Higher Learning Commission
A commission of the
North Central Association

Open Pathway: *Quality Initiative Institutional Proposal*

The enclosed Quality Initiative proposal represents the work that the institution will undertake to fulfill the Improvement Process of the Open Pathway.

_____   4/30/13

Signature of Institution's President or Chancellor   Date

 Dr. George E. Ross, President

Printed/Typed Name and Title

 Central Michigan University

Name of Institution

 Mt. Pleasant, MI 48859

City and State

The institution completes the Quality Initiative proposal by responding to the questions in each category of the template. The institution may choose to include a brief implementation plan that addresses many of the questions below and replaces portions of the outline. Proposals should be no more than 4,500 words.

Overview of the Quality Initiative

1. **Provide a title and brief description of the Quality Initiative. Explain whether the initiative will begin and be completed during the Quality Initiative period or if it is part of work already in progress or will achieve a key milestone in the work of a longer initiative.**

   Title: Promoting Academic Challenge: Taking Stock and Moving Forward

   Abstract: Central Michigan University has engaged and will continue to engage the campus community in a conversation to assess our current efforts to promote academic quality and, building on past efforts, to move forward in promoting a challenging academic environment for our undergraduates. Most academic majors are of very high quality in their junior and senior years, but with greater variation in the abilities of entering freshmen, who enroll in the introductory courses that are not consistent in their level of rigor. We need to develop innovative strategies for producing an academically challenging environment for all students throughout their entire undergraduate experience. Over the past decade, various campus units and committees have proposed and have implemented plans to improve key aspects of the undergraduate experience, such as general education, academic advising, student engagement, and the assessment of student learning. However, these initiatives have largely been pursued independently of one another. The Quality Initiative that we propose will allow us to recognize both where we have made advances and where we need to focus additional energy and resources. By building on past efforts and on faculty initiatives, we are more likely to be successful and to mobilize the energies of faculty and students across the campus.

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2. Explain why the proposed initiative is relevant and significant for the institution.

This initiative is the natural next step in a very intense institutional planning process. Central Michigan University has engaged the entire campus community in several very significant projects in the past two years. Shortly after Dr. George Ross joined CMU as its president in the spring of 2010, the institution developed a new mission statement and core values that were adopted by the Board of Trustees (December 2010). A Strategic Planning Team was formed in March 2011 that initiated engagement meetings to gather input from all stakeholders. This team drafted and vetted the institutional vision statement and strategic priorities. Student success, excellence in research and creative activity, quality staff and faculty, community partnerships, and infrastructure development were identified as the institution's strategic priorities. The vision statement and priorities were approved by the Board of Trustees in December 2012. The campus has continued the strategic planning process, defining initiatives that will make the priorities a reality and determining specific metrics and targets.

To complement the strategic planning process, CMU completed a Campus Facilities Master Plan, an Information Technology Strategic Plan, and two of our six academic colleges are engaging their faculty in strategic planning using the institutional strategic plan as the foundation. President Ross, working with the Academic Senate, established a task force to review shared governance and communication. In addition, the Academic Senate continued the evaluation of courses for the new General Education program to be implemented in fall 2014.

Continuous quality improvement has become part of the fabric of CMU. Academic program prioritization and administrative unit review, led by the Provost, identified programmatic strengths and opportunities. The program review process was then modified to build upon prioritization and specialized accreditation and to minimize the duplication of efforts. The Assessment Council, Office of Curriculum and Assessment, and several assessment coaches provided leadership and guidance in the development and approval of assessment plans designed to measure the student learning outcomes of all academic programs. This year, assessment reports were completed for all programs and feedback from the Assessment Council was provided through letters and in discussions of next steps with each department chair and college dean.

Many faculty committee reports, including *Raising Academic Performance, Academic Standards,* and *Foundations of Excellence,* have outlined steps toward greater academic commitment. Another document titled *Shared Expectations* identified the expectations for students, faculty and the administration in the pursuit of academic excellence. Many students have expressed their desire for more challenging academics through their responses on the NSSE, end-of-semester Student Opinion Surveys, and elsewhere. Unfortunately, we have failed to consistently implement these recommendations. It is now time to pull all of these initiatives, reports, and recommendations together into a cohesive strategic plan to advance academic excellence that includes greater focus on academic challenge across undergraduate education.

