



**Revised Quality Enhancement Plan**

**in support of reaffirmation of accreditation by**

**Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges**

**On-site Review Committee Visit: September 30 – October 3, 2024**

**Response to Recommendation**



Stanly Community College  
141 College Drive  
Albemarle, NC 28001



Stanly Community College (SCC) is located in Albemarle, North Carolina, and has been meeting the needs of our region's workforce since it was chartered in 1971. Today, the College serves over 10,000 credential-seeking, continuing education, and basic skills students annually through both career and technical programs and college transfer programs. SCC is one of fifty-eight community colleges within the North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS), governed by a local Board of Trustees in compliance with legislation by the North Carolina General Assembly and administrative code promulgated by the State Board of Community Colleges

SCC is a comprehensive community college that offers programs designed for transfer to a baccalaureate institution and career-focused associate of applied science, diploma, and certificate programs. SCC offers four associate degree programs that embody a coherent course of study. The four associate degree programs are planned programs of study culminating in an:

1. Associate in Arts (A.A.),
2. Associate in Science (A.S.),
3. Associate in General Education (A.G.E.), and
4. Associate in Applied Science (A.A.S.).

The Associate in Arts and Associate in Science degree programs are designed to prepare students for transfer at the junior level to institutions offering baccalaureate degrees.

The Associate in General Education degree program is designed for students seeking a general liberal arts education. The Associate in Applied Science degree programs are designed to prepare students for employment, although some students do transfer to institutions offering a baccalaureate degree. These programs involve the application of scientific principles in research, design, development, production, distribution, or service. Moreover, some trades programs are offered at SCC at only the diploma and certificate level to prepare students for employment.

SCC offers educational programming on the main campus, at the Crutchfield Educational Center, online, at the Albemarle Correctional Institute, and through early college high school and dual enrollment. The wide variety of curriculum programs include health, business, manufacturing, industry, technology, public service, and college transfer at various completion levels, including associate degrees, diplomas, and certificates. Programs are organized into three schools, each having two divisions: the School of Advanced Manufacturing, Industry, Technology, and Trades (AMITT); the School of Health Sciences and Public Service; and the School of Transfer and Business. The activities proposed in the Quality Enhancement Plan

(QEP) will be piloted in one program of each School and then scaled to reach programs in each of the six divisions within the schools.

SCC's primary focus is on our students. This focus is reflected in a broad array of efforts to develop the potential of each student. We endeavor to individualize the educational experience from a personal and professional perspective. Students at SCC have achieved success through prior efforts by faculty to design and build courses that contextualize content so that it is relevant to the student experience. The activities of the QEP use this approach to facilitate student success for education in employability or "soft" skills.

SCC's student population is made up of seated, hybrid (combination of seated and distance education delivery), and distance education students enrolled in a variety of programs (i.e., certificate, diploma, associate degree) with access to the same student support services. Serving approximately 3,300 curriculum (for-credit) students with about 5,200 more in occupational extension and literacy programs, SCC enrolls approximately 70% female students in curriculum, for-credit classes. In the academic year 2022-2023, 66.4% of curriculum students were twenty-four years old or younger. They were 63.6% White, 18.1% African American, 4.9% Hispanic, 2.9% Asian, 0.4% American Indian/ Alaska Native, with the remainder being of multiple, unknown or other races. The Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Acceptance (IDEA) Team continually seeks ways to engage the larger SCC community in the national discourse of equity in colleges.

SCC's mission, vision, and values provide the guiding statements for the QEP:

### **Mission**

Stanly Community College values effective teaching, partnerships, and life-long learning for Stanly County residents and students across North Carolina, other states, and other countries. The College enhances the economic, social, and cultural life of the communities we serve by providing face-to-face and virtual learner-centered environments that encourage access, success, and completion.

### **Vision**

Stanly Community College will be the gateway for higher education and a positive catalyst for change in all the communities we serve by

- providing quality instruction in every delivery method;
- being a committed economic development partner; and
- offering an outstanding customer service experience.

### **Values**

**STUDENT SUCCESS** is the foundation of all our values. SCC exists to create a well-rounded education for our students. We seek to equip them so that they may enrich their lives, serve our community, and be productive citizens.

**COMMUNITY** is essential to the College's mission. The College strives to reflect our community's demographics in the student body, faculty, and staff. We pursue relationships with local industries, other learning institutions, and government and civic organizations to provide educational and training resources to meet the needs of the local community.

**EQUITY** is fairness in action. Meeting students where they are and providing the needed resources to help students from all backgrounds achieve their individual goals. The College firmly believes students can attain success no matter the socioeconomic factors in the community.

**INNOVATION** in all of our efforts puts us at the forefront of exciting new initiatives and technologies. Changing industry and educational standards require SCC to stay vigilant in seeking better ways to provide effective student and community support.

**EXCELLENCE** is our commitment. We demonstrate excellence in our teaching, partnerships, services and are planning to provide our faculty, staff, and partners with the training, motivation, and opportunities necessary to accomplish our mission. We continuously improve through data-informed decisions.

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## Chapter 1. Executive Summary

Stanly Community College (SCC or the College) prepares students to succeed in an ever-changing workforce. SCC's Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), entitled *Leadership, Employability, Accountability, and Professionalism (LEAP)* is designed to support these efforts by preparing students for the evolving academic and professional worlds. Students must not only be competent in their academic and technical career knowledge and skills but also in those intangible "soft" skills (Nagy, 2019). By integrating soft skills into the academic curriculum (Adams, 2012), the College aims to better prepare students to thrive and succeed in both their college years and in preparation for their careers.

In today's competitive job market, employees with strong employability or "soft" skills are those who succeed (Chandhok, 2021). However, many students entering the workforce lack the interpersonal and communication skills necessary for their chosen careers. Local employers report to SCC that, while the college does an excellent job of teaching the required technical skills, students are lacking the necessary soft skills. With this in mind, the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) will integrate soft skills into the Advanced Manufacturing, Industry, and Trades (AMIT) programs and courses, train the relevant faculty to enhance soft skills in their coursework, and better prepare students for success in their future careers. SCC has designed the program for *Leadership, Employability, Accountability, and Professionalism (LEAP)* to empower students to develop soft skills that are in high demand by employers. When setting goals for implementing soft skills into the curriculum, SCC considered the specific needs of the students, the academic disciplines involved, and the desired outcomes.

- Goal 1: Equip students with a foundation in critical soft skills, specifically in accountability, dressing appropriately, teamwork, and workplace communication.
- Goal 2: Improve students' self-efficacy, awareness, and employability through soft skills development.
- Goal 3: Cultivate skills of leadership, employability, accountability and professionalism in students by integrating the key soft skills of dressing appropriately, teamwork, workplace communication, and accountability into the academic curriculum.

## Chapter 2. Planning and Development

### Topic Selection

Stanly Community College identified “soft skills” as the topic for quality enhancement through its ongoing, comprehensive planning and evaluation processes. The selection of the topic was guided by the Institutional Effectiveness Council (IEC), a cross-disciplinary group of faculty and staff (Table 1) who exercise oversight of institutional planning and effectiveness processes. The IEC began planning for the QEP with its strategic planning process, collected ideas from a variety of college stakeholders, narrowed the potential array of topics, and methodically selected soft skills as the focus of the QEP.

*Table 1: Institutional Effectiveness Council Roster*

<b>Member Name</b>	<b>Member Title</b>
Dr. John Enamait	College President
Dr. Jeff Parsons	Vice President - Academic Affairs/Chief Academic Officer
Kim Bradshaw	Vice President - Administrative Services/Chief Financial Officer
Dr. Myra Furr (to Dec. 2022) Dr. Carmen Nunalee (from Dec. 2022)	Vice President - Student Success
Heath LuQuire	Chief Technology Officer
Devin Baucom	Associate Vice President – School of Advanced Manufacturing, Industry, Technology, and Trades
Tammi McIlwaine	Associate Vice President – School of Transfer and Business
Christie Honeycutt	Associate Vice President – School of Health Sciences and Public Services
Lori Poplin	Executive Director – Human Resources
Dr. Cindy Dean	Director – Institutional Effectiveness
Michael Hinson	Director - Security
Joe Pollard	Dean – Center for Teaching and Learning
Marcus Pryor (to July 2023) Jennifer Hatley (from July 2023)	Dean - Students
Petra Fields	Dean – Financial Aid Management
Nicole Williams	Executive Director – Marketing and Outreach
Anissa Chapman	Chair – Faculty Senate
Casey Covington (to December 2023), Lydia Van Hoy (from December 2023)	President – Staff Council
Joshua Aldridge	Chair - Learning Evidence Committee

SCC engages in a full Strategic Planning process as needs warrant, but not less than once every five years. The SCC Strategic Plan is a framework for student, employee, and community success, and the priorities identified help the institution outline a plan for moving forward.

SCC’s strategic direction arose in 2017 during a broad-based, community-wide series of discussions, culminating in a three-pronged success framework for Student Success, Employee Success, and Community Success. College employees, students, and members of the public set priorities to address college and community needs by leveraging strengths and mitigating weaknesses. Strategic discussions in 2021 helped to plan the comprehensive work-based learning activities that ultimately resulted in a Title III grant award.

In 2022 and 2023, SCC employees, students, and members of the public in Stanly County resumed broad-based discussions to begin planning for the five-year period spanning July 2024 through June 2029. These discussions would inform both the development of the College’s new strategic plan and the QEP. From August to October 2022, SCC convened focus groups of employees, students, and the community to discuss the needs of the college. The same time frame was used to collect survey results for anonymous feedback. Ultimately, 51 students, 140 employees, and 12 community members participated in focus groups. Table 2 provides the dates of the focus groups, the constituencies attending, and the numbers of participants at each focus group. Additionally, 19 current and former students, 38 employees, and 20 community members responded to the survey (Table 3). Based on past participation rates for focus groups and survey responses, SCC is satisfied that the numbers of participants in the in-person and electronic feedback are representative of the respective constituencies. The timeline of planning activities is provided in Appendix A.

