



Ask the Okra: A Campus Concierge
April 15-18, 2024 SACSCOC On-site Review



WHO: Concierge (kaan-see-ehrz)
A DSU team member who connects you with campus resources.

WHAT: Our Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) is a five-year, collaborative, campus-wide initiative that Delta State designs as part of reaffirmation of institutional accreditation. QEPs focus on student learning and/or student success. Delta State's last 2014-2019 QEP focused on Diversity.

The 2024-2029 QEP focuses on providing all students with a one-stop, virtual means of getting information they need when they need it. The name of the QEP is *Ask the Okra: A Campus Concierge*, and the goal of the QEP is to increase retention of Delta State students.

INFO: For more information, contact: Dr. Tanya McKinney, QEP Director, at qep@deltastate.edu or via phone at 662-846-4244.

QEP Executive Summary

Delta State University developed its 2024-2029 Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) according to the institution's [guiding principles](#) of respect for people and ideas, promotion of a student-centric campus, and commitment to institutional effectiveness.

Ask the Okra seeks to improve retention of first-time, full-time, first-year freshmen and first-time, full-time, transfer students via the implementation and promulgation of a campus concierge. To attain the retention goals of the QEP, the university is investing in *Ask the Okra*, a one-stop virtual knowledge center for connecting students to the resources they need. The intended outcomes of the campus concierge are the seamless connection of student inquiries to answers, improved services aligned with student needs, high levels of student sense of belonging, and student self-report of thriving at the university.

The **goal** of the campus concierge called *Ask the Okra*, is to intentionally match students with the services they need to thrive at Delta State. The theoretical framework for the QEP is self-determination and student autonomy ([Deci & Ryan, 2020](#)).

The QEP **topic** was identified through a two-year, iterative process that involved a representative campus team of faculty, staff, and students, all of whom received survey data and focus-group findings from the broader campus community. The focus of the QEP is improved student success via a streamlined process for identifying students in need, connecting them via soft transfer to services specific to their individual needs, and offering students every opportunity to engage with campus resources prior to a student's graduation or withdrawal from the university.

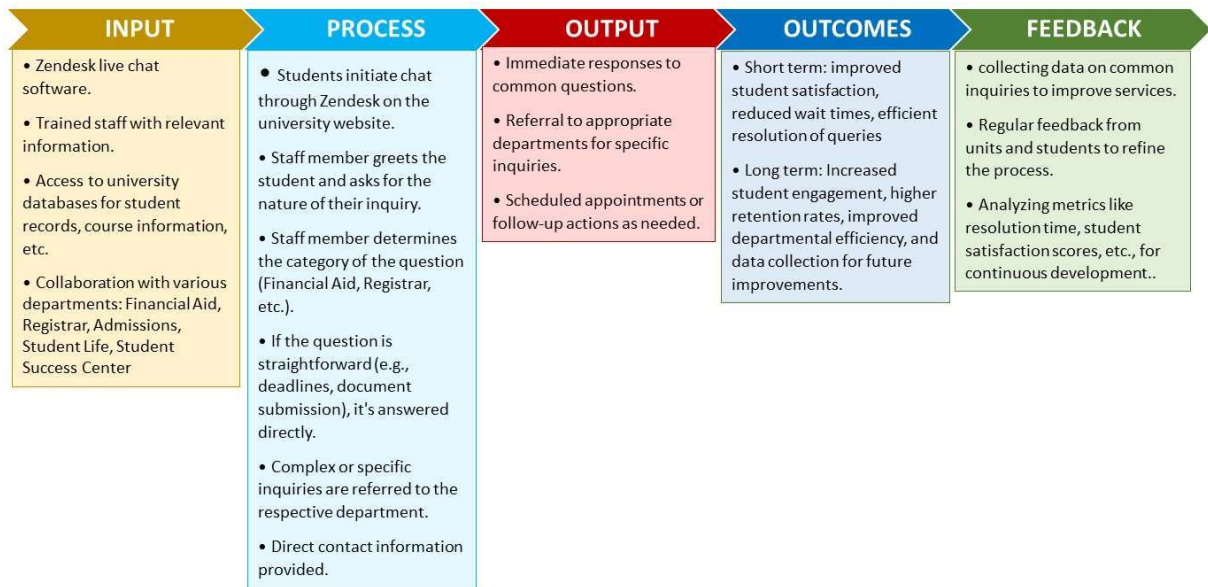
Broad-based support for the QEP includes representatives from faculty, administration, staff, and students, each of whom contributed to the QEP development via committee work, written qualitative feedback, participation in meetings during the February 2023 visit with our SACSCOC VP, or participation in ongoing meetings with the QEP Director.