Academic challenge is a key feature of Central Michigan University's Vision and Mission.

Vision: *Central Michigan University, an inclusive community of scholars, is a national leader in higher education inspiring excellence and innovation.* Adopted by the Board of Trustees, December 6, 2012

Mission: *At Central Michigan University, we are a community committed to the pursuit of knowledge, wisdom, discovery, and creativity. We provide student-centered education and foster personal and intellectual growth to prepare students for productive careers, meaningful lives, and responsible citizenship in a global society.* Adopted by the Board of Trustees, December 2, 2010.

Both the vision and mission statements share the expectation for academic excellence. In order to maintain our status as a leader in higher education, we must set high academic standards for our students. This academic challenge initiative presents a framework for exploring and implementing those best practices that provide our students with the key academic tools for both productive careers and meaningful lives. It will allow us to utilize data to enhance our foundation in liberal studies and optimize our academic practices, driving us toward our vision of inspired excellence and innovation.

The time is right for a review of the past and the paving of a path forward toward academic challenge. The development of the vision and mission statements, shared expectations, and committee reports complement the strategic planning efforts and affords us the opportunity for significant impact in the way that CMU achieves its educational mission. The current institutional initiatives that focus on the relevance of liberal studies and the development of reasoning skills will inform the decisions we will make to ensure academic excellence leading to successful students who remain in school, graduate on time, and exit having mastered the analytical and communication skills required to contribute to a global society. Recent advances in the science of learning as well as new learning technologies underscore the importance of academic challenge and support our decision to reassess strategies for consistent academic development of our students. Greater academic challenge will be a key component of these converging, innovative efforts toward academic excellence at CMU.

3. **Explain the intended impact of the initiative on the institution and its academic quality.**

Central Michigan University has put student success at the forefront of its strategic plan. The time is right to build upon the efforts and products of the past to articulate a sustainable vision for academic excellence. The institutional commitment is clear, the students are eager, and the campus is engaged. A grassroots faculty organization, the Teaching and Learning Collective, was formed in 2010, and since then has hosted a yearly series of workshops, invited speakers, and all-day conferences focused on integrating practical strategies to enhance the development of students' higher-order thinking skills. CMU is fortunate to have such dedicated faculty who are committed to the continuous evolution of a quality education. This Quality Initiative will build upon this foundation to look closely at the academic quality of the general education and non-major experiences of students in their first two years. (Later, we can focus on the advanced classes in the major, which will require a very different set of strategies.) The completion of this Quality Initiative will have significance because it is faculty driven and will result in recommendations that are derived from and supported by faculty and student input. *We anticipate that the recommendations will include a careful look at academic rigor, standards across colleges, the role of liberal studies, and academic practices leading to improved retention.*

4. **Describe the purposes and goals for the initiative.**

The purpose of this Quality Initiative is to build upon past efforts, utilize current research on best-practices, and engage in a campus conversation that will result in a plan to promote a challenging academic environment for our undergraduates. Central Michigan University has made significant advancements in several areas including the reform of General Education, the institutionalization of assessment and continuous improvement across all programs, and campus conversations around academic excellence. Each campus conversation begins in the fall with a well-known speaker and a common reading, followed in the spring with an all-day workshop. Guest speakers included *Academically Adrift* authors Dr. Richard Arum and Dr. Josipa Roksa in 2011 and Dr. Stanley Fish on critical thinking in 2012. In 2013 Dr. Andrew Delbanco, author of *College: What It Was, Is, and Should Be,* will visit campus. These events are undeniably outstanding.