*Table 2: Focus Group Attendees*

Date of focus group	Constituency	Number attending
August 4, 2022	Division of Student Success (staff employees)	24
August 11, 2022	School of Advanced Manufacturing, Industry, Technology, and Trades (faculty and staff employees)	16
August 11, 2022	Staff Council (staff employees)	7
August 23, 2022	Faculty Senate (faculty employees)	6
August 25, 2022	Crutchfield Educational Center (faculty and staff employees)	19
August 30, 2022	School of Transfer & Business (faculty and staff employees)	20
August 31, 2022	Division of Administrative Services; SCC Foundation (staff employees)	23
September 1, 2022	Division of Marketing & Outreach; Division of Strategy & Performance (staff employees)	9
September 2, 2022	Academic Affairs support (staff employees)	8
September 6, 2022	Executive Leadership Team (administration)	8
September 21, 2022	Student group, Albemarle main campus	10

September 22, 2022	Student group, Locust Crutchfield Educational Center	41
October 3, 2022	Community group	3
October 6, 2022	Board of Trustees	6
October 6, 2022	Community group	3

*Table 3: Survey Respondents*

<b>Self-identified Constituency</b>	<b>Number of individual respondents</b>
Employee	38
Current Student	16
Former Student	3
Advisory Board member	6
Other member of the public	10
Stanly County or area municipality official	4

Through this planning process, SCC identified and analyzed strengths, weaknesses/problems, and opportunities associated with the institution's academic programs, institutional management, and fiscal stability. The planning process expanded to incorporate cross-functional working groups for research and data analysis for each of the Student Success, Employee Success, and Community Success pillars. To obtain a broad-based set of opinions during the planning process, SCC used a modified SWOT analysis through the lens of appreciative inquiry for focus groups and surveys of employees, students, and the community. In advertising the invitations to focus groups, SCC also provided a QR code to give additional access to the survey for interested parties who could not attend a focus group setting. The survey and focus group questions are provided in Appendix B with a sampling of the resulting word clouds showing the differences in the responses by constituencies of students, employees, and community members. Evidence of the focus group settings and engagement of participants is provided in Figures 1 to 3 below. A total of 16 focus groups met to discuss the college's strategic direction.

*Figure 1: Employee Focus Group in Albemarle on the Main Campus*



*Figure 2: Student Focus Group in Albemarle on the Main Campus*



**Figure 3: Student Focus Group in Locust at the Crutchfield Education Center**



As the focus groups met in Fall 2022, the Institutional Effectiveness Council (IEC) began preparing to narrow ideas to select the topic. The Dean, Learning Resources & Grant Management met with the IEC to review research methods and the resources of the college available to employees. Furthermore, the IEC reviewed a rubric for members to use to make final decisions. The rubric is described more fully later in this chapter. The qualitative data collected through surveys and focus groups was coded and analyzed, resulting in 18 areas of emphasis that aligned with eight themes (Table 4).

*Table 4: Themes and Areas of Emphasis Identified*

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Areas of emphasis</b>
Quality Teaching (193 comments)	1. Retention of quality instructors 2. Advisory boards and partnerships 3. Complete Pathways work in classroom
Good Customer Service (187 comments)	4. Process mapping 5. Student mental health
Career Placement (140 comments)	6. Critical thinking / soft skills 7. Pathways work for career services 8. Job placement
Work-based learning (135 comments)	9. Registered Apprenticeships 10. Internships 11. Customized training
New Programs (126 comments)	12. Visionary program growth
Pipeline (118 comments)	13. Pipeline development
Marketing (112 comments)	14. Raise community value for student learning at community college
Student Engagement (92 comments)	15. Student engagement space 16. Student engagement activities 17. Promote emotional belongingness 18. Sports

Using the data the college collected through this planning process, the Institutional Effectiveness Council (IEC) met on October 19, 2022 to work toward narrowing the topic choices for the QEP. The discussion included other college initiatives already addressing some of the topics and the IEC members' knowledge of discussions about these topics at community advisory board meetings (for examples, see Appendix C). Ultimately, the IEC selected five topics for further review: soft skills, registered apprenticeships, career services, student engagement, and marketing the value of the college. IEC members volunteered to provide a summary of the reviews for topics that most interested them. On November 16, 2022, the IEC met to discuss the topic summaries. Only two groups produced summaries for the topics of soft skills and of registered apprenticeships. The other three topics - career services, student engagement, and marketing the value of the college - did not garner sufficient interest from IEC members to pursue further research. The topic of career services is a component of the Title III grant. The

topics of student engagement and marketing are strategically emphasized in the College's department of institutional advancement.

The final two topics were set for voting by the Institutional Effectiveness Council (IEC) members using the QEP selection rubric provided in Appendix D. The Go/No-go rubric was designed to determine whether prospective topics were aligned with SCC's strategic direction and could be supported by SCC's resources. Decision factors included linkage with existing strategy, potential for a return on investment through improving student outcomes, available human resources to lead and implement the plan, and a sound knowledge base of theory and evidence. IEC members scored each factor, scores were summed for each voting member, and the results were plotted. The results of the voting by rubric are also provided in Appendix D showing a clear preference for selecting soft skills as the topic of the QEP. By January 18, 2023, the IEC had completed its task of selecting the QEP topic.

Appropriate levels of college governance approved key steps in the development of the QEP. The Institutional Effectiveness Council (IEC), a cross-disciplinary group of faculty and staff representatives (Table 1), selected the topic of soft skills through a rigorous planning and evaluation process. College leadership accepted the recommendation of the IEC. The Executive Leadership Team (ELT, comprised of the President, the Vice Presidents, the Executive Director of the SCC Foundation, the Executive Director of Human Resources, the Executive Director of Marketing & Outreach, and the Executive Assistant to the President) met on January 23, 2023 to review the recommendation. ELT approved the recommendation. The Board of Trustees of the college met on May 4, 2023 to review the recommendation and approved the selection of employability skills as the topic of the QEP.

### **QEP Development**

The QEP topic was selected through ongoing institutional planning, strategic discussions, and a firm foundation of institutional and program evaluation. Those same factors inform the development of the QEP. To develop the topic of soft skills into a comprehensive quality enhancement plan, SCC began with the end in mind: students should complete their studies at SCC with the employability skills necessary to succeed in the workforce. Moreover, SCC sought to leverage existing student success and work-based learning efforts in the development of the QEP to enhance the employability of students and meet the needs of the labor market.

SCC understands its region, the workforce development needs of local employers, and the challenges facing its students as they navigate a path to earning family-sustaining wages and providing their desired quality of life. SCC's region faces significant economic challenges. Twelve percent of Stanly County residents live below the federal poverty line. Of county residents ages 25 and older, 13.5 percent do not have a high school diploma, and 22.5 percent are not working (Economic Innovation Group, 2022). SCC serves as a critical partner in broadening students' employment prospects, moving from having few employment opportunities to workforce success by earning a credential with labor market value.

Since 2016, SCC has engaged in a guided pathways framework to meet workforce development needs. The framework is designed to achieve early momentum, student success outcomes, credential completion, and, ultimately, professional career entry in a high-wage, in-demand occupation. As a college that has embraced guided pathways, SCC serves students through a mission that includes ensuring they progress along the journey they have chosen. SCC places student success as the first of its institutional values, defining it as the foundation of all our values. Through the value of student success, SCC seeks to equip students so that they may enrich their lives, serve our community, and be productive citizens. Qualitative data collected from student interviews and surveys reveal that many students choose to enroll part-time in order to meet time and financial responsibilities such as work schedules and caregiving. Students who are working either full- or part-time and enrolling part-time are navigating a path to earning family-sustaining wages that provide their desired quality of life. Doing so, they are engaging with employers who tell SCC that these students do not have high levels of the employability skills they need in the workplace (see Appendix C).

Augmenting the guided pathways work, in 2023 SCC was awarded a federal Title III Strengthening Institutions Program grant entitled *Guided Pathways: Career and Workforce Services from Connection to Completion*. Planning for the Title III grant proposal during 2021 included faculty and staff from academic affairs, SCC's Center for Teaching and Learning, and student services. The grant is funded from October 1, 2023 to September 30, 2028. SCC's Title III tasks are delivered in alignment with guided pathways. Furthermore, the Title III grant funds and activities will support the QEP synergistically.

