faculty, and staff) and corporate representatives. The format used for each focus group was to introduce key data points and best practices in career readiness identified by the **National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) (Appendix E)** and

published reports such as **Innovative Design**.

Following each presentation, a panelist discussion ensued to stimulate discussion among the Focus Group participants. The Director of the Center for Academic Innovation and Transformation (CAIT) led the question-and-answer section of each focus group discussion.

Student focus groups revealed that students were concerned with major fit, career preparation, understanding the connection between academic major and types of jobs in the field.

Corporate representatives shared that they are interested in building a bridge that directly connects majors to the workforce. HT has several students currently participating in the **UNCF-Lilly Foundation grant-funded Career Pathways Initiative (CPI) (Appendix F)**. Students who were engaged in a UNCF-Lilly Foundation grant-funded initiative. The student feedback and shared experiences indicate the program had a positive impact on their preparation for employment.

Faculty focus groups were eager to identify what employers wanted and were looking for in their students' preparation, particularly those beyond content knowledge.

They shared their current instructional practices that addressed the essential skills outlined by the corporate panelist and discussed those identified by the NACE

Standards. Expressly, most faculty agreed that they cover communication skills, critical thinking skills, and teamwork.

The moderators for each focus group used the following sample list of discussion points for those participating in the events.

**Student Questions:**

- 1) What job can I get with my major?
- 2) What are the job functions related to my major?
- 3) How do I know if the job in my major is a good fit for me?
- 4) How do I prepare myself for a job in my major?
- 5) Of HT could help, what would that look like?

**Faculty Questions:**

1. What do you think the role of faculty is in helping student gain employment in their field?
2. You have seen the NACE Career Readiness Competencies, what do you feel that you are already doing?
3. What kinds of things do you feel faculty can do in addition to their classes to promote career readiness among our students?
4. Tell us about a success story in your program. What was faculty's role in that success?

Overwhelmingly, the responses supported HT's interest in doing more to assist our student in career readiness. Faculty were reluctant to committing to do more than they think they are doing to contribute but believed that there was more that could be done.





### **Academic Program Alignment with 21<sup>st</sup> Entry NACE Competencies Survey**

A survey determined by program these alignments were as determined by program faculty.

The findings suggested a great deal of alignment; however, there was ambiguity in terms of accurate alignment related to career readiness. Therefore, the committee felt that they needed further interpretation and faculty development to ensure a common understanding of the instructional contest through classes. Once identified, courses for each program would be to provide professional development for those faculty to ensure intended outcomes of student learning outcomes. You may review the results of the **Curriculum Alignment Survey (Appendix G)** in the appendices.

### **United Negro College Fund (UNCF) Career Pathways Initiative (CPI)**

To improve students' career placement at HBCUs and PBIs, UNCF created a 50-million-dollar grant fund to help institutions improve career readiness programs. HT is a CPI grant recipient. Led by the Dean of Enrollment Management, HT's CPI initiative, RAM Career Connections, focuses on pre-college engagement.

The program features a summer experience where students interact with local corporations, participate in start-up competition, and gain exposure to career

development principles. During the fall semester, students are placed in major-specific freshman seminar courses to gain skills valuable for 1st-year success and strengthen major-career connections. Participants also engage with peer career coaches and program staff during mandated monthly meetings. CPI students are also required to take advantage of internships and study abroad opportunities. The program core focuses on developing the 21st Century skills needed to improve students' post-graduate employability in their discipline area. Program staff is working on implementing badges to validate career readiness competencies.

### **Yes, We Must Coalition**

**The Yes, We Must Coalition (YWMC) (Appendix H)** comprises 31 independent, non-profit colleges and universities where the undergraduate enrollment is 50% or more Pell-eligible. The mission of YWMC is to increase student success for low-income students, especially career success after graduation. Through facilitated discussions, member colleges discovered that local employer partnerships and early and consistent career development experiences are pivotal to improving students' career placement outcomes. HTU is among the 18 schools committed to exploring and building effective employer engagement and career preparation models.

We joined forces with 18 of our colleagues to prepare and submit a grant to the Ascendum Foundation to convene to discuss ways to engage with employers to help the student achieve career success after graduation.

**Ascendum: Increasing Employer Engagement (Appendix I)** with Students Initiative we explored along with 18 of our member institutions

- how the work experiences that characterize the lives of all our students can be utilized for student learning
- what employers are saying about the need for professional preparation
- how reciprocal partnerships can be built with employers
- the role of employers in enhancing curriculum

Huston-Tillotson University engaged a team of five participants in the conference and discussion. The group consisted of an administrator, the director of career services, the director of professional development or (Center for Academic Innovation and Transformation (CAIT), and two faculty members, one from the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) and one from the School of Business and Technology (SBT).

The group was highly engaged in the conference, met several times during the event as a group, and brought back to the QEP Advisory Committee many ideas and best practices in Career Readiness. We were also able to do a significant amount of networking with both colleagues at other institutions doing this work and employers.





The 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Career Competencies Symposium (3.0), building on two previous events in 2017 and 2018, engaged attendees in approaches to implementing substantive, institutional-wide strategies for both beginners as well as those with competency initiatives already in place. The Symposium content and program design were based on four essential components:

- Conceptualizing and Planning – Establish a Plan
- Coalition Building – Stakeholder Engagement
- Resources – People, Money, Technology
- Assessment – Measuring Impact, Making Improvements

For beginners, a thorough introduction to the NACE Career Readiness Competencies, foundational competency implementation strategies, and a focus on campus-specific considerations provided attendees the opportunity to develop strategic action plans for their campus. For the intermediate/advanced, crowdsourcing for new ideas, learning from others' best practices, and strategies designed to enhance institutional effectiveness provide opportunities to advance existing and on-going competency initiatives.

Sessions facilitated meaningful sharing and collaboration among all attendees, accompanied by tailored discussions and activities to maximize sharing, learning, and strategic takeaways—institutions sending teams (career services, administrators, faculty, advisors, etc.).

- We participated in team collaboration sessions to develop/refine our campus implementation strategy. There were customized tracks tailored for beginners and intermediate/advanced attendees.
- There were also affinity group meet-ups that provided time to connect, share, and ideate with professionals in a similar role (career services, campus partners, faculty, vendors, and employers)
- Huston-Tillotson University invested in sending a team of individuals to participate and bring back information, best practices, and lessons learned to inform our Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP). Again, two different representatives from each of the academic areas attended along with the Director, CAIT, and the SACSCOC Liaison.

### **Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board 60X30 Initiative**

In 2015, Texas launched **60x30TX (Appendix J)** under the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB). The State's higher education strategic plan, which aims to position Texas among the highest achieving states in the country and maintain its global competitiveness, was the undergirding of this initiative. The 60x30 program is entirely student-centered: its overarching goal is "that 60 percent of young adults (25-34) in Texas will hold some postsecondary credential by 2030." The program also proposes that at least 550,000 students by 2030 will complete a certificate, associate, bachelor's, or masters from a Texas institution of higher education. It also proposes that graduates will have identifiable marketable skills regardless of principle, and students (statewide) will not graduate with debt exceeding 60 percent of their first-year wages.

Huston-Tillotson University holds a seat on the state advisory council for 60X30 at the request of its President. Each year, every institution in the State revisits its goals and contribute to the statewide initiative. HT has monitored its contribution through increased enrollment and graduation rates each year. However, the institution has done nothing to support its graduates' earning potential and associated with their discipline preparation. Therefore, a need exists if the institution expects to have a more meaningful impact on ultimate student success is defined by the 60X30 initiative.

### **EMSI/Equifax Partnership**

Before selecting the QEP topic, Academic Affairs, Alumni Affairs, and Career Services initiated a collaboration to redesign the exit interview instrument and consolidate the three initiatives into one device. They led to our further review of our alumni's employment data to determine if they were getting jobs in their discipline preparation and came upon a startling observation. Not only were students not receiving employment in their discipline areas with data reviewed from **senior exit reviews**

(Appendix K) and a workforce solutions database, but the average salary of our students in first destination employment was critically low.

This project helped us to discover the needs of graduates and issues with employment immediately after graduation. Administrators joined an initiative of the United Negro College Fund Career Pathways Project, which connected HBCUs with **EMSI and Equifax (Appendix L)** to receive over 15 years of graduates' employment data. EMSI is a research firm dedicated to using economic data to help higher education institutions improve post-graduate employment rates. Equifax, a credit reporting agency, provides updated income and employment data to help higher education institutions better understand graduate outcome metrics. The customized report revealed that more than 60% of graduates who majored in Business, Kinesiology, Education, Chemistry, and Criminal Justice are employed in their field within one year of graduation and have an average salary of \$62,000. On average, 56% of HTU's recent graduates are employed in their areas.

### Refining Scope

As a result of the robust body of knowledge and observations brought to the QEP Advisory team regarding College readiness, the discussion and ideas were abundant. Coupled with its work in reviewing previous QEP's that addressed the topic by member institutions and reviewing the literature on the subject (s), ideas were abundant. The committee discussed ways to narrow its project down to create a quality enhancement project that would be more manageable. Without a clear understanding of which of the NACE competencies were more valuable than others, the committee decided to look at some other internal data fields. They reviewed the NSSE Assessment data, which is administered by the institution every two years.

The **NSSE data in Table 1** provided three areas that aligned with the NACE Competencies. Specifically, in each NSSE assessment cycle, we look at our freshman and senior students and their performance in the following three areas that align with NACES Competencies.