CMU will use the 2013-2014 year to build upon the progress we have made, review earlier documents, identify gaps, and determine next steps with faculty and student input. The campus dialog will be enhanced by new data collection that will identify opportunities for improvement. This discussion will be led by the Core Team, the grassroots faculty Teaching and Learning Collective,

and the Academic Senate. A new Provost will join CMU in fall 2013 and this review will acquaint him/her with the academic climate. *The benchmark to be achieved during the first year will be to identify one or two areas of focus that will directly impact the level of academic challenge at CMU.*

The second year of the Quality Initiative (2014-2015) will accomplish a concrete set of activities identified in year one as critical to enhancing the academic challenge for CMU students. Although we cannot be absolutely certain, we fully anticipate the focus to be on the general education/ liberal studies courses taken in the first two years (with spill-over of best practices into upper-level courses). This will build on the reform of the required General Education by creating a learning community among faculty to discuss and develop common paths to challenge students in all introductory-level courses. This effort will utilize the knowledge gained from the speaker series, the workshops, and the reports. It will bring the voice of students into the conversation, echoing the results of several NSSE surveys indicating that students expect more demanding courses in their early college experiences. Targeted initiatives will be mindful that students arrive with great variability in their preparation for college, and planning groups will be charged to be innovative regarding opportunities for policy changes or program development that create learning opportunities that ensure student success for all in the face of increased academic challenge.

This exploration of the opportunity for educational excellence through general education will be led by the Quality Initiative Core Team, the Director of General Education, the Academic Senate, and the Academic Affairs Committee Chair of the Student Government Association with support from the Teaching and Learning Collective. The Faculty Center for Innovative Teaching will develop and conduct workshops to unify and strengthen the core of the General Education curriculum and other introductory-level courses so that they are taught in ways that increase student engagement and academic challenge. *The outcome of the second year will be to develop a common set of expectations for all 100 and 200-level courses that go beyond content and that will include the development of habits of the mind (e.g., reasoning, critical and higher order thinking skills, problem-solving skills, research skills), and communication skills (e.g., advanced listening and comprehension skills, analytic writing, and persuasive speaking), including advanced communication via technology.*

The third year of the Quality Initiative (2015-2016) will most likely focus on improved student success, retention and time to graduation resulting from the use of improved academic advising and the use of learning analytics. CMU created the division of Enrollment and Student Services and hired Steven Johnson as the Vice President in January 2012. A restructuring of academic advising is currently under discussion with changes coming in fall 2013. We have joined the Student Success Collaborative of the Educational Advisory Board that will inform and enhance the Advising Workbench in the new Degree Audit project. It is too early to predict the exact nature of the activities, but year three will utilize these diagnostic tools to maximize the student experience. Any discussion of retention and time to graduation must be grounded in the quality academic experience of the students. We are determined to guard against lowering academic standards to increase graduation rates. This exploration will be led by the Quality Initiative Core Team, representatives from Enrollment and Student Services, students, and representatives from the academic colleges. This year will bring the full engagement of all faculty and all academic colleges. *The outcome of the third year will be increased retention and decreased time to graduation that will be natural outcomes of more informed advising and analytics available to both students and faculty.*

Each of these years will engage campus in rich dialog supported by well-developed professional development workshops and campus-wide conversations. A detailed timeline is given in Section 9.

5. **Describe how the institution will evaluate progress, make adjustments, and determine what has been accomplished.**

It is difficult to describe with detail an assessment plan for this Quality Initiative because the first year is a discussion to determine the path it will take. The QI Core Team includes Drs. Poole and Senter, both of whom have extensive experience developing and conducting evaluation plans ensuring that whatever path we take, it will be assessed.

The evaluation of the first year will include the engagement meeting minutes, Senate discussions, and a thorough review of previous reports. A website will be established with a section to collect comments. The Core Team may survey both students and faculty to validate the conclusions of the campus discussions with empirical data. The identification of a topic for year two will be evidence of a successful year.

If the topic for year two is, as anticipated, academic challenge in first-year courses, then the assessment will be an analysis of syllabi before and after revision. This will be followed by an analysis of student outcomes relevant to the defined goals, although they may take several years to fully materialize. The minutes of campus discussions will continue to document the engagement of all stakeholders.

Year three brings the addition of improved academic processes including changes to advising, analytics, and the Advising Workbench based in the degree audit system. Satisfaction surveys will evaluate the advising processes and the tools. The ultimate measure of success will be improved academic progress toward timely degree completion.