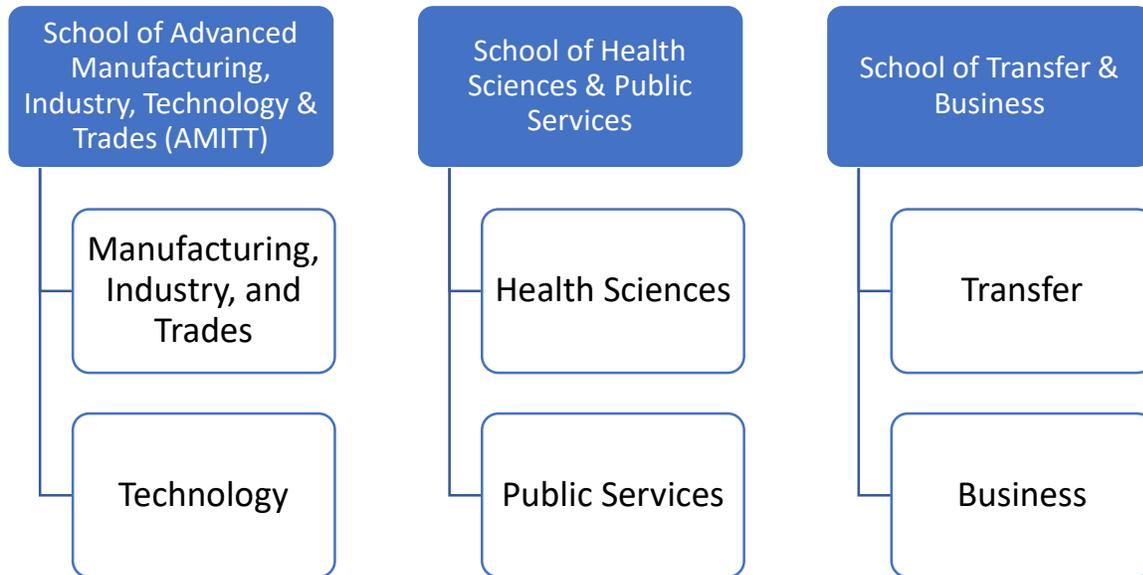
Building on and leveraging the guided pathways and Title III work, the QEP will enhance the quality of SCC's educational services leading to greater student success and enhanced employability. The quality enhancement plan is designed to incorporate into program curricula the skills required for students to be productive and effective participants in the workforce: Leadership, Employability, Accountability, and Professionalism. These essential qualities comprising the QEP are summarized by the acronym *LEAP* and will be developed in students through select skills that will be incorporated into the curriculum for each select program. Together, these skills will generate in students the overall workforce requirements of Leadership, Employability, Accountability, and Professionalism.

A QEP committee was formed in April 2023 with two co-directors to oversee the development of the project. By design of the Institutional Effectiveness Policy and procedures, the Director, Institutional Effectiveness is a designated co-director of the QEP. The current Director, Institutional Effectiveness, Dr. Cindy Dean, is also an adjunct faculty member in the School of Transfer and Business. Given that implementation of the QEP will occur on the academic side of the college, it is important that it be faculty driven. The Faculty Senate solicited nominations for a second co-director and voted to select Dr. Alan Campbell, a faculty member who teaches in the School of Transfer and Business.

Working together, the QEP co-directors, informed by the Institutional Effectiveness Council (IEC) and with recommendations from academic deans and associate vice presidents,

created a QEP Team comprised of a cross-section of faculty and staff. On April 18, 2023, the Vice President of Academic Affairs/Chief Academic Officer and the Vice President of Student Success met with the Associate Vice Presidents of the three Schools to discuss the remaining QEP Team members. Collectively, they decided to solicit nominations for one representative from each division of each School. SCC is comprised of three schools made up of two divisions each (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Academic Schools and Divisions



In addition, the QEP Team decided to include the Dean, Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) for his expertise in curriculum design and implementation and the Coordinator, CCR Student Success from the division of Career and College Readiness (CCR) for her subject matter expertise. The full QEP Team roster is provided in Table 5.

Table 5: QEP Team Roster

Name	Title	QEP Role
Dr. Alan Campbell	Instructor, History	Co-director
Dr. Cindy Dean	Director, Institutional Effectiveness	Co-director
Josh Gooch	Program Head, Advertising & Graphic Design	AMITT - Tech & Engineering representative
Kathrine Helms	Coordinator, CCR Student Success	College & Career Readiness representative
Dr. Beth Hopkins	Dean, University Transfer & Precollege	Transfer & Business representative
Ashlyn Isenhour	Director, Clinical Education - Respiratory Therapy Program	Health Science & Public Services - Co-Allied Health representative

Ryan Love	Program Head, Computer-Integrated Machining	AMITT - Industry & Trades Representative
Joe Pollard	Dean, Center for Teaching & Learning	CTL representative; implementation consultant
Jaime Shelton	Instructor, Early Childhood Education	Health Science & Public Services - Public Services representative
David Smith	Program Head, Cosmetology	Transfer & Business representative
Amy Witschey	Director, Clinical Education, Respiratory Therapy Program	Health Science & Public Services - Co-Allied Health representative
Dr. Carmen Nunalee	VP, Student Success; SACSCOC Institutional Accreditation Liaison; Title III Project Director	SACSCOC accreditation consultant
Dr. Jeff Parsons	VP, Academic Affairs/Chief Academic Officer	Academic consultant

The QEP Team met regularly to develop the QEP. The initial meeting occurred on June 5, 2023. This committee is tasked with the development and implementation of the QEP, and their first order of business included creating a name, one that would reflect the topic and spirit of the QEP's purpose. The QEP Committee developed the name **LEAP**: Leadership, Employability, Accountability, and Professionalism. This acronym and the individual words its letters represent are the themes that capture the spirit and intent of the QEP which is to develop, enhance, and improve students' knowledge of and ability to demonstrate effective soft skills which will help make them more effective employees and more successful in the labor market.

Aside from the summer term when not all members are contracted to work, the QEP Team met approximately twice monthly. During the Fall of 2023, they surveyed college stakeholders (SCC students, SCC employees, local employers, community) to ascertain the specific employability skills that would be the focus of the QEP in the classroom. The QEP Team used the following text to introduce the survey of specific employability skills for local employers and SCC employees:

“Stanly Community College is preparing for its upcoming decennial reaffirmation of accreditation with SACSCOC in 2024. Part of this effort is the requirement to develop a Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), a broad-based college-wide initiative focused on improving student learning outcomes and/or student success. Through a comprehensive process involving feedback from you, the community, our students, and our own college employees, SCC has identified professional/employability skills (aka soft skills) as the focus of our QEP, but the list of specific skills to focus as the most crucial is vast. [text selected for the constituent surveyed -- As current and/or potential employers of SCC students and graduates / As college employees who interact regularly with students / As students and as current and future members of the workforce], we invite your input once again to help us narrow down the list of specific skills to a concise, yet

essential list to help [text selected for the constituent surveyed -- our students be successful in their future careers / you be successful in the workplace.]”

The four surveys garnered a total of 244 respondents. Again, based on past participation rates for survey responses, SCC is satisfied that the numbers of respondents are representative of the respective constituencies. The number of respondents for each version of the survey is shown in Table 6.

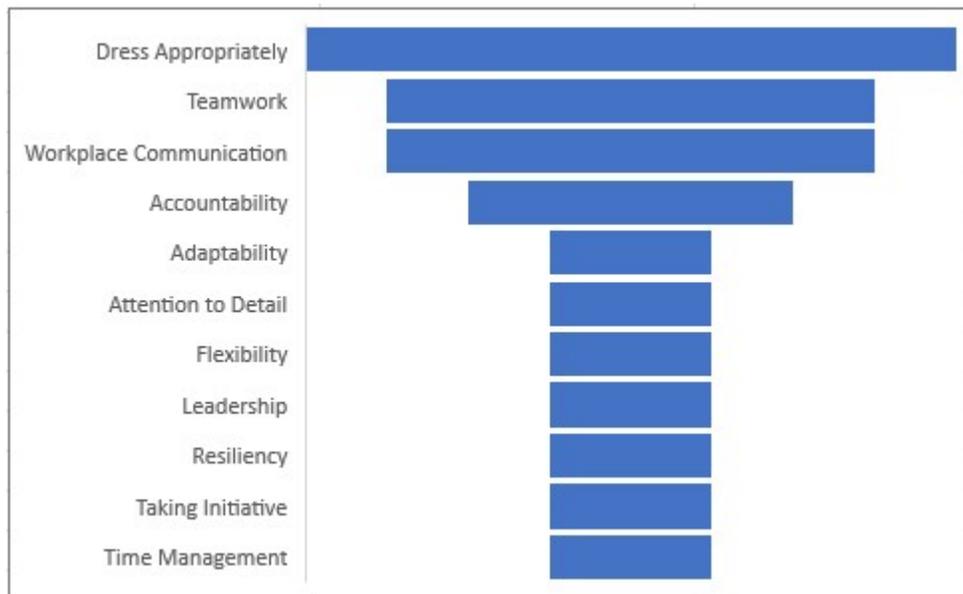
Table 6: Soft Skills Survey Respondents

Constituency by Survey Type	Number of individual respondents
Community member	35
Employee	103
Local employers	33
Students	73

The QEP Team reviewed survey results (Figure 5) during its October 9, 2023 meeting and selected the top four highest-ranking skills as the focus of LEAP:

1. Dressing appropriately
2. Teamwork
3. Workplace communication
4. Accountability

Figure 5: LEAP Skills Survey Results



Note. Combined results from surveys of all constituencies. Results based on the number of surveys in which each skill ranked in the top five.

During Spring 2024, the QEP Team defined the skills (see Chapter 4), identified goals and objectives (see Chapters 1 and 6), and designed the assessment plan (see Chapter 6). The complete timeline for institutional planning related to topic selection and development of the QEP is included in Appendix A.

### **Communication**

A key priority for the QEP Team is communication and transparency. Throughout the process, the Team has endeavored to keep students and employees updated on every step of the development process. Communication began during the planning process with SCC's outreach to the various college constituencies for feedback and input which was used to determine a QEP topic and the specific soft skills. The Team established a communication plan during its second committee meeting on June 21, 2023. Formal communication efforts with employees began in July 2023 through the *SCC Insider*, the college's employee newsletter (Appendix E), and in October 2023 with students through the *News Flush*, the college's student newsletter (Appendix F).