Quantitative Reasoning, Collaborative Learning, and Quality of Interactions align with the competencies of Critical Thinking, Collaboration, and Teamwork, respectively. In the 2019 NSSE Survey (see Table 1), the HT freshman class showed a mean score of 21.7 in Quantitative Reasoning.

Falling shy of the NSSE Top 50% mean of 29.3 and significantly short of the NSSE Top 10% mean score of 30.8. By the senior year, interventions unidentified, our student's mean score rose by 13.1 points to a mean score of 34.8.

While exceeding the NSSE Top 50% of 31.3 and the NSSE Top 10% mean score of 32.7.

During our discussions, we could say that our students gained this growth through their academic programs. Most made claim to teaching students critical thinking skills. Perhaps our students acquired these skills through their interactions with co-curricular activities that they personally chose to engage. The problem is that we do not have the

Evidence to support either of these hypotheses. Suppose the institution is making this significant impact on student growth in this critical skill needed for graduate school success and their careers. In that case, the institution needs to understand where it is happening to replicate current and future students' success.

In Collaborative Learning, students learn while engaged with their peers and demonstrate collaboration skills when working to achieve a common goal. As freshmen, the 2019 NSSE data showed that the mean score for our students was 41.4.

At the freshman level, the HT student far exceeded their peers in the NSE 50% and Top 10% by 6 and 3.7 percentage points, respectively. Our students come to our university with a high level of ability in working with teams.

The senior year has moderate growth in this ability as the HT student gains an additional 3.6 points (from 41.4 to 45 percentage points). The HT student exceeded its NSSE 50% and Top 10% by 8.9 and 6.4 percentage points, respectively (36.1 and 38.6). While both peer groups' growth is slightly more than one percentage point by the senior year, the HT student increases markedly by more than 3.6 percentage points. Again, this gives cause to wonder, what are we doing to cause our students to grow in this critical skill set during their matriculation at HT?

Collaboration involves interpersonal skills. The students must be a team player, discuss, and work with others from diverse groups. Likewise, the students must be able to build strong relationships and effectively manage conflict. That is where the quality of one's interactions come into play. The last category that aligns with the NACE competencies found in the NSSE standards is the Quality of Interactions.

NSSE data for 2019 shows that the HT student comes to us with a 29.6 mean score in this category as a freshman. To our dismay, this score falls way short of the NSSE 50% peer group by 15.3 percentage points (44.9). Compared to the Top 10% NSSE peer group, which has a mean score of 47.1, the HT freshman has a mean score that falls 17.5 percentage points.

Comparatively, by the senior year, HT students scored a mean of 40.7. This tremendous growth represents an 11.1-point increase in the HT student mean. By the old year, the NSSE 50% peer group had only increased their mean score in this category by 0.3 percentage points, while the NSSE Top 10% also increased their mean score (47.4) by 0.3 percentage.

This data raises important questions for HT. While our student's performance in these vital competency areas, we are perplexed by the increases' causes. It is a good problem to have but we need to work with greater intention to create excellent interventions that will be sustainable and duplicable for current and future students' success. Likewise, determining how to translate this success into the results, we see for our students in graduate school and their careers and employment are critical to ensuring student success.

We set benchmarks in places where we could significantly impact our students' success in career readiness.


## Program Development

Several trends emerged from the information gathered by the committee. Administration, students, and employers were all concerned with career preparation in terms of employability.

Findings from partnerships, coalitions, and initiatives on careers and student success suggest that developing 21st Century Skills is key to improving employability. Discussions during conferences and professional convenings focused on defining, developing, validating, and documenting students' attainment of soft skills. Digital badging has proven to help many college graduate's narrow employment gaps. Based on research and preliminary information, the committee decided to narrow the initiative's focus on improving employability through digital badging and experiential learning.



Table 1: 2019 NSSE Comparative Data

		<b>NSSE 2019 Engagement Indicators</b> Comparisons with High-Performing Institutions Huston-Tillotson University						
<b>Comparisons with Top 50% and Top 10% Institutions</b>								
While NSSE's policy is not to rank institutions (see <a href="https://nsse.indiana.edu/links/PNP">nsse.indiana.edu/links/PNP</a> ), the results below are designed to compare the engagement of your students with those attending two groups of institutions identified by NSSE <sup>a</sup> for their high average levels of student engagement:								
(a) institutions with average scores placing them in the top 50% of all 2018 and 2019 NSSE institutions, and								
(b) institutions with average scores placing them in the top 10% of all 2018 and 2019 NSSE institutions.								
While the average scores for most institutions are below the mean for the top 50% or top 10%, your institution may show areas of distinction where your average student was as engaged as (or even more engaged than) the typical student at high-performing institutions. A check mark (✓) signifies those comparisons where your average score was at least comparable <sup>b</sup> to that of the high-performing group. However, the presence of a check mark does not necessarily mean that your institution was a member of that group.								
It should be noted that most of the variability in student engagement is within, not between, institutions. Even "high-performing" institutions have students with engagement levels below the average for all institutions.								
<b>First-Year Students</b>								
Theme	Engagement Indicator	HT Mean	Your first-year students compared with					
			NSSE Top 50%		NSSE Top 10%			
			Mean	Effect size	✓	Mean	Effect size	✓
Academic Challenge	Higher-Order Learning	34.4	39.3	-.38		41.0 *	-.51	
	Reflective and Integrative Learning	38.4	36.8	.14	✓	38.8	-.03	✓
	Learning Strategies	37.6	39.9	-.16		42.5	-.34	
	Quantitative Reasoning	21.7	29.3 *	-.50		30.8 **	-.60	
Learning with Peers	Collaborative Learning	41.4	35.4 *	.44	✓	37.7	.27	✓
	Discussions with Diverse Others	37.1	41.3	-.28		43.2	-.43	
Experiences with Faculty	Student-Faculty Interaction	20.7	24.9	-.28		28.0 *	-.47	
	Effective Teaching Practices	29.9	40.6 ***	-.81		42.7 ***	-.91	
Campus Environment	Quality of Interactions	29.6	44.9 ***	-1.33		47.1 ***	-1.48	
	Supportive Environment	26.3	38.1 ***	-.90		40.1 ***	-1.05	
<b>Seniors</b>								
Theme	Engagement Indicator	HT Mean	Your seniors compared with					
			NSSE Top 50%		NSSE Top 10%			
			Mean	Effect size	✓	Mean	Effect size	✓
Academic Challenge	Higher-Order Learning	41.5	41.8	-.02	✓	43.0	-.11	
	Reflective and Integrative Learning	44.4	39.9	.37	✓	41.6	.23	✓
	Learning Strategies	45.7	40.8	.34	✓	42.6	.22	✓
	Quantitative Reasoning	34.8	31.3	.22	✓	32.7	.13	✓
Learning with Peers	Collaborative Learning	45.0	36.1 **	.63	✓	38.6 *	.47	✓
	Discussions with Diverse Others	43.1	42.0	.07	✓	43.5	-.03	✓
Experiences with Faculty	Student-Faculty Interaction	31.0	29.9	.07	✓	33.9	-.18	
	Effective Teaching Practices	32.5	41.8 *	-.68		43.5 **	-.81	
Campus Environment	Quality of Interactions	40.7	45.2	-.38		47.4 *	-.56	
	Supportive Environment	35.9	34.8	.08	✓	37.0	-.08	✓

Notes: Results weighted by institution-reported sex and enrollment status (and institution size for comparison groups); Effect size: Mean difference divided by the pooled standard deviation; \*p < .05, \*\*p < .01, \*\*\*p < .001 (2-tailed).

a. Precision-weighted means (produced by Hierarchical Linear Modeling) were used to determine the top 50% and top 10% institutions for each Engagement Indicator from all NSSE 2018 and 2019 institutions, separately by class. Using this method, Engagement Indicator scores of institutions with relatively large standard errors were adjusted toward the mean of all students, while those with smaller standard errors received smaller corrections. As a result, schools with less stable data—even those with high average scores—may not be among the top scorers. NSSE does not publish the names of the top 50% and top 10% institutions because of our commitment not to release institutional results and our policy against ranking institutions.

b. Check marks are assigned to comparisons that are either significant and positive, or non-significant with an effect size > .10.

### III. IMPROVING STUDENT LEARNING AND SUCCESS

## Measuring Student Learning Outcomes

When determining what is needed by students to be successful, there are three perspectives. The first is that of employers. What employers consider essential, significant, or necessary in the job market is rapidly changing. Influenced by the boundless growth in the technology industry, among other parameters, what is needed changes seamlessly in the world of work. What higher education and educators think student needs is on a different perspective level. Students expect that what they need to be employable and enjoy the career they pay so bountifully for will be provided by the University of their choice. In pursuit of what employers consider the most important of the essential skills competencies the signals are even more mixed, as observed by **Stewart, Wall, and Marchiniec (2016)**.

Faced with the challenge of focusing on what would bring about the most significant impact on the HT student, the faculty, staff, and students were even more perplexed. While some crossover exists between the essential skills of any liberal education person, they discovered many standard terms. A Survey of HT faculty found numerous overlaps with the stated NACE Competencies and their pedagogical instructions. The question is, while the same words exist, do they mean the same. It is how the student manifests the interpretation of the workplace skills that will call for some transfer of skills. Therefore, as the educators in this situation, we must do the instructional integration needed to ensure meaningful instructions and implementation of the essential abilities works to benefit our students.