Resources for the QEP include contributions by academic, student life, finance, athletic, and advancement units to one or more of the three phases of QEP including knowledge base development, marketing, and implementation. Delta State demonstrates institutional commitment and capability to implement the QEP via a budget of \$255,000 over the course of the five-year plan. The university has allocated \$55,000 for the first year and then \$50,000 for each of years 2-5.

Assessment of each phase consists of formative and summative assessments. Formative assessment includes implementation fidelity measures such as agent efficiency and effectiveness, unit-specific data, and senior exit survey data. Summative assessment of key performance indicators includes year1-year2 retention, fall-to-spring retention, belongingness, and thriving.

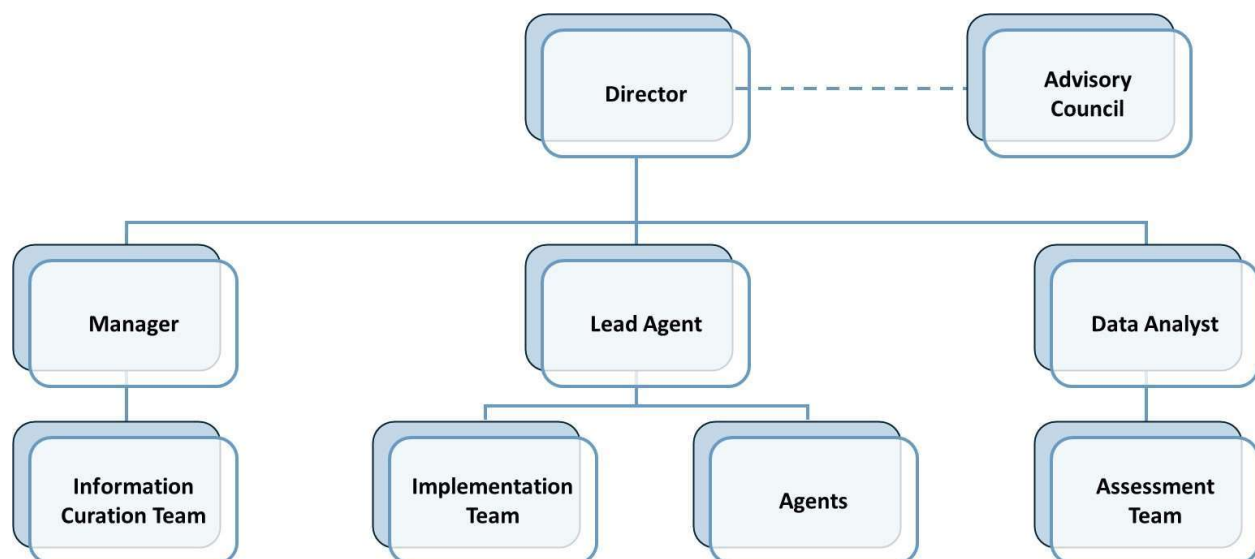
The overall goal of the QEP, aligned with the university's [mission](#) statement, is the self-determined motivation of our students to ask for and receive the resources they need to succeed at Delta State via academic competency, realized autonomy, and meaningful engagement with the university's community of scholars. To attain this goal, Delta State will create, implement, and promulgate a single-source campus concierge that will connect students with the resources they need to thrive ² at Delta State University and graduate on time.

LOGIC MODEL FOR *ASK THE OKRA: A CAMPUS CONCIERGE*



QEP Leadership

Every major area of campus, including Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, Finance, Athletics, and Advancement is involved in each phase of the QEP. Leadership for the QEP includes an Advisory Board and multiple subcommittees of the QEP team as illustrated by the QEP Organizational Chart:



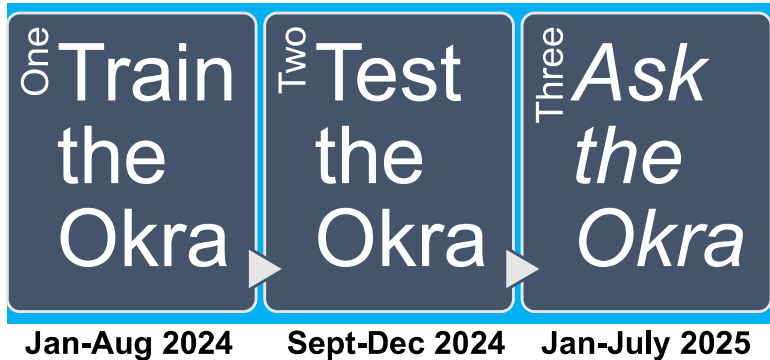
The responsibilities of different units/committees involved in the implementation of the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) are delineated below:

- **QEP Director** (Strategy & Implementation): The QEP Director will oversee the coordinated implementation of QEP, deliver all formal QEP updates, and write all formal QEP reports.
- **Advisory Council** (Guidance): The Advisory Council will offer an objective review of the QEP progress according to the project timeline.
- **Manager**: The Manager oversees information curation to meet content key performance indicators of *Ask the Okra*.
- **Information Curation**: The Information Curation Team builds the article library, develops the chatbot, and ensures that information provided by *Ask the Okra* is accurate and current.
- **Data Analyst** (Measurement): The Data Analyst will generate QEP outcome data and share findings with QEP subcommittees as follows:
 - *Summative assessment*
 - Student achievement data (to Advisory Council)
 - Thriving data (to Advisory Council)
 - Belongingness data (to Advisory Council)
 - *Formative assessment*
 - Agent efficiency and effectiveness data (to Implementation Team)
 - Unit-specific data (to Assessment Team)
 - Senior exit survey data (to Assessment Team and Advisory Council)
- **Assessment** (Feedback): The Assessment Team utilizes the data gathered to inform campus units about their processes, efficiency, complaints, and other relevant areas. IREP administers the Belongingness (first term) and the Pulse (annually after first term) surveys to FTFT cohorts.
- **Lead Agent**: The Lead Agent oversees the daily operations of the *Ask the Okra* agents to meet service key performance indicators.
- **Implementation**: The Implementation Team oversees the functioning of the Zendesk system, reviews agent efficiency and effectiveness data, and makes recommendations to the Lead Agent.
- **Agents**: Agents operate the virtual and live components of *Ask the Okra*, responding to live and virtually logged inquiries.
- **Communication & Marketing**: The Communication & Marketing committee will implement the communications plan to ensure that the campus and community at large are informed about *Ask the Okra*.

QEP Project Plan

Ask the Okra: A Campus Concierge advances through four phases from roll-out to completion. Year one rolls out *Ask the Okra* in three phases. Phase IV assumes a steady state of operation of the virtual and live assistant from year 2 through year 5 of the QEP.

Timeline Year One: Phases I, II, and III



Phase One of *Ask the Okra* began in January 2024. The QEP team initiated the process by enlisting the expertise of seasoned help-desk directors and university switchboard managers, all of whom shared their valuable insights and experiences. This was followed by President Ennis's formal announcement of the QEP during his January Town Hall. The momentum continued into February with a vibrant roll-out event that saw participation from faculty, staff, and students, celebrating the QEP initiative's launch. To further engage the community and enrich the *Ask the Okra* knowledge base, marketing materials promoting the Train the Okra survey were distributed both online and throughout the campus environment. Additionally, the QEP team has been actively collecting Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) from various service and academic departments across the university. FAQs for the Registrar's Office, Financial Aid, Student Business Services, Residential Life, and the School of Nursing have been completed. The remaining service and academic departments are in progress. This phase demonstrates a strong start and a collaborative effort for the success of *Ask the Okra: A Campus Concierge*.

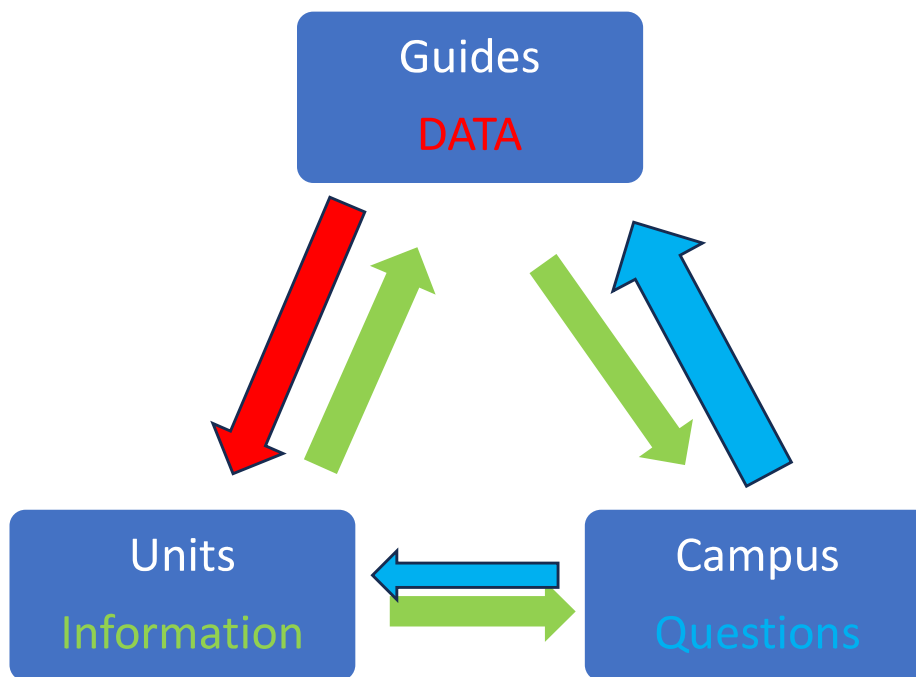
Phase One *Train the Okra* Poster with QR code to Survey