6. **Describe the level of support for the initiative by internal or external stakeholders.**

This Quality Initiative with a focus on academic challenge has the full support of the President and Provost. The discussion of potential topics for the Quality Initiative began two years ago among several faculty groups with general consensus around the topic of academic challenge building on the past reports. All campus planning builds toward the strategic priorities. The Board of Trustees has the institutional priorities before them at each meeting to focus their discussions and decisions, and this initiative will advance the top priority of student success. The Provost initiated a review of all academic programs in 2011 followed by a significant investment in the assessment of student learning outcomes. The Teaching and Learning Collective (TLC) is a grassroots faculty group that is committed to student success through academic excellence, and students have demonstrated their desire for challenging courses and programs through their responses on the NSSE and their presentations to the Academic Senate. The faculty leadership in the Academic Senate have demonstrated their commitment to joint planning through shared governance and improved communication. *The entire campus including the administration, students, and faculty are fully supportive of advancing academic excellence, including greater challenge.*

As noted earlier, many groups have been advancing various academic quality initiatives for many years. These efforts have largely been independent of one another and some have involved only one or two colleges. Our challenge will be bringing these voices into harmony so that we can move ahead with strength and focus. In the past two years, the faculty have been engaged in one major initiative after another including academic prioritization, strategic planning, assessment, reform of general education, and moving forward with shared governance. The leadership team will need to communicate the purpose of the initiative very carefully so that faculty do not interpret it as criticism from the administration. While the Academic Senate was made aware of the need to present a Quality Initiative to the HLC and they know the general topic, there was no vote. A request to be put on the Academic Senate agenda was denied due to a full schedule for March and April. This proposal

has been circulated to campus faculty leaders, including the Executive Board of the Academic Senate. A summary of the initiative was sent to all Senate members. There will be a full discussion with a vote of endorsement by the Senate in September. In addition, a Senate representative is on the Core Team which will keep the Senate informed and will facilitate this becoming a priority agenda topic. *Maintaining momentum for positive change and overcoming faculty fatigue are our greatest challenges.*

This Quality Initiative is the logical next step for CMU on a path toward increased academic challenge. It will pull together the efforts of task forces and committees of the past, build on campus planning and prioritization, and capitalize on the momentum of the TLC speaker series, the Great Lakes Conference on Teaching and Learning, and the Faculty Learning Communities, among other activities and programs. By taking these conversations to the entire campus, the changes will become systemic. The support of the Academic Senate will ensure aligned curricular processes and the support of the Provost's Office will provide communication with and support of the Academic Division. *We foresee that the efforts of this Quality Initiative will be fully integrated into the practices of the University and therefore will be naturally sustainable.*

7. **Identify the groups and individuals that will lead or be directly involved in implementing the initiative.**

   Administrative Leadership: Provost and Vice Provost for Academic Affairs will provide administrative leadership for this Quality Initiative. The Provost will provide direct access to the Council of Deans and will be the liaison to the President and the President's Cabinet. The Provost is a voting member of both the Academic Senate Executive Board and the Academic Senate. Both the Provost and Vice Provost for Academic Affairs meet regularly with the Council of Chairs.

   QI Core Team: Three faculty leaders, Academic Senate Representative, Director of the Faculty Center for Innovative Teaching, one Associate Dean, two students (one must be from the Student Government Association Academic Affairs Committee), and the Vice Provost for Academic Affairs. Faculty leadership includes: Dr. Debra Poole (Psychology) who will lead the QI Core Team. Drs. Merlyn Mowery (Philosophy and Religion) and Mary Senter (Sociology, Anthropology, and Social Work) also have been very active in the TLC, implementing the annual speaker and workshop series and will provide leadership to this Quality Initiative. Other faculty will provide leadership as it matches their expertise and as time allows around their professional responsibilities. Academic Senate or Senate Executive Board representative will be appointed by the Academic Senate Chair. It is essential to have the voice and support of the Academic Senate. The faculty and Academic Senate must be the drivers for any systemic change to occur. Every effort will be made to diversify the Core Team with representation from all colleges.

   The Student Government Association is very active and the Academic Affairs Committee meets regularly with the Vice Provost for Academic Affairs. One student will be from that committee to ensure continuity and the other student might be from the SGA at large or from the graduate student organization.