In a survey conducted by the **National Association of College and Educators (NACE)**, the top five soft skills employers look for on a candidate's resume are: Leadership (80.1%), teamwork (78.9%), *written communication (70.2%)*, *problem-solving (70.2%)*, and *verbal communication (68.9%)* (NACE, 2016, p. 31). Hart Research Associates found employers believe the following to be the top five most important skills when hiring college grads: *Verbal communication (85%)*, *teamwork (83%)*, *written communication (82%)*, *ethical judgment and decision making (81%)*, and *critical/analytical thinking/reasoning (81%)* (**Hart Research Associates, 2015, p. 4**). A similar survey conducted by the Society of Human Resources Management (SHRM) lists the top five applied skills employers believe college graduates lack as: *Professionalism/work ethic (43%)*, *relationship building/soft skills (29%)*, *business acumen (28%)*, *written communications (26%)*, and *critical thinking/problem-solving (26%)*. Leadership came in at number six (18%), with teamwork/collaboration number eight (12%).

Data for the *Job Outlook 2017* survey were collected from August 5, 2016, through October 4, 2016. A total of 169 surveys were returned—a 17 percent response rate. The *Job Outlook 2017* report is available to members through MyNACE.

**Figure 1: Employers rate the essential need of the career readiness competencies**

COMPETENCIES	WEIGHTED AVERAGE RATING
Critical Thinking/Problem Solving	4.58
Professionalism/Work Ethic	4.56
Oral/Written Communications	4.43
Teamwork/Collaboration	4.43
Leadership	3.86
Digital Technology	3.78
Career Management	3.47
Global/Intercultural Fluency	2.85

Based on a 5-point scale where 1=Not essential; 2=Not very essential; 3=Somewhat essential; 4=Essential; 5=Absolutely essential. Source: *Job Outlook 2017*, National Association of Colleges and Employers

**Figure 2: Employers rate recent graduates on the eight career readiness competencies**

COMPETENCIES	WEIGHTED AVERAGE RATING
Teamwork/Collaboration	3.96
Digital Technology	3.92
Critical Thinking/Problem Solving	3.59
Professionalism/Work Ethic	3.43
Oral/Written Communications	3.41
Leadership	3.38
Career Management	3.09
Global/Intercultural Fluency	2.93

Based on a 5-point scale where 1=Not at all proficient; 2=Not very proficient; 3=Somewhat proficient; 4=Very proficient; 5=Extremely proficient. Source: *Job Outlook 2017*, National Association of Colleges and Employers

After a review, the literature and of **HT student internship assessments** for the Business, Communications, Criminal Justice, and Computer Science programs, it was concluded that Professionalism, Communication (oral and written), and Critical Thinking were the skills that we could best serve our students success and employability. We must ensure that our students are mastering these essential skills to a stronger degree if we are to empower them to be successful in their career and future employability.



## Professionalism

Why Professionalism?

Lots of people do not think about professionalism on a day-to-day basis. Today, the freedom of self-expression seems to be what is most important to many people, including students. Feeling comfortable in your skin often extends to what we wear and how we wear it. We can think of numerous instances in today's society that we see on television each day where professionalism seems insignificant. But as one gets closer to launching a professional career, the concept appears to acquire more importance (Brooks, **Ashley, (2019)**).

The key components of professionalism that we will emphasize through RAMSS are appropriate attire, strong communication skills, and ethical actions. The student will engage in course-embedded instructions, complete micro-credentials, and gain meaningful active learning experiences to acquire and demonstrate knowledge and acquisition.

We believe that if students display strong professional skills that he/she will break down the first barrier to their success. They will be able to get in the door and can demonstrate what they know and can do in an employment setting graduate school.

## Communications

One of the essential workplace skills is that of communication. NACE and many other career readiness organizations list Communications (oral and written) in their top five skills necessary for Career Success (**Sanders, G.I. 2020**). Communications in the workplace expand beyond merely the ability to hold a conversation or write a letter. Our students will need to share and exchange ideas and information and engage in business communication strategies formally and informally.

While 62% of students think that graduates have adequate oral communication skills, only 28% of employers concur. Hart Research Association (2015). Our faculty will need to help ensure that students can distinguish between communications and business communication.

For regular classroom teachers of communication, professional training they will receive during the Summer Summits will help them make the distinction through the instructions and advisement they provide for students.

## Critical Thinking

Among the top five most critical skills for students to acquire for a career, readiness is Critical Thinking. If employees want to build strategies that make them better at their jobs, they must develop sound critical thinking skills. According to a Career Guide published by Indeed, here are some reasons why critical thinking is essential in the workplace:

- *Some professions require it.*
- *Decision-making improves.*
- *Critical thinkers are happier.*

- *Being well-informed is a bonus.*
- *It encourages self-reflection.*
- *It bolsters the knowledge economy.*

### **Some professions require it**

*For career success in law, education, research, medical, finance and many other career fields, it's important to display critical thinking skills. It's an essential facet of any profession where the goal is to deduce information objectively without bias, analyze the context, solve creative problems and come up with realistic solutions.*

### **Decision-making improves**

*Applying critical thinking helps you make decisions that require a lot of thought. Big, life-changing decisions, like whether or not to make a career move, are aided by critical thinking, which encourages you to research and favor objective logic over your initial emotional response.*

### **Critical thinkers are happier**

*Critical thinking helps people better understand themselves, their motivations and goals. When you can deduce information to find the most important parts and apply those to your life, you can change your situation and promote personal growth and overall happiness.*

### **Being well-informed is a bonus**

*In an age when people have more access to information than ever before, critical thinkers excel at research and finding the most important pieces of information that make them well-informed on any given topic. This is helpful in workplace discussions and when positioning yourself as a thought-leader in your industry.*

### **It encourages self-reflection**

*Critical thinkers have the inherent ability to see challenges from several perspectives. By deflecting the reaction to defend their personal beliefs, critical thinkers are more self-reflective and can change their minds and opinions in light of new information.*

Many ways can develop critical thinking in students. Every HT states program that they deliver critical thinking as a part of their curriculum in the **competency alignment survey** (Appendix G). The challenge for RAMSS will be to equip faculty to think, learn, and deliver instructions like case studies, role play, and cooperative group learning. These instructional modalities will help the student demonstrate their understanding in a career/work like environment to ensure the acquisition of the knowledge and ability to use critical thinking in the workplace. We will also challenge faculty and staff to help students develop their resume in a way that reflects their ability to think critically.

## Measuring Student Success

We will use various measures to ascertain the level of accomplishment that our students reach in the preparation that we provide. The measurements are both direct and indirect. They are embedded at each level of the student matriculation to reflect progressively more rigor throughout their program using Blooms' Taxonomy.

Foundationally, we will begin with the freshman orientation classes (UNVI 1101 and UNVI 1102). The next level will be in the ENGL 1301 and ENGL1302 courses and the COMM 1315, usually taken at the sophomore level. At the Junior level, each academic program will identify classes to demonstrate competencies. The internship course that may be at the junior or senior year will help to demonstrate competencies. Course competencies will be collected using common rubrics that we will design or improved to assess course competencies. These rubrics will be developed or refined at the Summer Summit by like faculty. All assessments will be submitted and received by the QEP Office at least seventy -two hours after administration. We will analyze findings will into a report for making recommendations for improvements on Assessment Day. During the first week of each Fall semester, faculty, staff and the Assessment Advisory Committee will participate in the Assessment Day events. The event will culminate with a meal and awards for outstanding achievements presented to faculty, staff, and student by category.

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Outcomes, targets, and measures in each of the three areas of student learning exist.

We have also set forth expectations and measures for our faculty and staff who work directly with students to achieve the same goal. With an intentional delivery of these competencies, we anticipate proficiency levels in our students, faculty, and staff to increase. As a university, HT desires to be an institution of distinction in student success for career readiness. The assessment plan is in Section X Assessment.

We have also set forth expectations and measures for our faculty and staff who work directly with students to achieve the same goal. Intentional delivery of these competencies will support the achievement levels of our students. HT desires to become a University of distinction in preparing students for success in careers related to the discipline that we prepare them for in our academic programs. (see Table 2, and Section X of this document Entitled Assessment.

## IV. WHY CAREER READINESS?

### The Skill Gaps and Employability

According to the Strada-Gallup Education Consumer Survey, 85, 000 adults were asked what their reasons were for pursuing higher education. A little over half of the participants fifty-eight percent (58%) noted that getting a job was the basic most influential reason for completing a college degree (**Gallup and Lumina Foundation (2018)**). On the in an earlier student conducted by the same organization in 2014 in an effort to deconstruct perceptions and beliefs of and within higher education, ninety-six percent of chief academic offices at universities believed that their institutions properly prepared their graduates for the world of work. The also found during that study the only 11% of business leaders agreed that college graduates were adequately prepared for the workplace (**Gallup and Lumina Foundation (2014)**).

Over the last decade, there has been an increase in the number of employers who report difficulty recruiting employees for highly skilled positions that require college degrees (Cappelli, 2015; Matos, Galinsky & Bond, 2017). The difficulty stems from the lack of candidates with the right skills required for the job. While this incongruence could be associated with individuals lacking skills, it can also be that higher education preparation has not been able to keep pace with the rapidly changing needs of employers. The skills gap could also be a result of perceptions. More than 60% of college graduates think they are prepared for the workplace, while only 37% of employers agree (Hart Research Associates, 2015). Misaligned perceptions even exist when there is a comparison between administrators and employers. According to a survey administered by Gallup and the Lumina Foundation, 96% of chief academic officers believed that their institution prepared its graduates for the workplace success,

while only 11% of employers agreed that college graduates have adequate employment preparation (2014).