July	Update campus on QEP progress	Director	Power Point Presentation to President for Cabinet Advance retreat
July	Renewals of all paid QEP staff	Office of Academic Affairs	Signed MOUs for all paid QEP staff

Years 2-5 = Phase IV

After the Year-One initial planning and launch of *Ask the Okra: A Campus Concierge*, a steady state of operations is assumed. Monitoring of the live and virtual assistant system continues via a cycle of ongoing improvement. Thus, the Phase IV cycle, detailed below, serves as the QEP project plan from Year 2 through the close of the QEP in Year 5.



Project Plan Years 2-5: Phase IV

Phase IV Fall	Task	Responsible Party	Deliverable
August	Faculty, Staff, and SGA Brief on QEP progress	Director	Meeting minutes for each constituency
August	New Agent Training	Lead Agent	Completion Certificates uploaded to QEP Teams site

QEP Assessment

Summative Assessments

Student Achievement – Retention, YR1->YR2 and Fall to Spring

The goal of the QEP is to increase retention of first-time, full-time students and first-time, full-time transfer students.

First-time, Full-time Students

As noted on Delta State's Student Achievement [webpage](#), until fall, 2022, the university's year1 to year2 retention needle had hovered around 65% for nearly a decade (See Table 7). Delta State's published goal for year1 to year2 retention for first-time new students is to maintain or exceed 70% through the fall, 2027. Although recent retention rates have jumped above 70%, changes to admissions standards per the Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning (IHL) have increased the admission of underprepared students to Delta State. Thus, entering cohorts include a higher percentage of at-risk students.

Likewise, the QEP team will track fall to spring retention. Based on data from the past five years, the QEP team has set 90% as a target for fall to spring retention of FTFT students (See Table 9).

First-time, Full-time Transfer Students

Delta State has retained first-time, full-time (FTFT) transfer students at a median rate 4% higher than FTFT students (See Table 8). Therefore, the QEP team has set a goal for FTFT transfer student retention at 80% or higher through 2027.

Likewise, the QEP team will track fall to spring retention. Based on data from the past five years, the QEP team has set 93% as a target for fall to spring retention of FTFT transfer students (See Table 9).

TABLE 7. YEAR One and Year Two Retention Rate First Time, Full Time Freshmen			
Year	Original Cohort	1 Year Retained	2 Year Retained
2008	392	246 62.8%	181 46.2%
2009	367	215 58.6%	165 45.0%
2010	372	227 61.0%	174 46.8%
2011	325	219 67.4%	162 49.8%
2012	382	253 66.2%	192 50.3%
2013	374	252 67.4%	189 50.5%
2014	405	252 62.2%	203 50.1%
2015	322	217 67.4%	169 52.5%
2016	343	245 71.4%	193 56.3%
2017	318	213 67.0%	178 56.0%
2018	283	191 67.5%	155 54.8%
2019	280	188 67.1%	154 55.0%
2020	184	120 65.2%	100 54.3%
2021	250	160 64.0%	131 52.4%
2022	212	156 73.6%	

TABLE 8. Year One and Year Two Retention and Graduation Rates First Time, Full Time Transfers					
Cohort Year	Original Cohort	1 Year Retained	1 Year Graduated	2 Year Retained	2 Year Graduated
2008	459	306 66.7%	2 0.4%	189 41.2%	60 13.1%
2009	419	247 58.9%	3 0.7%	159 37.9%	45 10.7%
2010	404	249 61.6%	1 0.2%	137 33.9%	58 14.4%
2011	482	299 62.0%	0 0.0%	162 33.6%	68 14.1%
2012	396	245 61.9%	6 1.5%	149 37.6%	56 14.1%
2013	412	273 66.3%	1 0.2%	176 42.7%	58 14.1%
2014	458	285 62.2%	14 3.1%	178 38.9%	82 17.9%
2015	453	312 68.9%	21 4.6%	176 38.9%	107 23.6%
2016	423	278 65.7%	22 5.2%	176 41.6%	91 21.5%
2017	441	286 64.9%	29 6.6%	162 36.7%	130 29.5%
2018	385	290 75.3%	3 0.8%	160 41.6%	111 28.8%
2019	387	283 73.1%	3 0.8%	161 41.6%	85 22.0%
2020	266	181 68.0%	2 0.8%	100 37.6%	61 22.9%
2021	257	193 75.1%	3 0.8%		