   As the initiative takes shape, additional leadership will be added to garner the support from and bring the voice of all academic colleges. We anticipate the involvement of one or more associate deans as well as the Associate Vice President for Academic Programs on the Global Campus.

   Campus-wide Collaboration: Support will come from the Teaching and Learning Collective, Academic Senate, and Faculty Center for Innovative Teaching as we implement the recommendations emanating from this Quality Initiative. These groups will provide the broad-based support and collaboration as the message is incorporated into other campus activities including the Great Lakes Teaching and Learning Conference and the curricular committees of the Academic Senate. Each academic college and the Global Campus will participate in implementing the recommendations of

the Quality Initiative. Academic Affairs Committee of the Student Government Association (SGA) will provide the voice of the students and will take the message back to the students through SGA and social media.

Technical and Research Support: Offices of Institutional Research and Information Technology will provide access to data and analysis.

Communication: University Communication will assign a liaison to the project to assist with web delivery and campus communications.

8. **List the human, financial, technological and other resources that the institution has committed to this initiative.**

HLC Quality Initiative Expenses Estimated 2013-2016				
	2013-2014	**2014-2015**	**2015-2016**	**2013-2016 Total**
Faculty Salary (.25 FTE) x 4 faculty	$ 62,000.	$ 62,000.	$ 62,000.	$ 186,000.
Faculty Benefits (summer @ 22%)	$ 4,400.	$ 4,400.	$ 4,400.	$ 13,200.
Faculty Summer ($5000 x 4 faculty)	$ 20,000.	$ 20,000.	$ 20,000.	$ 60,000.
QI Speaker Series	$ 10,000.	$ 10,000.	$ 10,000.	$ 30,000.
Assessment expenses	$ 4,750.	$ 3,000.	$ 3,000.	$ 10,750.
Supplies	$ 200.	$ 200.	$ 200.	$ 600.
Meeting/Workshop Expenses	$ 2,000.	$ 2,000.	$ 2,000.	$ 6,000.
Printing	$ 250.	$ 250.	$ 250.	$ 750.
HLC Conference (4 faculty x $2000)	$ 8,000.	$ 8,000.	$ 8,000.	$ 24,000.
TOTAL	$ 106,850.	$ 106,850.	$ 106,850.	$ 320,550.

Faculty on QI Core Team will need one course reassigned time each semester (.25 FTE) during the academic year. Each academic course is funded at replacement rates.

The QI Core Team will need to spend time in the summer planning for the fall and completing assessment. They will be paid a stipend of $5,000 each. The FaCIT director is 12-month employee.

Speaker Series (aka TLC speakers) has a 5-year commitment of at least $10,000 annually from the Provost.

Workshops will be hosted by FaCIT at no additional charge with the exception of contracted external speakers. Extraordinary workshop expenses will be paid by Academic Affairs.

Communications and media will be part of University Communications at no additional charge. Institutional Research and Technology support will be at no additional charge.

The financial model at CMU gives discretion to the colleges providing opportunity for the colleges to engage in planning and to set, and fund, more specific priorities with regard to program enhancement and development.

9. **Describe the primary activities of the initiative and timeline for implementing them.**

The following timeline presents the initial three years of the Central Michigan University Quality Initiative. We fully expect this to be only the beginning of a sustained effort to bring greater academic challenge and quality to the undergraduate curriculum. The focus of the three years outlined in this proposal is to enhance the academic experience for all students during their first two years at CMU. We expect to continue with a review of the rigor in the major. *This timeline will allow us to hold campus conversations that will build consensus and focus so that the outcomes of*

the quality initiative will have impact. What follows has been discussed by campus leaders and faculty and we fully expect the project to unfold as shown below; however, because the exact set of activities will be based on campus conversations, this plan must remain fluid.

Year 1 (2013-2014): Define academic excellence, complete SWOT, and identify target area(s) of emphasis.

> May – August 2013: The QI Core Team will chart the path for the 2013-2014 engagement process, seek input from the immediate stakeholders, prepare communications/website, and coordinate with other campus initiatives (strategic planning, enrollment management) and with faculty groups (Teaching and Learning Collective, Faculty Center for Innovative Teaching, Academic Senate); identify benchmark data.