There are several factors that contribute to misperceptions among higher education stakeholders. Wolf and Booth note that the belief that teaching workplace skills is counterproductive to the mission of higher education is major contributor to the skill gap (2017). This belief stifles innovation and change within curriculums and courses. The skills gap can also be linked to the lack of verification of soft skills (Wolf & Booth, 2017). The traditional transcript only provides a summary of academic milestones and not specific skills attain in courses. Moreover, students lack skills may be attributed to the limited opportunities in the classroom to apply skills in a real-world context (Wolf & Booth, 2017). With the various perceptions of workplace readiness, there is an opportunity to present students, administrators and employers with an objective means to demonstrate that students have the right skills and abilities to secure and sustain post-graduate employment.

While there is a variety of beliefs in skills attainment, employers are consistent in which skills they value most that college graduates lack. Business leaders agree that college graduates lack basic skills or soft skills the most (Cappelli, 2015). Soft skills are non-technical competencies associated with one's personality, attitude, and ability to interact effectively with others (Stewart, Wall, & Marciniac, 2016). Among the top skills employers' value are: verbal and written communication, collaboration, critical thinking, problem solving, and decision making (NACE, 2016; SHRM, 2015).

Closing the skills gap is only part of the solution to ensure that students find post-graduate employment. Helping students improve their employability is another comprehensive, long-term solution. Employability is the ability to find, create and sustain work and learning across lengthening working lives and multiple work settings (Smith, Martin, Bell, Bennett & McAlpine, 2018; Wolf & Booth, 2017). This definition does not undermine the traditional mission of higher education as it inherently values critical thinking, self-awareness, and life-long learning as does post-secondary education. With the ever-growing discussion on the value of higher education in the wake of rising costs and dissatisfaction with post-graduate employment, institutions can improve the employability through intentionality, industry partnerships, and curriculum innovation. Smith et al. identified characteristics of "high-performing employability-focused university" (2018). These qualities include:

- Top administrators strategically inform all stakeholders and encourage partnerships that exists inside and outside of the curriculum and that are focused on career development and employability.
- Curriculum and instruction practices should be informed by industry, feature high quality employability and career development practices, take advantage of dynamic and innovative career readiness models and map/benchmark competencies.

- Message on employability should be clear and consistent so that internal and external stakeholders understand the goals and desired outcomes.
- Partnerships with employers, alumni and students should be cultivated be beneficial to all parties.
- Employability development approach should be evidence based, feature rigorous assessment, continuous improvement strategies (Smith et al., 2018).

Focusing on employability address the needs of students, administrators, and employers. Improving employability not only helps students find immediate employment after graduation, but also helps to insulate them against the evolving workforce for a sustained career success.

### Frameworks that Address Skills Gap and Employability

This issue of accountability for employability in Higher Education is growing to an extent that there are several major organizations addressing employability from various aspects. The Lumina Foundation is currently piloting the **Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP) (2014)**. The DQP assists any type of postsecondary institution to clearly define learning outcomes in terms of soft skills for any degree level. It is a framework that can be customized to any degree or institution. Tools associated with the DQP help administrators and faculty in curriculum mapping, creating learning outcomes and articulating specific knowledge, skills, and abilities related to a degree. The DQP presents five categories of essential learning outcomes: Specialized Knowledge, Broad and Integrative Knowledge, Intellectual Skills, Applied and Collaborative Learning, Civic and Global Learning.

Like the DQP, the Essential Learning Outcomes (ELO) from the American Association of Colleges (AACU) and Universities, provides institutions with standardized learning outcomes and rubrics to help faculty integrate and evaluate soft skills in any course (**American Association of Colleges and Universities, 2017**). The Essential Learning Outcomes are derived from AACU's LEAP initiative which advocates the importance of a liberal education to the nation's economic progression. Learning outcomes are grouped in four categories: Knowledge of Human Cultures, Intellectual and Practical Skills, Personal and Social Responsibility, and Integrative and Applied Learning. AACU's VALUE initiative produced rubrics to help faculty assess each standard within the four categories.

While the Lumina and AACU focused on learning outcomes in the classroom, National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) focused on both curricular and co-curricular learning experiences. Through extensive research and collaboration with college career services, human resource professionals and employers, NACE developed eight (8) competencies to define career readiness competencies include: Critical Thinking/Problem Solving, Oral/Written Communications, Teamwork/Collaboration, Digital Technology, Leadership, Professionalism/Work Ethic, Career Management, and Global/Intercultural Fluency (National Association of Colleges

and Employers, 2019). Related tools include activities for incorporating competencies as well as assessment examples.

The Connecting Credentials Framework (CCF) was created by Lumina to address the need uncovered by the Degree Qualifications Profile. The DQP lacks a connection to all degrees and credentials awarded in Higher Education. The CCF includes competencies that are reflected through badges, certificates, and micro-credentials. It is organized into two learning domains: knowledge and skills. Learning achievement is presented as a range of complexity, breadth, and depth. The framework can help to evaluate existing credentials as well as create new credentials.

Education Design Lab's (EDL) mission is to uncover gaps in the education-to-work ecosystem. One factor that differentiates EDL from other frameworks is the focus on technology. A primary initiative of EDL, is to validate 21st Century Learning Skills through digital badging. EDL presents eight (8) skills that are essential to employability: Intercultural Fluency, Resiliency, Empathy, Oral Communication, Initiative, Collaboration, Creative Problem Solving and Critical Thinking (Education Design Lab, 2019). The badging toolkit assists institutions with implementing digital badges that allow students to showcase soft skills attained inside and outside of the classroom. The badging toolkit includes rubrics and assessments that can be integrated in various learning management systems.

### **Why a Focus on Employability at HT?**

The true test of how an institution has fulfilled its promise to guide a student to success is determined by what the student can do with what they have learned while earning their degrees at a higher education institution. If the student has learned their theoretical pedagogy is indeed significant. But what can they do with that degree, that learning to take them to the next level whether it be graduate school, a career, employment, or an entrepreneur? HT believes that we have a responsibility to help ensure that our student not only know their pedagogy but are equipped with skills that will empower them to engage with society in a way leads to their success in life.

An initial review of our student employment data based on senior exit reviews showed that many of our students earned their degrees only to land customer service level, discipline related employment in their first destination jobs. These jobs showed that our students were earning mid-30 thousand dollars which is well below what is expected of a college graduate.

**Donald Moore, (2020)**, in his June 2, 2020 article in the Bloomberg Press offered the following observation:

*"In September, the jobless rate for black workers with a college degree was 3.1%, higher than that for white workers of all educational levels, at 2.2%, according to the Economic Policy Institute. Among black college graduates who found work, almost 40% were in jobs that typically would not require a college*

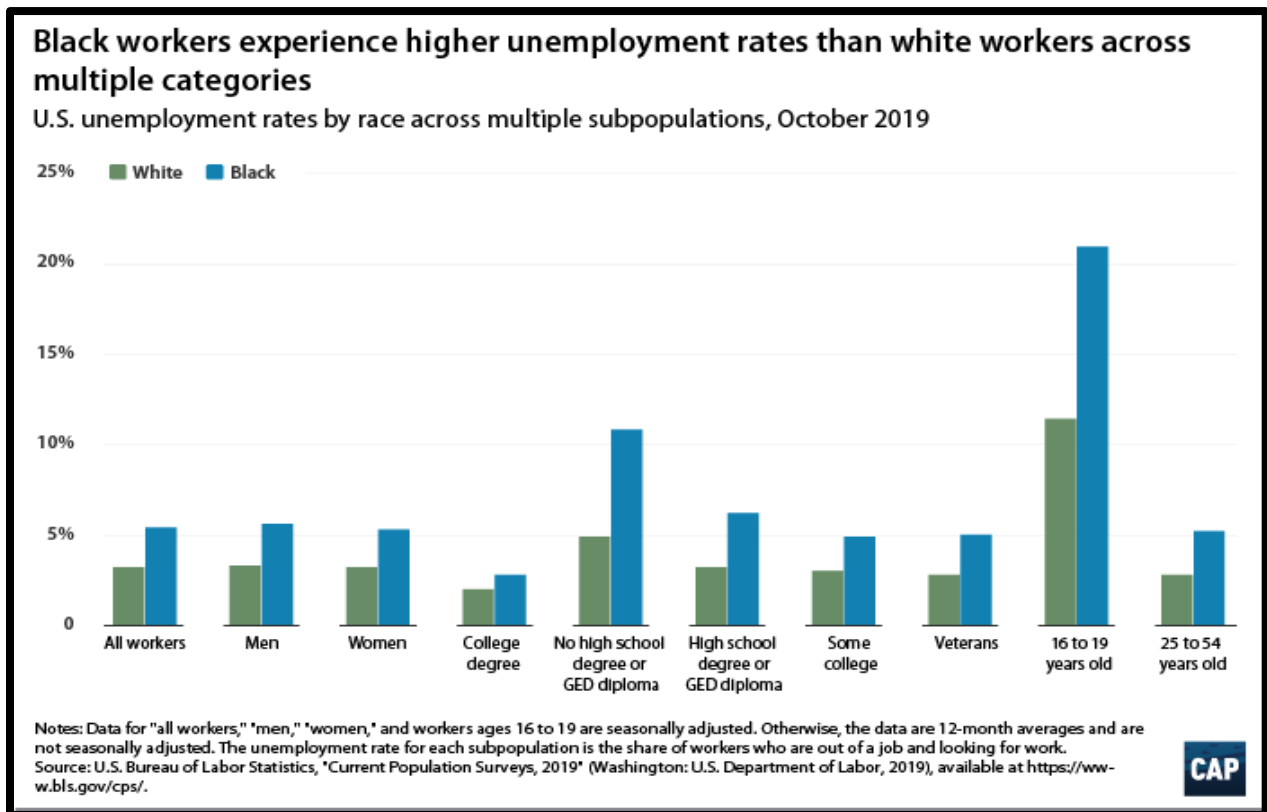
degree. The median income for black college graduates was \$36,000, compared with \$40,000 for their white counterparts.”