Source: Office of Institutional Research, Effectiveness, and Planning, April 12, 2023

TABLE 9. Fall to Spring Retention Rates				
	Fall 2019 to Spring 2020	Fall 2020 to Spring 2021	Fall 2021 to Spring 2022	Fall 2022 to Spring 2023
First-time, Full-time Freshmen	89.0%	85.9%	87.6%	86.8%
Full-time Transfers	88.3%	86.8%	89.9%	92.3%

Exploratory Dependent Variables: Belongingness, Thriving

Retention and on-time graduation reflect competencies attained by Delta State students. Within the self-determination framework, other factors that could affect the internal motivation of students to remain enrolled include relationships and autonomy.

Belongingness

The institution will administer the four-item belongingness survey to each FTFT student and FTFT transfer student during the student's first term at Delta State.

Institutional data used to develop the QEP included a measure of belongingness. As explained earlier in this narrative, first-year students reported high levels of belongingness. Each cohort of

the QEP will complete this survey. Permission to use this IRB-approved survey is filed in the QEP Teams site.

Thriving

After students complete the belongingness survey in the fall of their first term at Delta State, the QEP team will follow the student experience from each cohort of FTFT students and FTFT transfer students via two items from the Thriving Quotient Survey ([Schreiner, 2010](#)). Permission to use this IRB-approved survey is filed in the QEP Teams site. The modified, two-item survey reads as follows:

According to psychologist and researcher Dr. Laurie Schreiner, thriving is defined as getting the most out of your college experience, so that you are intellectually, socially, and psychologically engaged and enjoying the college experience. Given that definition, to what extent do you think you are THRIVING as a college student at Delta State this semester?

- not even surviving
- barely surviving
- surviving
- somewhat thriving
- thriving most of the time
- consistently thriving

What has happened this semester that has led to your perception of whether you are thriving or not?

Formative Assessments

In addition to the QEP's primary dependent variable, retention, and the exploratory dependent variables of belongingness and thriving, the QEP team is conducting formative assessments designed to maximize the effectiveness and efficiency of *Ask the Okra* and to improve the student's college experience via a continuous feedback loop from the QEP team to services and resource units across the university. To that end, formative assessments include the following:

Implementation Fidelity: Agent Efficiency and Effectiveness

As described in the project plan, the QEP Data Analyst reviews Zendesk logs of factors such as the number of cases/tickets generated during specific hours, number of cases resolved, average response time, average time from ticket to resolution, average number of open tickets at a given time; and user satisfaction. The Data Analyst then shares findings with the Agents and the Implementation Team. As noted in the project plan, key performance indicators (KPIs) for this metric will be developed by Agents and the Implementation Team under the leadership of the Lead Agent during Phase II of Year One of the QEP, and the Lead Agent will report on these KPIs annually. Efficiency and effectiveness are verified per the following workflow:

QEP Resources

Resources for *Ask the Okra* include human and financial support as follows:

Phase	Task	Unit	Budget/Source
One	Content Development	QEP Team, All units	In-Kind
One	Technical Set-Up	OIT	In-Kind once
One	Staff Training	Zendesk Modules	\$5K
One	Technical Set-Up	Zendesk Licenses	\$18K (12 licenses)
All	Staff – 3/year	Agents - Library	In-Kind
All	Staff – 2/year	Agents – GradStud	Graduate Office
All	Faculty or Staff- 2/year	Agents - Faculty	\$10K (2 agents)
All	Agent Oversight	Lead Agent	\$5K
All	QEP Director	Dr. Tanya McKinney	\$7K
All	QEP Data Analyst	Jon Westfall	\$5K
All	Marketing	Marketing	In-Kind
All	Content Creation and Modification	Manager	\$5K annually
Total Year One			\$55K
Total Years 2-5			\$50K/year

Delta State University believes that a one-stop, virtual, and live assistant called *Ask the Okra* will unite students, faculty, and staff in elevating the student experience both online and on campus. To promote an ongoing campus-wide conversation on *Ask the Okra*, the QEP committee will meet annually to provide updates to the DSU campus community. Updates will also be posted regularly on the [QEP website](#). Dr. Tanya McKinney, QEP Director, will report on the QEP success, lessons learned, and future plans of *Ask the Okra: A Campus Concierge* via the SACSCOC Fifth-Year Report.