In addition to the monthly newsletters, the QEP Team communicates with all stakeholders through various other media. Employees receive updates through regular meetings of various college committees such as the Institutional Effectiveness Council and college-wide meetings. Students receive updates through student organizations and on-campus events. As an example, the SACSCOC Institutional Accreditation Liaison and one of the QEP co-directors met with the Student Government Association on January 17, 2024 and April 10, 2024, respectively, to discuss the plans for *LEAP*. All constituencies, including the public, receive updates through social media and the college's website which features a dedicated QEP webpage.

Essential to communication is branding, and the QEP Team was determined to involve students in branding *LEAP*. During the Spring 2024 term, students in the Advertising & Graphic Design program developed logo designs. The ten student-designed logos were entered into a QEP logo contest during the week of the SCC Art Show that began April 8, 2024. The winning logo was prepared by second-year program student Aiden McNeill. His winning logo and the story of his success in the competition were the subject of a social media post (Figure 6) and news article posted to the SCC website (Figure 7). The logo he designed adorns the cover page of this quality enhancement plan. The logo will be used throughout the implementation period of the QEP to identify activities related to the development and implementation of *LEAP*. Brand management will serve as a tool to increase awareness of the skill-building that is integrated throughout SCC's curriculum.

Figure 6: Facebook Post of QEP Logo Contest Winner



Figure 7: Article on SCC Website Announcing QEP Logo Contest Winner

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- Strategic Plan
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- Enrollment & FTE
- Student Demographics
- Success Rates in Curriculum Courses
- Graduation & Retention Rates
- Performance Measures
- SCC's Economic Impact
- Quality Enhancement Plan

**LEAP** is coming soon!

Stanly Community College (SCC) is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC). [Accreditation](#) affirms that SCC provides a quality educational experience to all students. In preparation for its reaffirmation of SACSCOC accreditation in 2025, SCC is embarking on a new Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) called **LEAP**.

The College's overall goal with LEAP, which stands for Leadership, Employability, Accountability & Professionalism, is to enhance students' employability skills to ensure they are workplace-ready upon leaving SCC.

### Involving Our Students



Drumroll, please! The votes are in, and we're thrilled to announce that **Aiden McNeill** is the winner of our logo design contest. This emblem will be used on Marketing Materials to promote the QEP.

Thank you to all students who participated and voted.

Watch this webpage for future updates.

QUESTIONS? CONTACT US.  
**Dr. Cindy Dean**  
Director, Institutional Effectiveness  
c\_dean5600@stanly.edu  
704-991-0329

let's **SUCCEED**

## Chapter 3. Literature Review

### Introduction

Soft skills, often referred to as interpersonal or employability skills, have increasingly been recognized as essential for career success and advancement in the modern workplace. These skills encompass a wide range of non-technical abilities such as communication, teamwork, leadership, problem-solving, adaptability, accountability, professional appearance, and emotional intelligence. This brief literature review examines soft skills in the workplace, focusing on their effect on career progression and employability as discussed in various academic sources.

### Conceptualization and Importance of Soft Skills

Soft skills are described as interpersonal and intrapersonal abilities that facilitate effective and harmonious interactions with others (Lippman et al., 2015). Unlike technical skills, which are specific to a particular job or task, soft skills are universally applicable and critical across various professions. Tripathy (2020) highlights that employees often fail to advance in their careers due to weak or nonexistent soft skills, underscoring their importance for both entry-level employees and seasoned professionals.

Touloumakos (2019) expands the term "soft skills" to include a variety of qualities, traits, values, and attributes. However, this broader definition has led to ambiguity, complicating the design of curricula aimed at developing these skills. Executives from large companies report that recent hires lack sufficient training in critical soft skills such as communication, integrity, and teamwork (Robles, 2012).

### The Importance of Soft Skills in Career Advancement

Chandhok (2021) asserts that soft skills are essential for career success. Adams (2012) advocates for integrating soft skills into higher education curricula to better prepare students for the workforce. Contemporary research underscores the importance of soft skills in career development, bridging the gap between technical expertise and practical application (Nagy, 2019). As automation and artificial intelligence reshape industries, the demand for soft skills has intensified, enabling professionals to navigate complex interpersonal dynamics and drive organizational success (INNOVA People, 2024).

### Metrics for Evaluating Soft Skills

Devedzic et al. (2018) provide a comprehensive analysis of metrics used to assess students' soft skills, emphasizing the need for reliable evaluation methods. Robust assessment techniques are crucial for understanding and improving these essential skills. Evaluating soft skills involves measuring competencies such as communication, teamwork, adaptability, and emotional intelligence (Bautista-Mesa et al., 2018).

### **Educational Perspectives and Development**

The development of soft skills in educational settings is critical for preparing students for the workforce. Educational institutions should integrate soft skills training into their curricula to ensure students are well-equipped for future employment (Succi & Canovi, 2020). The U.S. Department of Labor's "Soft Skills to Pay the Bills" program provides practical training resources to develop these skills, highlighting their necessity for young people entering the workforce (US Dept. of Labor, 2010b).

### **Perceptions of Soft Skills in Enhancing Employability**

Succi and Canovi (2020) investigated the perceptions of students and employers regarding the role of soft skills in enhancing graduate employability. They revealed a gap between the two groups' views, with employers placing a higher value on these skills than students. This indicates a need for educational institutions to emphasize the development of soft skills to better prepare students for the job market. LaFrance (2018) supports this, suggesting that integrating soft skills training into academic programs can significantly enhance students' employability and career readiness.

### **Soft Skills in Healthcare**

Goldman and Wong (2020) discuss the critical role of soft skills in healthcare, particularly in quality improvement and patient safety. Their research underscores that soft skills are core competencies necessary for healthcare professionals to deliver high-quality care. This aligns with Bergh et al. (2014), who explore the perceptions of medical students regarding their development of soft skills, noting their critical role in medical education.

### **Government and Organizational Support for Soft Skills Development**

The U.S. Department of Labor's initiative "Soft Skills to Pay the Bills" provides resources for developing essential soft skills among youth, aiming to prepare them for the workforce. Jobs for the Future (2019) recommends a balanced development of both technical and soft skills for college and career pathways. The National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) (2020) highlights key attributes employers seek in resumes, such as problem-solving, teamwork, and communication, underscoring the critical role these skills play in the hiring process.

### **Employer Expectations**

Beaton (2017) and America's Job Exchange (AJE) (2018) provide insights into employers' expectations, emphasizing the need for soft skills in the modern workforce. Employers value candidates who can demonstrate strong interpersonal and communication skills, essential for team collaboration and customer interaction. Lippman et al. (2015) further explore key soft skills that foster youth workforce success, underscoring their importance in enhancing employability and career progression.

### **Educational Strategies**

Harris and Rogers (2008) discuss methods and best practices for cultivating soft skills in educational settings, emphasizing the importance of integrating soft skills training into academic and vocational programs. This aligns with findings by Durowoju and Onuka (2014),

who highlight effective assessment methods for evaluating soft skills in students. LaFrance (2018) supports the integration of soft skills training in education, suggesting that such initiatives can significantly enhance students' career readiness.

Expanding on these foundational insights, contemporary research underscores the critical role of educational strategies in effectively teaching soft skills. Integrating soft skills into curricula is essential for preparing students to meet the demands of the modern workforce. According to the Midwest Teachers Institute, soft skills such as communication, teamwork, adaptability, and critical thinking are increasingly sought after by employers. These skills can be woven seamlessly into various subjects through project-based learning, collaborative activities, and real-world problem-solving scenarios (Midwest Teachers Institute, 2024).

### **Industry-Specific Soft Skills**

Goldman and Wong (2020) emphasize the importance of soft skills in the healthcare sector, particularly in quality improvement and patient safety. Their research highlights that soft skills are core competencies necessary for delivering high-quality care and achieving positive patient outcomes. This is supported by Bergh et al. (2014), who explore the development of soft skills in medical students and the critical role these skills play in their professional growth. Similarly, van Heerden et al. (2023) discuss the importance of soft skills in the construction industry, highlighting how these skills contribute to effective team collaboration and project management. The National Center for Construction Education & Research (NCCER) also emphasizes the need for soft skills in construction, noting that these skills are essential for career advancement and overall job performance (Burris, 2018).

### **Workplace Communication**

Effective communication is a fundamental component of professional success, exerting a significant influence on teamwork, productivity, and overall job satisfaction. Communication skills are highly esteemed by employers across diverse industries as they facilitate a clear understanding of tasks, enhance teamwork, and foster robust relationships within the workplace. According to Adu-Oppong and Agyin-Birikorang (2014) proficient communication mitigates work-related conflicts, enhances employee morale, and elevates job satisfaction. Additionally, effective communication cultivates organizational loyalty and trust, which are imperative for a positive work environment (Coursera, 2024).

The enhancement of productivity through effective communication is notable as it ensures that employees comprehend their roles and responsibilities, thereby increasing efficiency (Penn State Extension, 2022). Effective workplace communication, moreover, improves employee engagement; when employees perceive that their voices are heard and their perspectives understood, their commitment to the organization intensifies, consequently reducing turnover rates (Adu-Oppong & Agyin-Birikorang, 2014). Clear communication, thus, facilitates the exchange of ideas and feedback, promoting a culture of innovation and continuous improvement (Gallo, 2022).

Improving communication skills necessitates several strategic approaches. Active listening is paramount; it involves fully concentrating on the speaker, comprehending their message, and responding thoughtfully. This practice enhances interpersonal relationships and aids in understanding colleagues' needs and concerns (Coursera, 2024). Additionally, tailoring messages to the audience's needs and preferences is crucial for effective communication, because "knowing your audience can be key to delivering the right messages effectively" (Coursera, 2024).