We are not oblivious to the fact that despite a record 109 months of uninterrupted job growth in the US labor market, that African American workers often end up with the lower-paid jobs across multiple categories of educational preparation. (Weller, Christian E. 2019). The Figure 1 below shows the disparity by educational level.

To quote the author of this study Christian Weller,

“Among college graduates, for example, the Black unemployment rate averaged 2.8 percent from November 2018 to October 2019, 40 percent higher than the 2 percent rate for white college graduates in the same period. (see Figure 3) While college attainment helps all workers get more access to better-paying, stable jobs with better benefits, the advantages are not evenly distributed.”

Figure 3: Comparative Unemployment by Level of Education



Through this initiative, we aim to address those essential skills that will support our student’s ability to earn and maintain career employment at a greater rate thereby closing the gap for students who graduate from HT. Students will have a better opportunity to show what they can do on a job if they can get in the door. With increased knowledge and skills in the selected essential NACE competencies of



Professionalism, Communications (oral and written), Problem Solving and Teamwork, the HT student will be equipped to earn employment in careers aligned with their majors at salaries that will be representative of a college graduate.

## V. LITERATURE REVIEW AND BEST PRACTICES

The literature that undergirds employability and career readiness is abundant and based on some significant research theories that have proven to be tried and true over the years. A few of these theories are outlined below:

### **Career Development Theories**

Major theories that ground career coaching and counseling practices and inform career services were found by the QEP Advisory Council through their work. Career development and readiness can be viewed through three perspectives: psychology, social cognitive, and self-concept. Each explains an important factor that contributes to choosing the optimal career path (Leung, S., 2008).

### **Psychological: Holland Theory**

John Holland's Theory posits that an individual's personality is related to vocational interests and that vocational interests can be condensed into six categories. "The six typologies are typologies, which are Realistic (R), Investigative (I), Artistic (A), Social (S), Enterprising (E), and Conventional (C)." Through a standardized assessment, a three-letter code is generated to represent the individual's top three interests, with the first being the strongest interest which would play a primary role in career decision making and the remaining interests would provide supplemental insight. The benefit of selecting an environment that is congruent with personality yields a more meaningful work experience and the environment naturally enhances the values, skills, and abilities of the individual. Conversely, choosing a vocation that is dissimilar to personality, skills, and values can leave an individual unfulfilled and ultimately unhappy. The six personality/environment types are illustrated as a hexagonal figure in which adjacent typologies are closely related to each other, while typologies across from each other have less in common. The proximity of each typology denotes the degree of consistency. A high degree of consistency signifies that the individual is ready to begin specifying career paths and job possibilities.

### **Decision: Social Cognitive**

Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive (1986), Theory proposes that "an individual's behavior is a result of personal attributes, environmental factors, and vicarious situations." Self-efficacy is the central element of this construct. Self-efficacy is the belief in one's ability to accomplish a specific task. When self-efficacy levels and abilities are in equilibrium, individuals are attracted to tasks they are confident that they can complete. If self-efficacy levels are slightly above abilities, individuals may be inclined to take on more challenging tasks. Self-efficacy is impacted by past performances, peer experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiology and emotional factors. When it comes to careers, individuals choose paths in which they feel they can

succeed. Goal setting is extremely important to developing an optimal level of self-efficacy, because accomplishing realistic goals with sufficient difficulty, can increase self-efficacy and enhance abilities. Job training, internships, and mentoring are examples of practical ways to help improve self-efficacy and career decision making.

### **Development: Career Maturity or Self-concept Theory**

According to Donald Super (1990), self-concept is a product of complex interactions among several factors, including physical and mental growth, personal experiences, and environmental characteristics and stimulation. Super proposes that selecting a career is parallel to a person applying self-concept. Meaning as one develops and matures physically, mentally, and emotionally, so should their career choice. As one ages and grows, self-concept evolves. Super proposed a five-stage career maturity framework that coincides with the natural stages of life: Growth, Exploration, Establishment, Maintenance, Decline.

### **Additional Practices Built on Career Development Strategies**

The practices outlined below have been developed based on the theoretical framework outlined above. A few that are of significance to this project are as following:

#### **Active Learning**

The basic premise upon which the Active Learning strategy is built is that “students learn more when they participate in the process of learning.” Used in career readiness, students are interactive with the learning process with the information they are learning, they perform better. According to Claire Hoendoorn, ( ), New York City College of Technology, Active Learning, unlike where student sit passively while listening to lectures and taking notes, research shows that most students achieve better learning results when engaging in their instructional processes at The OpenLab at City Tech: A place to learn, work, and share.

#### **Work-based Learning**

**Work-Based Learning (WBL)** consists of three key components as determined by federal legislation through the “**Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Act (Perkins V)**”, the “**Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 (WIOA)**”, and the “**Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA)**”; policy literature, and recent research. The three components are 1) classroom and workplace learning, 2) application of academic, technical, and employability skills in the work setting, and 3) support for classroom or workplace mentors.

Through the alignment of classroom and workplace learning the opportunities for students to receive training, learn skills, and gain experiences in all aspects of the workplace is achieved. These experiences allow for simultaneous mapping of academic content with practical workplace and tasks, with time for student reflection on their experiential learning in real time. As simple as this sounds, efficient and effective

use of this strategy calls for instructor training on how to integrate WBL experiences into their curriculum and instruction.

The second component of the WBL strategy calls for the application of academic, technical, and employability skills in the work setting. This means that WBL's are based on rigorous academic and employability skills. They include in-depth hands-on work experiences with activities that include a range of experiences from career awareness and exploration to career preparation and training.

Finally, the WBL strategy requires support for classroom or workplace mentors. It requires the promotion of student engagement through mentoring from supervisors, instructors, and career services. It provides opportunity for students to develop relationships and network with industry and community professionals. Supervision and evaluation of the learning experience is key to the success of the student. As a wraparound to ensure quality at every level of the experience the offering of training for mentors on providing students with industry-specific support, general career, and education guidance, personal and professional growth that are key components of a successful initiative.

### **Advising, Counseling and Coaching**

Since the inception of Higher Education, educators and administrators have been in constant search of development strategies to meet the needs of students. The field of Psychology and sociology have contributed to many of the theoretical models that are currently being used since early in the twentieth century (**Evans, Forney, Guido, ( ) Patton, & Renn, (2010)**). From the early 1950s through the early 1990's research-based contributions have been made by everyone from **Erikson to Chickering and Reisser, ( )** as they have explored the development of identity in adolescence. **McWilliams, A.E. and Beam, L.R. ( )**. As of late, researchers have noted that these theories are not a one-size-fit all model. Allison McWilliams and Lauren Beam describe the development of the Wake Forest University Mentoring Resource Center in their efforts to create a campus-wide mentoring culture using strategic partnerships, Career Education and Counseling, Residence Life and Academic Advisement. (McWilliams, A.E., and Beam, L.R. ( )). Their discussion of this highly collaborative model came with lots of challenges and opportunities for the University. They discussed lessons learned and aspects of how their strategy was influenced by other developmental models that enhanced the effectiveness of their program.

It is worth noting that just as research theory in the areas of advising, counseling and coaching have evolved over the past forty to fifty years, so have the challenges faced by students. In full disclosure, if institutions are to develop programs that are effective in their environment, keeping a finger on the pulse of this research is critical. Career counseling only has moved from ensuring a basic fluency of the soft skills needed for success calls for not only an eye on polishing students but equipping them to be able to thrive in an ever-changing economy, technological and communications innovations, and increased competition for positions with those prepared at other universities.

**Hackney, and Comier (2005)**, suggested that career development is defined as “a lifelong process involving psychological, sociological, educational, economic, and physical factors, as well as chance factors that interact to influence the career of the individual.” They suggest that career strategies and tools used that facilitate concepts such as facilitating educational career panels, networking events, and self-assessment tools are used with students and that they include one-on-one career counseling relationships. They also recommend the use of role-playing in interviewing activities helps prepare students to talk with employers and helps them learn how to deal with uncomfortable conversations.

The concepts of academic and career coaching are relatively new but can be used very effectively in preparing students for success. A byproduct of coaching that has been realized by those who utilize this strategy is that they have experienced increased retention and academic success rates among students. **Bettinger and Baker (2011)**, in their study found that strategies used in academic coaching and the creation of an individualized action plan while using worksheets to practice skills such as time management are highly effective strategies.

No strategy has transformed more than the concept of advisement in higher education advisement. Once identified as a strategy that was devoted to a focus on student learning and educational experiences, it has expanded to a strategy to help connect students' academic interests and skills with personal and career aspirations. Depending upon the size and capacity of various universities, the way that academic advisement looks different from one institution to another. According to Pardee, 2004, many smaller universities are defragmenting advisement and equipping their faculty members with skills to merge academic and career advisement efforts.