> September 2013: Kickoff event by Academic Senate leadership and President/Provost; announce focus speaker and schedule of events.

> September - December 2013: Engage the campus community in discussions of the past committee reports tying the past to the future. Host Andrew Delbanco and hold associated discussions applying the topic to our campus environment.

> January - March 2014: TLC and Academic Senate lead discussion to determine one area of focus (e.g., critical thinking, general education, degree qualifications). Conduct workshops, engage the campus in dialogs, and collect new data to identify opportunities for improvement and determine one area of focus for year two. Determine scope of year two focus, activities, and metrics.

> March – May 2014: Identify initial programs for analysis and reform. Form program planning teams. Identify and contract fall 2014 speaker. Review and identify appropriate assessment tools.

> May – August 2014: Jointly develop program-level action plans. Prepare materials for pilot projects including sampling, assessment (e.g., determining level of QR engagement in classes); FaCIT prepares to assist programs with improvement, plans campus workshops.

Year 2 (2014-2015): Analyze level of academic challenge in one program (most likely General Education), develop strategy for change, implement changes in at least 6 General Education courses.

> September 2014: Include a review of year one in opening college meetings and fall events. Announce fall speaker and author.

> September 2014 – May 2015: Faculty collect data and analyze evidence of current status, explore opportunities for improvement, identify touch points for reform. Identify the next set of courses for review and possible revision. This pattern of systematically revising General Education courses will continue until all courses have been revised, evaluated and revised again.

> January – April 2015: Identify second area for focused improvement in academic challenge. It is nearly impossible to predict what this might be, but we will have student success analytics and an Advising Workbench fully functional and populated with data by this time. Wise use of these tools will improve academics and retention and time to graduation will naturally follow. This discussion may include the use of the Degree Quality Profile.

> May – August 2015: The QI Core Team will work with personnel from Enrollment and Student Services and Advising, as well as Academic Affairs will develop a plan to engage the campus in a conversation around retention and time to graduation (if that is the chosen topic).

Year 3 (2015-2016): Review available data on the interaction between academic services, retention, and time to graduation and identify areas of improvement that will not sacrifice academic challenge. Develop an implementation plan.

September 2015: Report on the progress of the first area of emphasis (General Education), introduce the second reform initiative (improved academic services affecting retention and time to graduation), announce the speaker and author.

September 2015 - May 2016: Continue year two area of emphasis (General Education) with additional implementation, assessment, and next steps.

September - December 2015: Engage the campus community in discussions of the data surrounding retention and time to graduation with an emphasis on maintaining academic challenge. Determine opportunities for improvement.

January - March 2016: Campus agreement on area of focus surrounding second area of emphasis (e.g., gateway courses, advising, degree requirements, etc.). Hold workshops building on speaker and applying the topic to our campus environment.

March – May 2016: Identify initial programs for analysis and possible reform. Form program planning teams. Review and identify appropriate assessment tools.

May – August 2016: Jointly develop program-level action plans. Prepare materials for pilot projects including sampling, assessment; FaCIT prepares to assist programs with improvement, plans campus workshops; Enrollment & Student services plans for improvements.

Each year we will continue campus conversations and diligently communicate the project highlights and results to the campus. This will include semi-annual reports to the Board of Trustees and regular reports to the Academic Senate, Council of Chairs, and Council of Deans.

These activities and timeline align with current campus initiatives. The implementation of the strategic plan will be part of the planning process for each unit, college, and department providing opportunity to align resources with new initiatives. The TLC and FaCIT have engaged the campus in discussions relevant to improved student learning and teaching. Continuous improvement is part of the campus culture with each program reviewing student learning outcomes annually and engaging in a summative program review cycle. *We fully anticipate that this Quality Initiative will complement current priorities and therefore will not be a burden to the campus community.*

10. Institutional Contact for Quality Initiative Proposal

Include the name(s) of the primary contact(s) for the Quality Initiative.

Dr. Claudia B. Douglass, Interim Vice Provost for Academic Affairs
Name and Title

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