Clear and concise communication is also needed to prevent misunderstandings and ensure that messages are easy to comprehend and act upon (Penn State Extension, 2022). Selecting the appropriate medium for communication - be it face-to-face, email, phone, or video conference - is vital for the effective delivery of messages. The chosen medium should align with the nature of the message and the audience's preferences (Coursera, 2024).

### **Problem-Solving and Critical Thinking**

Problem-solving and critical thinking are essential soft skills that enable individuals to navigate complex situations and make informed decisions. These competencies involve analyzing problems, identifying potential solutions, and implementing effective strategies, all of which are highly valued by employers. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, these skills are fundamental for adapting to dynamic work environments and overcoming challenges (U.S. Department of Labor, 2010a).

Research by Succi and Canovi (2020) underscores the high value employers place on graduates with robust problem-solving abilities as they contribute to innovative solutions and drive organizational success. This finding highlights the imperative for educational institutions to prioritize the development of these skills within their curricula.

Problem-solving and critical thinking significantly enhance workplace efficiency and effectiveness. These skills enable employees to address challenges methodically, thereby reducing the time and resources required for issue resolution (Sharma, 2024). Moreover, problem-solving and critical thinking foster a culture of continuous improvement. When employees are encouraged to scrutinize existing processes and propose enhancements, organizations benefit from ongoing innovation and refinement of practices (Smith, 2022). This proactive approach is crucial for remaining competitive in today's rapidly evolving business environment.

Enhancing these skills involves a multifaceted approach encompassing education, practice, and workplace support. Educational institutions play a pivotal role in developing problem-solving and critical thinking abilities by integrating relevant exercises and real-world scenarios into their curricula. Brookfield (2012) posits that engaging students in active learning activities such as debates, case studies, and group projects cultivates these skills.

In the workplace, providing employees with opportunities to tackle challenging projects and offering constructive feedback further enhances their problem-solving and critical thinking

abilities (Champlain College Online, 2023). Employers can foster an environment conducive to problem-solving and critical thinking by promoting open communication and collaboration. Baldoni (2009) suggests that fostering a culture where employees feel safe to express their ideas and question assumptions leads to more innovative solutions. Additionally, providing access to resources such as training programs, mentorship, and cross-functional projects aids in the development and refinement of these skills.

### **Teamwork and Collaboration**

Teamwork and collaboration are fundamental elements in achieving common goals and fostering a cooperative work environment. Effective teamwork necessitates communication, trust, and the ability to collaborate efficiently with others. According to the National Soft Skills Association (2017), teamwork skills are indispensable for creating a cohesive work environment where all team members can thrive. Effective teamwork entails sharing responsibilities, supporting one another, and working towards common objectives. This is essential for enhancing productivity and innovation within the workplace (Harris & Rogers, 2008).

Research substantiates that effective teamwork can significantly enhance organizational performance. Psychologists emphasize that teamwork facilitates superior decision-making by integrating diverse perspectives and expertise (Weir, 2018). Additionally, teamwork can improve job satisfaction by fostering a sense of belonging and support among team members (Haas & Mortensen, 2016). Furthermore, embracing teamwork can lead to better health outcomes in high-stakes environments such as healthcare. The American Association of Critical-Care Nurses (2020) reports that in critical care settings, teamwork is crucial for managing complex patient care and ensuring safety. Regular, goal-driven meetings and open communication are essential strategies for maintaining effective teamwork in such settings.

Enhancing teamwork skills requires intentional effort and strategic approaches. Establishing a culture of open communication and non-punitive feedback is vital. This approach ensures that team members feel comfortable sharing ideas and concerns, leading to more innovative and effective solutions (Critical Care Nurse, 2020). Regular and structured team meetings are also crucial. These meetings should have clear agendas, defined objectives, and be time-efficient to ensure productivity. Preparing in advance and adhering to the agenda can help maintain focus and goal orientation during meetings (Critical Care Nurse, 2020). Additionally, fostering a sense of unity and common purpose can enhance teamwork. Encouraging team members to support one another and work collaboratively towards shared goals can build stronger, more resilient teams (Haas & Mortensen, 2016).

### **Adaptability**

Adaptability and flexibility are essential soft skills for navigating the dynamic and ever-changing work environment. Employees who can adapt to new situations, learn new skills, and remain open to change are highly valued by employers. This section explores the importance of adaptability, its benefits, and strategies for improvement based on recent research.

Adaptability is a crucial skill for thriving in diverse and fast-paced work environments. According to Beaton (2017), adaptability is one of the top skills that employers seek in millennial employees as it enables them to handle various challenges and changes effectively. This skill is particularly important in today's rapidly evolving job market, where technological advancements and global events can significantly alter work processes and requirements (McKinsey, 2023). Research by Lippman et al. (2015) found that adaptability is critical for youth workforce success, allowing young people to transition smoothly between different roles and responsibilities. This finding underscores the need for educational programs to focus on developing students' adaptability and resilience. Additionally, a study by Rossier, et al (2017), highlights that career adaptability can enhance job satisfaction and reduce job stress, contributing to overall employee well-being and productivity.

Adaptability offers numerous benefits in the workplace. Employees who are adaptable are more likely to embrace change positively, leading to higher levels of job performance and satisfaction. According to research published in the *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, career adaptability can increase job satisfaction and lower job stress by fostering a sense of competence and control over one's career path (Fiori, Bollmann, & Rossier, 2015). Moreover, adaptable employees are better equipped to handle unexpected challenges and can contribute to innovative solutions, thereby driving organizational success (Harvard Business Review, 2020). McKinsey (2023) also emphasizes that adaptability is linked to greater learning ability, better performance, and increased creative output. This adaptability allows individuals to remain relevant in their careers and supports continuous professional growth. Furthermore, adaptable employees often exhibit higher levels of resilience, enabling them to recover quickly from setbacks and maintain a positive outlook despite uncertainties (Huber et al., 2021).

Improving adaptability involves several key strategies. One essential approach is fostering a growth mindset, which encourages viewing challenges as opportunities for learning rather than as obstacles. This mindset shift can help individuals remain open to new experiences and continuous improvement (McKinsey, 2023). Additionally, developing strong problem-solving skills can enhance adaptability. Employees who can analyze situations effectively and come up with creative solutions are better prepared to navigate changes and challenges in the workplace. Engaging in continuous learning and professional development is another critical strategy. By staying updated with the latest industry trends and acquiring new skills, employees can adapt more readily to evolving job requirements (Fuller et al, 2019). Building strong interpersonal relationships and seeking diverse perspectives can also bolster adaptability. Collaborating with colleagues from different backgrounds and with varying expertise can provide new insights and foster a more flexible approach to problem-solving (Rossier et. al., 2017).

### **Accountability**

Accountability is a crucial soft skill and employability trait that significantly impacts professional behavior, workplace dynamics, and organizational success. This section explores the importance of accountability, its effects on professional identity and organizational culture, and offers strategies for fostering accountability based on recent research.

Accountability is essential for maintaining a productive and ethical workplace. It ensures that employees take responsibility for their actions, decisions, and performance, thereby enhancing trust and reliability within the organization. According to Hsieh et al (2018), accountability is foundational to a healthy and sustainable organizational culture, promoting transparency and ethical behavior. Moreover, accountability helps clarify roles and expectations, reducing ambiguities that can lead to conflicts and inefficiencies. It plays a critical role in shaping professional identity by instilling a sense of responsibility and ownership over one's work. Employees who are accountable are more likely to engage in behaviors that align with organizational goals and values, thereby contributing to the overall success of the company (Goncharenko, 2022).

The benefits of fostering accountability in the workplace are manifold. It leads to improved performance and productivity as employees who are held accountable are more likely to meet their objectives and deadlines. Painter-Morland (2006) found that relational accountability, which emerges from ongoing interactions among team members, can create a strong sense of mutual responsibility and support, enhancing team dynamics and performance. Furthermore, accountability promotes ethical decision-making and reduces the likelihood of unethical behavior. When employees understand that they will be held responsible for their actions, they are more likely to adhere to ethical standards and organizational policies (Hsieh et al., 2018). This not only helps in maintaining a positive reputation but also mitigates risks associated with legal and regulatory non-compliance.

Creating a culture of accountability requires intentional effort and strategies. Leading by example is crucial; leaders who demonstrate accountability in their actions set a standard for their teams to follow. Students at Harvard Business School, for example, are taught that leaders should create a culture grounded in reliability, ethics, and goodwill to foster accountability among employees (Hsieh et al, 2018). Providing regular, meaningful feedback is another effective strategy. Constructive feedback helps employees understand their performance and areas for improvement, encouraging them to take responsibility for their development (McClain & Nelson, 2024). Incorporating key performance indicators (KPIs) into evaluations can also promote accountability by setting clear expectations and measurable goals. Additionally, fostering an environment of open communication and trust is essential. Employees are more likely to hold themselves accountable when they feel trusted and valued by their organization. Encouraging team collaboration and peer accountability can further reinforce a culture of responsibility (Painter-Morland, 2006).

### **Leadership and Management Skills**

Leadership and management skills are essential for guiding teams, making strategic decisions, and driving organizational success. Effective leaders possess a combination of technical and soft skills, including communication, problem-solving, and emotional intelligence. According to Robles (2012), leadership skills are critical for executive success as they enable leaders to inspire and motivate their teams. Research by Keil et al. (2013) found that leadership skills are among the most critical competencies for managing IT projects as they help project

managers navigate complex challenges and ensure project success. This finding underscores the importance of developing leadership skills in both educational and professional settings.