### Curriculum Integration

Since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, theorist such as those outlined in this report have been engaged in defining integrated curriculum. This recently emerging strategy has been loosely used by many in curriculum design. Many have come to agree that there are four categories interdisciplinary work. The four categories according to (Murdoch, 2007) are 1) Integration of Experiences, 2) Social Integration, 3) Integration of Knowledge, and 4) Integration as a Curriculum Design. He defines each as follows:

- **Integration of Experiences** is defined as one's experiences, perceptions, beliefs, and values about others and the world we live in.
- **Social Integration** consists of the people that make up our school and its community.
- **Integration of Knowledge** references the knowledge that all students engage regardless of the subject area.
- **Integration as a Curriculum Design** refers to the specific kind of curriculum design engaged.

### ***Micro credentialing/Badging***

Micro credentialing is the demonstration of a specific skill, and a badge certifying that micro-credential becomes part of an individual's digital file. While initially created in the world of technology to demonstrate computer programming skills, the concept has expanded to various other skills-based learning platforms. Students are required to engage in instructional programs, demonstrate achievement of the competencies required, and receive a credential to verify their competencies.

There are many organizations that are now offering micro credentialing in the career readiness arena. Those that have been explored by the HT QEP Advisory committee consist of the following:

#### **EdDesign Lab**

The **Education Design Lab (Appendix O)** is working with over 135 colleges, 60 plus employers, in 10 regions, and thousands of learners who need education programs and pathways that better serve their futures through micro credentialing. Their core belief is that education outcomes are being measured by competencies, not degrees. They see the lines between school and work as blurring. Further, they promote that colleges and even high schools are starting to unlock skills from degrees, making them more explicit to learners and employers. (see attachment).

#### **Workforce Solutions**

##### **IBM**

**The IBM Credentials (Appendix P):** Badges and Certifications focuses on certification skills and accelerating the careers of workers through a fully portable and digital object that when clicked with surface vital information such as what was required to earn the credential. It assesses the achievement of the user and what outcomes were achieved. (see attachment).

##### **Google (Appendix Q)**

Google offers a robust set of career readiness and employability soft or essential skills through Google Career Certificates platform. The advantages that they offer over their competitors are as following (see attachment):

- A pathway to jobs: Certificate completers can directly connect with a group of top employers.
- Become job-ready for in-demand, high-paying roles: Qualify for jobs across fields with median average annual salaries of over \$55,000.
- Earn a certificate that helps you stand out: You can share your Google Career Certificate on your LinkedIn profile and on printed resumes, CVs, and other documents to help stand out to employers.

- Gain access to career resources: Learners will have access to resources to facilitate their job search and interview preparation.

### **Accenture**

The company has equipped more than 3 million people with the skills to get a job or build a business using their digital badging program. They are continually evolving Skills to Succeed to meet changing market needs and to support people throughout their career life cycle. (see attachment).

### **E-Portfolios**

An E-portfolio is a collection of pieces that **showcases your skills and past works in a specific area**. E-portfolios are being used increasingly to demonstrate to potential employers the demonstration of both content knowledge and the achievement of soft skills or essential skills that are critical to career readiness.

### **Co-curricular Transcripts**

The Co-Curricular Transcript is a record of a student's involvement in educational, career readiness experience, and demonstration of achievement of competencies. This strategy is relatively new to the world of career readiness but can be used as a tremendous resource for students when demonstrating their competencies their co-curriculum endeavors.

While we do not plan to utilize all these strategies, we have selected those that seem to align with our needs and the project for Huston-Tillotson University. They will be discussed in the next section as we discuss our Action Plan.

## VI. ACTION PLAN

### Developing Campus-wide Career Readiness Knowledgebase

#### RAMSS Program Components

##### Curriculum Integration

Curriculum Integration requires that faculty who teach courses where standard assessments will be utilized to determine student achievement of key NACE competencies will ensure that the already identified competencies being taught in their classes meet the expectations of career readiness. Some courses will use micro credentialing learning activities.

##### Active Learning

Requirements for mini-internship experiences both on and off-campus will be required of each student. Experiences may be work-study (on or off campus), service learning, volunteer experiences, that are 15-20 contact hours in length. Students will be evaluated by their assigned advisor, coach, or mentor) and the supervising of the experience for demonstration of specific career readiness. Competencies.

##### Advising, Counseling, and Coaching

During matriculation in the UNVI 1102 course each student will be assigned an advisor, counselor, or coach using a matching process. This individual (after successful completion of training) will be responsible for the supervision of the student in their mini-internship assignment. The individual may remain the student's advisor, counselor, or coach during the remainder of their matriculation. This process will be monitored by the QEP Coordinator.

The work-based experience will take place during the second semester of the FYE course. The process will mirror a service-learning project where students will learn in a work-based environment.

##### Work Based Learning (Internships)

The final internship will take place during the junior or senior year. Students must complete the requirements internship per the program description during their junior year or during the Senior Seminar course. A common assessment rubric will be utilized with all instructors receiving training on the use of the rubric and expectations of student at the senior level.



## Digital Badging

RAMSS will feature a university-wide digital badge initiative in which students will earn two of the [number] standard badges each academic year. The initiative will utilize Education Design Labs Badge Toolkit. The toolkit provides foundational knowledge, activities, and assessments for eight distinct badges that represent top soft skills needed for success in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century workplace. All activities and assessments will be customized to fit the needs of HTU while the integrity of each badge. Students will have the opportunity to earn [number] badges, namely, Initiative, Collaboration, Critical Thinking, Resilience, Oral Communication, Empathy, Intercultural Fluency, and Creative Problem Solving. In addition, HTU will work to design additional badges for career management and digital technology. The process of attaining a badge will be integrated with specific courses. Badges will be issued via Canvas, the university learning management system.

## Faculty Training

A Summer Faculty Summit will be held the first two years of the program 2021 and 2022. All faculty and staff involved in the project will participate in a summer summit related overall career readiness and to their role (curriculum revision, advising, coaching mentoring, internship supervision and evaluation, micro credentialing, e-portfolio development, assessment, etc.).

## QEP Assessment Day

A QEP Assessment day will coincide with the Opening Faculty Institute during the first week of the fall semester each year of the QEP. Led by the Director of the QEP and the Office of Institutional Planning, Research and Assessment. This Assessment day to make sure that all assessments are submitted and to review the results and make recommendations for improvement in the program.

## Resource Integration

The institution has invested in several resources in preparation for this QEP that will be used to execute the program. A brief description of how they will be utilized along with a detail that can be found in the appendix.

- **Handshake (Appendix R)**  
Handshake has the latest jobs from employers hiring at your school.
- **PRESENCE Engagement Tracking) (Appendix S)**

Presence is a web and mobile software platform that helps you identify ways to increase student engagement, better allocate resources, enhance assessment practices, and promote opportunities, ultimately improving outcomes and retention.

- **Optimal Resume (Appendix T)**

A free resume service that is fast, easy to write produce with templates, resume samples, and provides discipline specific resume building tools. The product will assess the resume based on a preset rubric to determine its strength and areas that need improving. Students will begin using the tool during the Freshman Year in the Orientation course, build on their resume as they move through their coursework and receive a final assessment prior to the internship or senior seminar course. (Optimal Resume Information).

### **Curriculum Integration and Faculty Development**

Huston-Tillotson University, while a small University has a wide range of interest among its faculty in career readiness. Some faculty were engaged with the Career Pathway Initiative (CPI) grant and eagerly participated while gaining understanding of the relationship between what happens in the classroom and the ultimate results of the success of our students. There are others who see the relationship but view their engagement as only “added work or responsibility”. This QEP will transform the University’s thinking about that role as they engage in professional developed to help them learn how to expand their horizons to understand that curriculum integration helps them to be able to continue to deliver their instructions in more meaningful ways with their students. Ultimately every student who graduates will be “Ready to Attain Maximum Student Success (RAMSS) through this QEP initiative.

It was interesting that the results of an alignment survey conducted by the Advisory Committee in collaboration with the Office of Institutional Planning, Research and Assessment (OIPRA), faculty clearly identified that they covered many of the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) competencies throughout their programs. However, in discussions, these same faculty did not see that delivering instruction in Critical Thinking for example was equated to the essential skills needed for career readiness. Therefore, faculty training will help them see the relationships and modify their instructional modalities to accommodate student needs.\ across the spectrum of competencies that we will be covering for this project.

Redesigning how faculty engage with students in advisement and mentoring sessions is also key to the success of this QEP. Faculty will be provided the latest practices and methodologies of equipping their students with sound career readiness advise through training and summer summit activities. Faculty participating in the OEP training will be compensated for their work during the year and their participation in the Summer Summit. Workshops during the Summer Summit will include the following:

- Active Learning
- Instructional Integration
- Career Readiness Technology Tutorial
- Career Advisement/Counseling 101
- Using Career Assessments in the classroom

- The Power of Career readiness scaffolding by classification
- The Power of experiential learning in the classroom
- Using Common Rubric Training
- Using Micro Credentials

The QEP Assessment Day will be a way for the institution to give detailed attention to the results, progress, and need for improvements needed for the project. It will also be a day to celebrate success throughout the program.

## **Institutional Transformation**

HT like most of our peer universities has a small Career Services office. Staffed by one person, the office basically has to offer services on a build it they will come model. The Director engages with the academic program by providing once a year overviews of what the office has to offer and how it can help them when they need an internship or secure a job (often unrelated to their academic discipline area). The Office can not provide the level of needs that we have throughout the University.