Leadership and management skills significantly impact organizational performance and employee satisfaction. Effective leaders can create a vision for the future, set strategic goals, and guide their teams toward achieving these objectives. This ability to steer an organization in the right direction is vital for maintaining competitiveness and ensuring long-term success (Northouse, 2018).

Additionally, strong leadership fosters a positive workplace culture. Leaders who communicate effectively, demonstrate empathy, and manage conflicts constructively contribute to a supportive and collaborative work environment. According to Goleman (2021), leadership styles that prioritize emotional intelligence, such as transformational and coaching leadership, enhance employee engagement and productivity. These leaders can adapt their approach to meet the needs of their team members, resulting in higher morale and reduced turnover rates (Landry, 2019).

Improving leadership and management skills involves a continuous process of learning and development. Formal education, such as leadership courses and management degree programs, provides a strong foundation in essential theories and practices. However, experiential learning through real-world applications is equally important. According to Kouzes and Posner (2017), leadership development is most effective when individuals engage in challenging experiences that require them to stretch their capabilities and reflect on their performance.

Mentorship and coaching are also crucial for developing leadership skills. Experienced leaders can provide valuable insights, feedback, and guidance to emerging leaders, helping them navigate complex situations and build confidence in their abilities (Johnson & Ridley, 2018). Additionally, participating in leadership training programs and workshops can enhance specific skills such as strategic thinking, decision-making, and team management (Day et al., 2014).

Self-awareness and emotional intelligence are key components of effective leadership. Leaders who understand their strengths and weaknesses and who can manage their emotions are better equipped to lead with authenticity and build trust with their teams. Techniques such as mindfulness and reflective practices can help leaders develop greater self-awareness and emotional regulation (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005).

Employers play a vital role in nurturing leadership and management skills within their organizations. Creating a culture that values continuous learning and development encourages employees to pursue leadership opportunities and strive for excellence. According to the Center for Creative Leadership (2021), organizations that invest in leadership development programs experience higher levels of employee engagement and organizational performance.

Providing access to leadership training and development resources, such as online courses, workshops, and conferences, can help employees build and refine their leadership skills. Additionally, offering opportunities for employees to take on leadership roles in projects and initiatives allows them to gain practical experience and develop their capabilities (McCauley et al., 2010).

Recognizing and rewarding effective leadership behaviors reinforces the importance of these skills and motivates employees to cultivate them. Celebrating achievements in leadership, such as successful project management or exceptional team performance, highlights the value of strong leadership within the organization (Gallo, 2022).

### **Dressing Appropriately**

Dressing appropriately for the workplace is a critical aspect of professional behavior that significantly impacts perceptions of an individual's competence, credibility, and overall performance. This section explores the importance of appropriate workplace attire, its effects on professional identity and organizational culture, and offers recommendations based on current research (Peluchette et al, 2006).

Workplace attire plays a crucial role in shaping professional identity and influencing organizational culture. Studies have demonstrated that formal attire, such as suits and ties, conveys professionalism, competence, and reliability, which can enhance an individual's credibility and the respect they receive from colleagues and clients (Hays, 2016). This is particularly important in fields where maintaining a professional image is essential, such as finance, law, and corporate management. Moreover, the organizational culture is often reflected in its dress code policies. For instance, companies with formal dress codes tend to emphasize professionalism and hierarchy, while those with casual or business casual policies may promote a more relaxed and approachable environment. The choice of dress code can affect employee behavior, productivity, and morale. Research indicates that a more formal dress code can boost productivity and performance by fostering a sense of responsibility and professionalism (Shinn et al, 2019).

Dressing professionally has been linked to various psychological benefits, including increased confidence and a sense of authority. Studies suggest that employees who dress up for work tend to perform better in tasks that require abstract thinking and leadership skills. This phenomenon, often referred to as "enclothed cognition," indicates that wearing formal attire can positively influence an individual's cognitive processes and behavior (Smith R., 2016). Furthermore, dressing appropriately can enhance one's mood and self-esteem, leading to better interpersonal interactions and job performance. Employees who perceive themselves as well-dressed are more likely to feel competent and capable, which can translate into higher productivity and job satisfaction (Scott, 2018).

Dressing appropriately for the workplace, then, is not merely about adhering to a dress code; it is a strategic tool that influences professional identity, perceptions, and performance. By understanding the impact of attire and following best practices, individuals can enhance

their professional image, boost their confidence, and contribute positively to their organization's culture and success (Allen, 2016).

### **Emotional Intelligence**

Emotional intelligence, defined as the ability to understand and manage one's own emotions and the emotions of others, is a critical soft skill that contributes to effective interpersonal interactions and workplace harmony. Employees with high emotional intelligence can navigate social complexities, build strong relationships, and manage stress effectively. According to Touloumakos (2019), emotional intelligence is a pivotal component of soft skills and should be emphasized in educational and professional development programs.

A study by Goldman and Wong (2020) found that emotional intelligence is essential for quality improvement and patient safety in the healthcare sector, as it enables healthcare professionals to provide compassionate and effective care. This finding underscores the importance of integrating emotional intelligence training into healthcare education and practice.

Emotional intelligence significantly enhances teamwork, productivity, and overall job satisfaction. Employees with high emotional intelligence can effectively manage their own emotions, leading to better stress management and resilience. This capacity to remain composed and focused under pressure is crucial for maintaining productivity and making sound decisions in challenging situations (Goleman, 2021).

Furthermore, emotional intelligence fosters a positive work environment by promoting empathy and understanding among colleagues. Employees who can empathize with their peers are better equipped to resolve conflicts and build strong, supportive relationships, which are essential for a cohesive team (Bradberry & Greaves, 2016). This empathy also extends to customer interactions, where emotionally intelligent employees can provide superior service by understanding and addressing customer needs effectively (Landry, 2019).

Improving emotional intelligence involves several key strategies. Self-awareness is the foundation of emotional intelligence, requiring individuals to recognize and understand their own emotions. Techniques such as mindfulness and reflective practices can enhance self-awareness by encouraging individuals to observe their emotional responses and their underlying causes (Siegel, 2010).

Self-regulation, another critical aspect, involves managing one's emotions constructively. Practices such as deep breathing, meditation, and positive self-talk can help individuals maintain control over their emotional responses and reduce stress (Neff, 2011). Additionally, developing empathy, which involves understanding and sharing the feelings of others, is essential for emotional intelligence. Active listening and perspective-taking exercises can strengthen empathy by encouraging individuals to consider situations from others' viewpoints (Rogers & Evans, 2015, 1957).

Social skills, including effective communication and conflict resolution, are also integral to emotional intelligence. Training programs focused on these skills can equip employees with the tools they need to navigate interpersonal interactions successfully (Caruso & Salovey, 2004). For instance, role-playing scenarios can provide practical experience in handling difficult conversations and resolving conflicts amicably (Goleman, 1998).

Employers play a vital role in fostering emotional intelligence within their organizations. Creating a supportive and inclusive work environment encourages employees to develop and utilize their emotional intelligence skills. According to the Society for Human Resource Management (2022), organizations that prioritize emotional intelligence in their culture and values experience higher employee engagement and lower turnover rates.

Providing access to training and development programs focused on emotional intelligence can further enhance these skills among employees. Workshops on emotional intelligence, stress management, and interpersonal communication can help employees build the necessary competencies to thrive in the workplace (Bradberry & Greaves, 2016). Additionally, mentorship programs that pair less experienced employees with emotionally intelligent leaders can provide valuable guidance and support (Goleman, 1998).

Recognizing and rewarding emotionally intelligent behaviors can also motivate employees to develop these skills. Celebrating examples of empathy, effective conflict resolution, and strong teamwork reinforces the importance of emotional intelligence and encourages its practice throughout the organization (Landry, 2019).

### **Practical Applications and Recommendations**

To address these challenges, several recommendations have been proposed. The Jobs for the Future (JFF) report (2019) suggests incorporating soft skills training into college and career pathway endorsements, providing students with a more holistic education that prepares them for diverse workplace environments. Similarly, the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE, 2020) identifies key attributes employers seek on students' resumes, such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving skills, advocating for their inclusion in educational programs. Adams (2012) and Beaton (2017) highlight the importance of soft skills for higher education and millennial employees, respectively. They argue that these skills are essential for navigating the complexities of modern workplaces and should be prioritized in both educational and professional development programs.

### **Key Findings and Gaps in Literature**

The literature review by the Diversity Institute (2015) at Toronto Metropolitan University highlights the perceived gap between the skills possessed by new graduates and the requirements of employers in North America's fastest-growing sectors. This gap is particularly pronounced in STEM fields, where technical skills are often prioritized over soft skills. The report calls for a more balanced approach to education that includes both technical and soft skills training. The systematic review by Touloumakos (2019) criticizes the lack of consensus on what constitutes soft skills, complicating efforts to teach and assess them effectively. She

argues for a more in-depth and embedded approach to studying soft skills to reach a consensus on their definition and development.

### **Conclusion**

The reviewed literature consistently indicates that soft skills are crucial for career advancement and employability across various fields. While technical skills are important, the ability to communicate effectively, work well with others, and adapt to changing environments often distinguishes successful employees. Educational institutions and organizations must prioritize the development of these skills to prepare individuals for the demands of the modern workforce. Integrating soft skills training into curricula and professional development programs is essential for enhancing employability and ensuring long-term career success.

## Chapter 4. Goals and Objectives

*Leadership, Employability, Accountability, and Professionalism (LEAP)* will integrate soft skills into the Advanced Manufacturing Industry and Trades (AMIT) programs and courses, train the relevant faculty to enhance employability skills in coursework, and better prepare students for success in their future careers. When setting goals and student learning outcomes for implementing employability skills into the curriculum, SCC considered the specific needs of the students, the academic disciplines involved, and the desired outcomes.

### LEAP Goals:

- Goal 1: Equip students with a foundation in critical soft skills, specifically in accountability, dressing appropriately, teamwork, and workplace communication.
- Goal 2: Improve students' self-efficacy, awareness, and employability through soft skills development.
- Goal 3: Cultivate skills of leadership, employability, accountability and professionalism in students by integrating the key soft skills of dressing appropriately, teamwork, workplace communication, and accountability into the academic curriculum.

### LEAP Objectives:

- Objective 1: Develop and enhance students' workplace readiness through the awareness of select soft skills.
- Objective 2: Increase students' self-awareness, confidence, and leadership potential by focusing on the development of the four *LEAP* skills.
- Objective 3: Promote leadership, employability, accountability, and professionalism in students through the mastery of four select soft skills.
- Objective 4: Improve instructors' and employers' perceptions of students' leadership, employability, accountability, and professionalism as reflected in their use of the key soft skills:
- Objective 5: Integrate *LEAP* skills into all relevant program courses.

### LEAP Student Learning Outcomes

Student Learning Outcomes evolved from these goals and objectives and will help assess whether and to what degree *LEAP* is successful in achieving the goals. There are three SLOs for each of the four skills assessing each skill on the same behaviors of *identify*, *discuss*, and *demonstrate*.

Upon completion of the *LEAP* interventions, students will be able to:

SLO #1: identify [key elements of...]

SLO #2: discuss [concepts and importance of...]

SLO #3: demonstrate [effective and consistent use of...]

- Accountability
  - SLO #1: Identify the key elements of accountability (responsibility, transparency, ownership).
  - SLO #2: Discuss the concepts of accountability, their challenges and solutions.
  - SLO #3: Demonstrate consistent application of accountability principles in various workplace and professional contexts.
- Dressing Appropriately
  - SLO #1: Identify relevant industry standards for appropriate attire for the given workplace.
  - SLO #2: Discuss the importance of dressing appropriately for the workplace.
  - SLO #3: Demonstrate consistent application of appropriate dress in various workplace and professional contexts.
- Teamwork
  - SLO #1: Identify the key elements of effective teamwork (communication, roles, conflict resolution).
  - SLO #2: Discuss the challenges, solutions, and importance of teamwork in achieving project goals.
  - SLO #3: Demonstrate consistent and effective use of teamwork principles in various workplace and professional contexts.
- Workplace Communication
  - SLO #1: Identify key elements of professional communication (clarity, conciseness, tone, non-verbal cues).
  - SLO #2: Discuss the importance of effective workplace communication, its strategies and challenges.
  - SLO #3: Demonstrates consistent use of effective communication skills in various workplace and professional contexts.

## Chapter 5. Implementation

### Introducing Community Context for the Topic

Employers consistently report that graduates have the necessary job skills but lack the necessary soft skills to be successful (see Appendix C). Adopting soft skills as the QEP will better prepare students for the workplace culture and to be successful in the workplace. In all planning stages for selecting a topic for the QEP, all constituencies supported jobs-related topics or work-based learning (WBL). “Soft skills” is a sub-topic identified by many of the respondents and is focused, specific, and directly related to student success. It could encompass other WBL-identified topics such as internships, job shadows, or apprenticeships which would be helpful in giving students the opportunity to learn and practice how to conduct themselves appropriately in the workplace.

*LEAP* is focused on improving specific student learning outcomes and/or student success that were identified by college stakeholders. Throughout strategic discussions for institutional planning and for developing the Title III Strengthening Institutions Program grant, college stakeholders emphasized inadequate workforce readiness for students. Some programs already include essential employability skill-building, but the integration is inconsistent across programs. The design of an implementation model for integrating soft skills into the curriculum is adaptable because there is such variation across the Schools. The QEP Team discussed programmatic context at length to ensure that the goals, objectives, and outcomes would be flexible to allow all programs to gain improvements from the QEP.

### Identifying Specific Skills for the QEP

As evidenced in the literature review in Chapter 3, “soft skills” is a term that means different things to different employers. SCC adopted a contextualized definition, one that recognizes and allows differences for each school or division within each school. For over ten years, SCC has had success improving student outcomes by providing necessary context in coursework. SCC faculty are familiar with contextualized curricula in student success courses and general education courses. Program-specific coursework is already contextualized for student needs. Contextualizing *LEAP* allows for consistency plus the flexibility to make the skills framework applicable to a myriad of differences across college programs. As noted in Chapter 2, the surveys of college stakeholders resulted in identifying the four specific skills to be integrated:

1. Dressing appropriately
2. Teamwork
3. Workplace communication
4. Accountability

Notably, students were attuned to their own needs and ranked these four specific skills highly in making their selections (Appendix G). The QEP Team and the Institutional Effectiveness Council (IEC) were reassured in their own assessment of selecting the specific skills because students affirmed what they need.

## **Defining Essential Skills**

The QEP development team defined each skill carefully, as noted below, to encompass the needs of each division of the college. The definitions are supported by the research literature reviewed in Chapter 3.

Dressing appropriately - Dressing appropriately involves choosing clothing, accessories, and grooming that suit the particular workplace, industry, or professional environment. It involves following both implied and/or specified dress codes and presenting oneself professionally. It is often associated with professional etiquette, and reflects an individual's understanding of the environment, respect for organizational norms, and recognition of the importance of presenting oneself in a polished and competent manner. Dressing appropriately may also include wearing a uniform or using the required Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) in certain environments for safety and regulatory compliance. Those who dress appropriately prioritize professionalism, safety, and making a positive impression. While the specifics of appropriate dress can vary across industries and organizations, the common thread is the recognition that one's appearance can significantly influence how they are perceived by colleagues, clients, and other stakeholders.

Teamwork - Teamwork is the collaborative effort of individuals toward a shared goal. It involves the capacity to work harmoniously in a group, share responsibilities, provide mutual support, contribute ideas, and communicate openly. Teamwork is essential in various settings, including the workplace, as it enhances productivity, creativity, and overall success. It maximizes collective strengths and helps individuals develop a range of interpersonal skills. Strong teamwork includes not just understanding one's role but also demonstrating leadership when needed. Leaders guide, motivate, and coordinate efforts. Team players value diverse perspectives, fostering a positive work environment.

Workplace communication - Workplace communication is the exchange of information, ideas, and feedback. It involves a range of styles such as verbal, written, and non-verbal communication, and encompasses various forms including emails, phone calls, video conferences, and in-person discussions. Effective communicators utilize clear and concise language, active listening, and adapt their communication style to diverse audiences, ensuring that information is conveyed clearly and accurately. It helps prevent misunderstandings, promotes collaboration, and builds strong relationships among team members, leading to increased efficiency and success in achieving organizational goals. In addition to day-to-day communication, strong communication skills allow individuals to showcase their ability to articulate ideas, respond thoughtfully, and convey information with confidence.

Accountability - Accountability refers to an individual's willingness to take responsibility for their actions, decisions, and outcomes, including meeting deadlines. It involves owning up to both successes and failures, acknowledging mistakes, finding solutions, and delivering work reliably and punctually. Those who are accountable are dependable, trustworthy, and understand the impact of their actions on the team and organization. Accountability is a crucial aspect of your professional reputation in various settings, including the workplace, as it

promotes a sense of reliability, responsibility, and leadership that is valuable to both individual and team success.

### **Equity Considerations**

SCC is committed to equity as evidenced in the college's value statements and through the work of the Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Acceptance (IDEA) team. The IDEA team oversees the college's Equity Awareness Plan and serves as a review committee for all college policies and processes. At the QEP Team's request, the IDEA Team reviewed the skills' definitions through the lens of equity and inclusion and made the following suggestions:

While the definition itself doesn't necessarily need a change, there was a recommendation to keep in mind that Dressing Appropriately standard could be perceived as a barrier for students from lower-income backgrounds. Stanly Community College may need to proactively be ready to help those students find appropriate solutions. (Memo from Tabitha Love, IDEA Team chair to the QEP co-directors, dated Feb. 26, 2024)

The QEP Team had already engaged in discussions about similar concerns and, at its meeting on February 28, 2024, discussed the IDEA Team's recommendation more fully, agreeing to keep such considerations top of mind as implementation proceeds. The QEP co-directors discussed this concern with the Title III Project Director who will also work to address the equity concern through career services for students as part of Title III grant activities.

### **Selection of Programs for Implementation**

While the College's ultimate goal is for *LEAP* to benefit all students, implementation will begin in the manufacturing, industry, and trades programs which comprise a division of the school of Advanced Manufacturing, Industry, Technology, and Trades (AMITT). These programs include:

- Air Conditioning, Heating and Refrigeration Technology
- Collision Repair and Refinishing
- Computer-Integrated Machining
- Heavy Equipment Operations
- Welding

Because these programs make up only one division of AMITT, the College refers to these programs collectively as AMIT, or AMITT with one T, and the acronym AMIT will be used throughout this narrative to more easily identify the programs selected for implementation of the QEP.

The AMIT programs were chosen for *LEAP* implementation based on several factors. First, several of the AMIT programs already provide some instruction on employability skills so, while that instruction is not systematically or evenly applied across their curricula, the AMIT instructors have some knowledge and experience with soft skills instruction and are eager to

expand it. Second, a significant portion of the survey results from local employers came from those associated with AMIT programs. AMIT programs have some of the most active advisory boards and will provide an effective pipeline to access employer input and feedback. Third, students in the AMIT programs come into their programs with little knowledge or experience in soft skills. The QEP Team feels they are a population of students that have the most room for growth and will provide rich data to help refine and improve *LEAP*. Finally, the faculty in AMIT programs agree with these factors and volunteered their programs for assessment.