We were able to manage a grant that was funded by the United Negro College Fund as a passthrough from the Lilly Foundation that on the surface introduced the University to student the concept of Career Readiness. The project severed a small segment of the population (STEM Majors) providing them with training in employment exposure. The program included some faculty awareness training and helped HT cultivate some significant partnerships with employers. Network relationships provided significant opportunities for graduates particularly in the Computer Science area.

It is out anticipation that this QEP Project will lead to a transformation of the way that we look at student success from freshman to senior year. It will create a stronger preparation for our students to acquire skills to enhance their academic preparation and to realize their career aspiration to transform their lives. HT will be able to give our students that added advantage that they need to be successful in their life endeavors and in society. This passing on the touch that ignites our mission through “nurturing our legacy of leadership and excellence in education, connecting knowledge, power, passion, and values.”

It is the intent of this QEP initiative to create a culture of awareness and practice among faculty, staff and students that supports career readiness. Through intentional effort such as training, assessment, attention to and heightened expectations of internship practices, and curriculum embedded instructional design, virtually every avenue of the institution will be engaged in the goals of this project. We will conduct annual surveys to gauge the level of integration of the QEP strategy of Career Readiness. Ultimately every student who graduates will be **“Ready to Attain Maximum Student Success” (RAMSS) (Appendix U)** through this QEP initiative.



## VII. TIMELINE

### Marketing Plan

Our efforts to market our QEP entitled "Ready to Attain Maximum Student Success (RAMSS) is multifaceted. Embedded assessments have several courses. Faculty will engage in training during the summer of 2021. Faculty will be creating their embedded reviews under the direction of a professional facilitator skilled in integrating career readiness into course design. We will use a standard rubric for the data collection on the assessment.

Full-Time and adjunct faculty are welcome to participate in the training. For adjuncts not to attend the session, we will conduct special training through the Center for Academic Innovation and Transformation (CAIT). Likewise, during the Summer Summit, we will cover other topics during the training.

Throughout the year, additional training will be available through the CAIT center. The Summer Summit CAIT Professional Development Center will help with the advertisement. Participants will receive a stipend for their participation. Makeup and additional training during the academic year will not carry compensation. However, the QEP Director will ensure that all faculty are trained before course assignment and delivery.

Faculty, staff, and student training on the use of various computer programs used in the project such as Handshake, Presence, Optimal Resume, and Micro-credentials will be hosted through the CAIT as organized in collaboration with the QEP Director.

A web page will be set up for the QEP and housed on the OIPRA website. The page will be monitored and updated by the QEP Director monthly. The website will feature faculty participating in the project and exceptional learning opportunities, including the Summer Summits. There will also be a particular highlight of students and graduates who have exemplified the tenants of RAMSS. The web page will outline the program's different components and publicize training for faculty, staff, and students.

We will use marketing materials such as brochures, social media ads, and posters as publicity for the QEP.

T-shirts, buttons, notebooks, flash drives, and other marketing materials will help market the QEP. Students will receive certificates for micro-credential completions, and faculty will receive certificates for their engagement in the program annually at the Assessment Day events. We will also use videos of student testimonials on the benefits of the program. Faculty will be encouraged to seek opportunities to present their experiences and data at local, state, and national conferences.

A short-term marketing strategy that is being planned to coincide with the virtual on-site visit in an online format. The QEP will roll out immediately following the On-site visit.

## Timeline of Annual QEP Activities

**Table 2: Timeline for QEP August 2021 – Spring 2026**

	Fall	Spring	Summer	Fall	Spring	Summer	Fall
Faculty Summit			Summer Summit			Summer Summit	
Embedded Course Content FYE I	Embedded Assessment						Embedded Assessment
Embedded Course Content/Assessment FYE II		Embedded Assessment			Embedded Assessment		
Embedded Course Content/Assessment ENGL 1301	Embedded Assessment			Embedded Assessment			Embedded Assessment
Embedded Course Content/Assessment ENG 1202		Embedded Assessment			Embedded Assessment		
Embedded Course Content/Assessment COMM	Embedded Assessment	Embedded Assessment		Embedded Assessment	Embedded Assessment		Embedded Assessment
Embedded Course <b>Content TBD</b> /Assessment							
Embedded Course Content Senior Seminar/Internship/Assessment	Embedded Assessment	Embedded Assessment		Embedded Assessment	Embedded Assessment		Embedded Assessment
Assessment Day	Program Assessment & Awards	Program Assessment & Awards		Program Assessment & Awards	Program Assessment & Awards		Program Assessment & Awards
Monthly meeting QEPAC-Guest							

<b>Component</b>	
Training	
Assessment	
Assessment Day	
Internship	
Monthly Meetings	

## VIII. ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

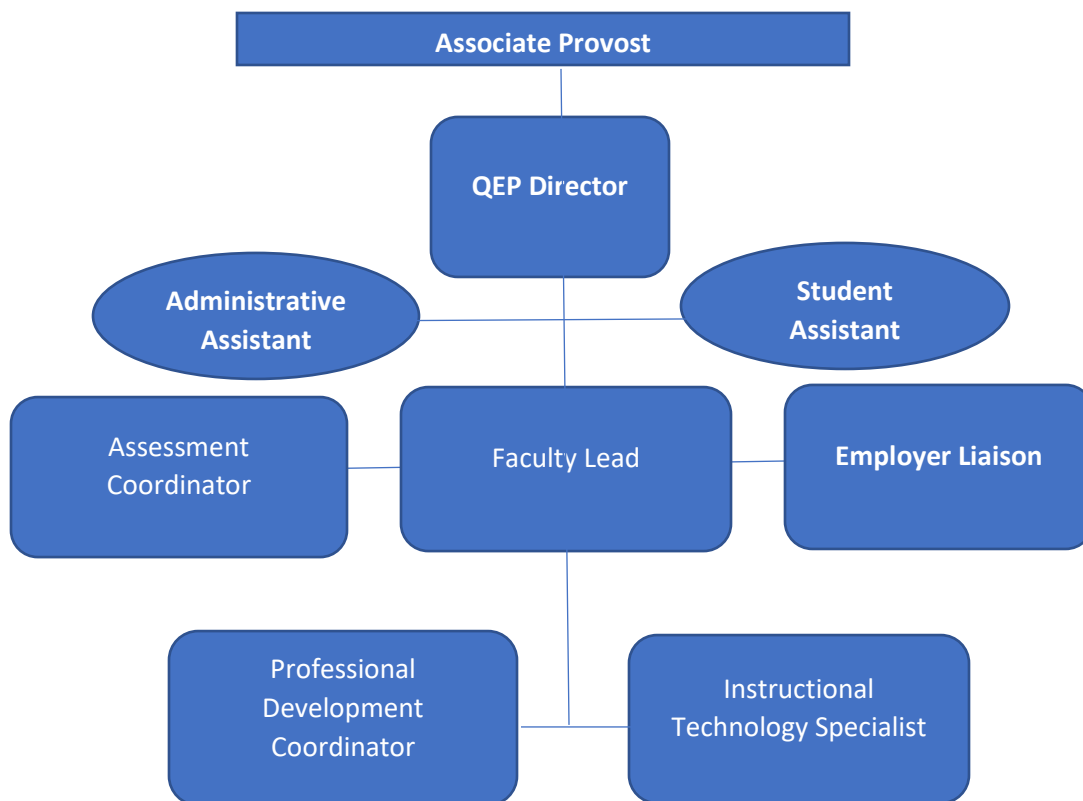
### QEP Advisory Committee

Last	First	Department
Brewington	Donald E.	University Chaplin
Montgomery	Katrina K.	Director Administration & Finance
Stinson	Shakitha L.	Director, ADP Student Services
Stewart	Shawanda J.	Faculty, English
Jackson	Linda Y.	Director, Community Engagement
Jones	Ericka D.	Dean, Student Affairs
Hancock	Sheila M.	Pre-Award Specialist
Hirsch	Michael L.	Dean, C
Ronsen	Josh P.	Director,
Dennis	Royce R.	Coach, Athletics
Kee	Jonathan	Student
Roebuck	Sahimelique A.	Student
Hatchett	Steven	Director, Career Services
McGhee	Danielle	Director, Library Services
Castaneda	Roberto	Faculty, Political Science
Carter	Jason	Faculty, Business
Downing	Beverly L.	Associate Provost
Thompson	Rohan	Interim Dean, School of Business
Hussain	Farzana	Chair, Mathematics
Magid	Karen	Director, Sustainability
Burnaman	Stephen	Chair, Music
Vela	Rafael	Faculty, Communication
Samuels	Lorraine	Faculty, Criminal Justice
Masino	Amanda	Chair, Natural Science
Cervantes	Carlos	Faculty, Kinesiology

## QEP Management Personnel

Name	Title
TBA	Director, QEP
TBA	Faculty Lead
Mr. Steven Hatchett	Employer Liaison
Mr. Josh Ronson	Instructional Technology
Shelia Hancock	Administrative Assistant
TBA	Assessment Coordinator
Dr. Jennifer Miles	Professional Development
Dr. Beverly Downing	Administrative Oversight
TBA	Student Assistant

## Organizational Chart



## IX. RESOURCES

### Budget of Expenses by Category 2021-2026

2021-2026 QEP Budget							
	Year 0 2021	Year 1 2022	Year 2 2023	Year 3 2024	Year 4 2025	Year 5 2026	Total
<b>Salaries</b>							
QEP Director	10000	6000	6000	6000	6000	6000	310000
Fringe Benefit (26.9%)	2690	16140	16140	16140	16140	16140	83390
<b>Marketing &amp; Promotion</b>							
Kick-Of Event	1500						1500
T-Shirts (500 x \$10)	5000	5000					10000
Marketing promotional materials (flash drives, pens, mask)	500	1000		500		500	2500
Banners & Posters	500		300		300		1100
<b>Monthly Meetings</b>							
Refreshments	1200						1200
<b>Faculty Training (consultants)</b>							
Summer Summit		1000		1000		1000	3000
Consultants		1000		1000		500	
Faculty Stipends (25) x 500= 12500		12500		12500		12500	37500
Staff (15) x \$300		4500		4500		4500	13500
Course Integration Workshops (\$1000)		1000		500		500	2000
Materials		500		500		500	1500
Food 40 x \$15.00		600		600		600	1800
<b>Assessment</b>							
Materials		500		400		300	1200
Assessment Day		1500		1000		500	3000
Awards		500		500		500	1500
<b>Professional Development</b>							
Trainers (2) x \$500		1000		1000		500	2500
<b>Internships</b>							
Transportation vouchers (30)			300	300	300	300	1200
<b>Miscellaneous</b>							
Software, membership, Books, etc.		1000	1000	1000	500	500	4000
<b>Total</b>							<b>\$481.390</b>

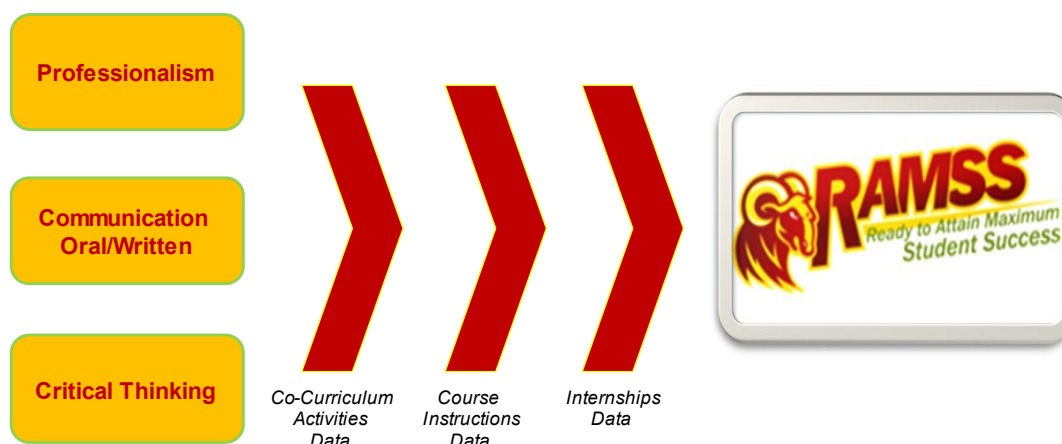


## X. ASSESSMENT

The Huston-Tillotson University Quality Enhancement Plan entitled “Ready to Achieve Maximum Student Success (RAMSS) is built on the premise that students who are provided additional and intentional supplemental instructions related to essential career readiness skills will demonstrate increased readiness for success in their careers, and graduate pursuits. As part of the development effort of RAMSS, focus on student efficiencies in Professionalism, Communications (oral and written), and Conflict Resolution are identified as the key competencies of focus for the program.

A conceptual map of the HT QEP RAMSS Assessment Plan is outlined below:

### Huston-Tillotson University RAMSS Assessment Plan



#### Assessment of Student Learning

##### Through Course Embedded Competencies

Throughout the curriculum **specifically identified courses** where embedded competencies related to professionalism, communications (oral & written), and critical thinking instructional modules are instructor lead. A variety of **instructional modalities** are used to instruct students and develop competencies acquisition. A rubric will be utilized to determine student learning outcomes levels by the faculty for each competency category. (**Professionalism Rubric, Communications Rubrics (oral & written), Conflict Resolution Rubric**)

These assessment rubrics will be built into the course management system (Canvas) for easy access by faculty. Data will be collected by the Office of Institutional Planning Research and Assessment (OIPRA) and analyzed. Reports to the Director of the QEP will share the data with instructors, deans, and program coordinators. The QEP Advisory Committee (Assessment Subcommittee) will review the data. Discussions of the findings, and action planning will complete the assessment cycle during the Institution-wide Assessment week in May of each year. Any changes in plans will be reflected in the program during the reporting cycle and implemented during the following year of the QEP.

### Through Co-Curricular Engagement

Co-curricular engagement will be utilized in two ways during the program. On its own, student engagement in seminars, workshops, career fairs, guest speakers, specialized activities of their major, job training software programs (handshake) will be monitored with the use a software called **PRESENCE**.

Student learning assessment for instructional related work associated with co-curricular activities will be recorded by the instructor and submitted in the Canvas System under the appropriate assignment.

There may also be instructional embedded assignments related to student participation in co-curricular activities through individual classes that will be captured by the instructor using assessment methods such as reflective papers, group discussions, research papers, case studies, role play, or other instructional modalities. Data will be collected by the Office of Institutional Planning Research and Assessment (OIPRA) and analyzed. Reports to the Director of the QEP will share the data with instructors, deans, and program coordinators. The QEP Advisory Committee (Assessment Sub-committee) will review the data. Discussions of the findings, and action planning will complete the assessment cycle during the Institution-wide Assessment week in May of each year. Any changes in plans will be reflected in the program during the reporting cycle and implemented during the following year of the QEP.

### Through Internship Engagement

Students will participate in at least two internship experiences. The first is a mini-internship and used as a benchmarking experience to determine if the student can demonstrate early learning levels of competencies they are being taught throughout the program. The feedback will serve as a guide for the program to adjust where necessary in the instructional delivery for the program. This early internship may be internal to the institution using programs like work-study, volunteer, or service-learning experiences. They are embedded through certain courses in each of the major and require a minimal number of hours ranging from 15-30.

The second required internship is experienced by each student at the junior or senior level. This experience is also driven through capstone course or senior seminar courses. **Student Self-Assessment Survey** and **Employer Feedback Survey** is required for each student. These should be completed by the QEP Director and filed with the OIPRA Office for analysis. Reports to the Director of the QEP will share the data with instructors, deans, and program coordinators. The QEP Advisory Committee (Assessment Sub-committee) will review the data. Discussions of the findings, and action planning will complete the assessment cycle during the Institution-wide Assessment week in May of each year. Any changes in plans will be reflected in the program during the reporting cycle and implemented during the following year of the QEP.

### Assessment of the QEP at the Institutional Level

At the institutional level, there are three major goals.

1. Equipped HT students with career readiness essential skills competencies of Professionalism, Communications (oral and written) and Critical Thinking that will lead to their success in acquiring discipline related employment.

To assess this goal, HT will analyze the data collected from the course embedded student learning as measured by the overall performance levels indicated in competencies rubrics (**Professionalism Rubric, Communications Rubrics (oral & written), Conflict Resolution Rubric**). This includes any disaggregated co-curricular assignments that are reflected in the data. The summative results of each competency should meet or exceed the target of seventy-five percent.

2. To promote a culture of career readiness among faculty, staff, and students at HT that leads to student success.

To determine if a culture of career readiness faculty, staff, and students, will be administered **climate survey's** will be used to gage awareness, practice, and results of interventions by each constituent group. Additional drivers of this goal will be meetings throughout the year at each level, professional development, celebration events, and recognition of achievements.

3. Increase the levels of success in student employability measures.

Ultimately, HT wants to increase the levels of success in student employability measures. To assess this measure, we will use **employer satisfaction surveys**, gage our performance against benchmarked findings in the Emsi database, Career Services database, **First Destination Survey**, and other data sets such as the Texas Workforce Commission.

## **XI. APPENDIX**

Appendix A: The QEP Topic Selection Survey

Appendix B: Focus Groups 1

Appendix C: Focus Groups 2

Appendix D: Focus Groups 3

Appendix E: National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE)

Appendix F: UNCF-Lilly Foundation grant funded Career Pathways Initiative (CPI)

Appendix G: Curriculum Alignment Survey

Appendix H: The Yes, We Must Coalition (YWMC) (Appendix H)

Appendix I: Ascendium: Increasing Employer Engagement (Appendix I)

Appendix J: 60x30TX

Appendix K: Senior Exit Reviews

Appendix L: EMSI and Equifax

Appendix M: Education Design Lab

Appendix N: Education Design Lab Micro Credentials

Appendix O: The IBM Credentials

Appendix P: Google

Appendix Q: Handshake

Appendix R: PRESENCE Engagement Tracking

Appendix S: Optimal Resume

Appendix T: Ready to Attain Maximum Student Success (RAMSS)

Appendix U: Specifically Identified Courses

Appendix V: Professionalism Rubric

Appendix W: Communications Rubrics (oral & written)

Appendix X: Example of Instructional Modalities to be used in Embedded Instructions

Appendix Y: Conflict Resolution Rubric

Appendix Z: Student Self-Assessment Survey

Appendix AA: Employer Feedback Survey

Appendix BB: Climate Survey's

Appendix CC: HT First Destination Survey

**Tables**

Table 1: 2019 NSSE Comparative Data

Table 2: Timeline of Annual QEP Activities

**Figures**

Figure 1: Employer's rate the essential need of the career readiness competencies

Figure 2: Employer's rate recent graduates on the eight career readiness competencies

Figure 3 Comparative Unemployment by Level of Education

Figure 4: Assessment Map

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