### **Implementation Within the Curriculum**

Foundational instruction and assessment will occur in our student success course (ACA-111, also known as ACA) which is already contextualized for individual program clusters within the three schools. All students in a degree program are required to take ACA in their first semester. From there, application and additional assessment of the four skills will be integrated into the select programs through program courses.

SCC will collaborate with employers and workforce development stakeholders to design curricula for employability skill-building, which will be contextualized for each of the select programs. Employability skill-building components will be integrated into multiple courses in the AMIT program pathways. This approach is consistent with the research literature documenting successful education for soft skills and presented in Chapter 3.

Foundational instruction and assessment for this goal will occur in the AMIT section of the ACA-111 Student Success course. As a central feature of the QEP, the Student Success course will provide foundational instruction in all four *LEAP* skills beginning in the Spring 2025 semester. The College's Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) which is responsible for content in the Student Success course is redesigning the course to include contextualized content focused on the four *LEAP* skills informed by input from AMIT faculty and research on soft skills.

Program courses will be redesigned by faculty members who have completed the *Certificate in Effective College Instruction with a Concentration in Career Guidance and Readiness* from the Association of College & University Educators (ACUE). The ACUE-led training is an integral part of the Title III grant. SCC piloted this professional development initiative starting in Spring 2021, with six faculty members (7% of FT faculty) and three staff members from the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) having completed the certificate. Participants evaluated the experience as highly valuable. The ACUE institutional, full 25-module program also includes specific content on Career Guidance and Readiness which complement the implementation of *LEAP*.

SCC faculty members will participate in ACUE professional development. Ninety-five percent of full-time faculty members will earn the Certificate in Effective College Instruction by the end of the Title III grant period, and key adjunct faculty will earn micro-credentials that provide equivalent professional development. Twenty-six full-time and part-time faculty are pursuing certification during calendar year 2024, including 5 of the 8 full-time AMIT faculty. The Certificate in Effective College Instruction includes content on supporting students regarding

career guidance and readiness. This professional development will support the proposed QEP to incorporate with SCC's curricula the employability skills needed for students. Because ACUE training will be completed by September 2028, nearly all of the courses offered in the final year of the QEP should be led by instructors who have been trained.

Course redesign based on best practices from the ACUE training and incorporating the select *LEAP* skills will be guided by the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL). A checklist will be created for course redesign to ensure quality standards are met. SCC has allocated significant resources developing the CTL which integrates faculty professional development activities to improve teaching. The purpose of the CTL is to provide faculty with resources and training related to course design, course delivery, course content, institutional infrastructure, learning management system, and faculty, and student readiness with the goal of improving student learning. The CTL facilitates training sessions virtually and in-person to maximize access to faculty. The CTL works with personnel from across the college to develop and execute initiatives related to continuous improvement in both the design and delivery of our courses. Quality Matters: Applying the Quality Matters Rubric is a basic training in understanding and applying the Quality Matters rubric that SCC uses as the foundation for redesigning courses. This training is provided in a seated format by instructors licensed to teach the course. Faculty are required to complete the Quality Matters training prior to progressing to ACUE professional development. In this way, faculty will have foundational knowledge in course design before integrating the career guidance knowledge necessary to teach employability skills.

The Title III grant activities include a goal to redesign nine program-specific courses per year, including three courses per year in each School: (a) Transfer and Business, (b) Health Sciences and Public Services, and (c) Advanced Manufacturing, Industry, Technology, and Trades. The goals of the Title III grant are a baseline on which the QEP will build. For the grant, course redesigns are scheduled to begin in year two of the grant (Year One of the QEP), and revised courses will be offered the next academic year. By the end of the grant, the number of courses integrating contextualized employability skill-building will be at least 36, or 12 courses per School. These are minimum threshold numbers; the QEP Team envisions meeting a higher level of performance among the AMIT programs and courses after a pilot stage so that AMIT curriculum integrates employability skills broadly.

## Chapter 6. Institutional Commitment

The commitment of SCC to *LEAP* is demonstrated through the allocation of human resources, integration of employability skill-building in planning for allocating federal funds from the Title III grant, extensive strategic planning for the intersection of student and community success in the SCC five-year plan, and funding designated to support the QEP. Broad-based stakeholder involvement and institutional planning have been addressed in Chapter 2. Elaborations for the timeline implementing the QEP follow the summary in Table 7.

*Table 7: Timeline of Implementation*

<b>QEP Topic</b>	<b>2022-2023</b>	<b>Identify topic</b>
<b>Year 0</b>	<b>2023-2024</b>	<b>Planning and initial development</b>
<b>Year 1</b>	2024-2025	Design implementation model and provide professional development to faculty
<b>Year 2</b>	2025-2026	Pilot & initial assessment – one program per school; survey faculty and students for feedback
<b>Year 3</b>	2026-2027	Scale implementation
<b>Year 4</b>	2027-2028	Finalize implementation
<b>Year 5</b>	2028-2029	Conclude formal QEP with <i>LEAP</i> integrated into SCC's academic culture

### QEP Topic Identification (2022-2023)

- Surveys & focus groups
- Analysis of results
- Institutional Effectiveness Council (IEC) review and vote to determine final topic.
- Identify QEP co-directors.
- Assemble QEP Team

### Year 0 (2023-2024)

- Identify project name.
- Identify specific skills to target.
- Outline project framework.
- Identify two potential independent reviewers.
- Begin marketing (2024SP)
- Establish goals and objectives.
- Write QEP document (2024SP)

**Year 1 (2024-2025)**

- Obtain SACSCOC feedback and approval (2024FA)
- Design and build implementation model (2024FA)
- Provide professional development to faculty (2024FA)
- Continue marketing.
- Pilot & initial assessment – in ACA-111 (2025SP)
- Survey faculty and students for feedback on *LEAP* (2025SP)
- Begin semiannual reporting (June 2025)

**Year 2 (2025-2026)**

- Revise and refine *LEAP*, including the rubrics and assessments, as needed.
- Scale implementation & assessment – add programs on a rolling basis each semester with assessment each semester.
- Survey faculty and students for feedback on *LEAP*.
- Publish semiannual reports (December & June)

**Year 3 (2026-2027)**

- Revise and refine *LEAP*, including the rubrics and assessments, as needed.
- Continue to scale implementation - add programs on a rolling basis each semester so that by Spring 2026 all AMIT programs have embedded *LEAP* into their courses.
- Survey faculty and students for feedback on *LEAP*.
- Publish semiannual reports (December & June)

**Year 4 (2027-2028)**

- *LEAP* is fully implemented across all AMIT programs.
- Revise and refine *LEAP*, including the rubrics and assessments, as needed.
- Survey faculty and students for feedback on *LEAP*.
- Publish semiannual reports (June & December)

**Year 5 (2028-2029)**

- Conclude *LEAP* as a formal QEP project.
- Conduct final surveys and assessments.
- Write final report for SACSCOC 5-Year Impact Report
- *LEAP* has become part of SCC's academic culture.

**Budget**

Stanly Community College has committed resources to initiate, implement and complete *LEAP* through the entirety of the QEP. Resources that have been allocated to the QEP are personnel to assist with administrative tasks and data analysis, stipends for faculty support during training, professional development services, survey software subscriptions, materials funding for marketing, and travel costs for the QEP co-directors to attend SACSCOC-sponsored professional development.

As described in Chapter 2, SCC is the recipient of a federal Title III Strengthening Institutions Program grant (October 1, 2023 to September 30, 2028) entitled *Guided Pathways: Career and Workforce Services from Connection to Completion*. The grant award includes budget line items in support of employability skill-building. The budget listed in Table 8 includes items of funding for Years Two through Five of the grant which correspond to Years One through Four of the QEP. Before Year Five of the QEP, SCC will have completed the course design and faculty professional development for ACUE certificate training. New positions created under the Title III grant will undergo incremental institutionalization and will be fully funded by SCC following the grant period. During Year Five of the QEP, SCC will commit 100% of the salary and fringe benefits required to continue employing the Research Analyst and Administrative Assistant who contribute to the success of both the Title III grant and the QEP. The QEP tasks for faculty professional development and course redesign for employability skills building are 3 out of 12 tasks (25%) of the Title III grant. For that reason, the three named staff positions are assigned a percentage of their time to be dedicated to the QEP. The allocation of financial resources is listed in Table 8.

*Table 8: Budget*

<b>Funded item</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Title III grant funds</b>	<b>Institutional funds</b>
Title III Project Coordinator (25% time) Research Analyst (25% time) Administrative Assistant (<5% time)	2024-2025 2025-2026 2026-2027 2027-2028 2028-2029	\$38,112 \$34,532 \$30,706 \$26,623 \$0	Balance of total salary and fringe benefits for each year and sustaining in future
Faculty stipends to revise program-specific courses to contextualize employability skill-building throughout courses	2024-2025 2025-2026 2026-2027 2027-2028 2028-2029	\$11,894 \$11,894 \$11,894 \$11,894 \$0	<none>
Stipends for adjunct faculty to participate in ACUE certificate training	2024-2025 2025-2026 2026-2027 2027-2028 2028-2029	\$0 \$0 \$47,366 \$47,366 \$0	<none>
Overload time for full-time faculty and staff to participate in ACUE certificate training	2024-2025 2025-2026 2026-2027 2027-2028 2028-2029	\$52,331 \$55,239 \$66,868 \$110,477 \$0	<none>
ACUE institutional partnership for professional development of faculty and staff	2024-2025 2025-2026 2026-2027 2027-2028	\$60,000 \$50,000 \$50,000 \$50,000	<none>

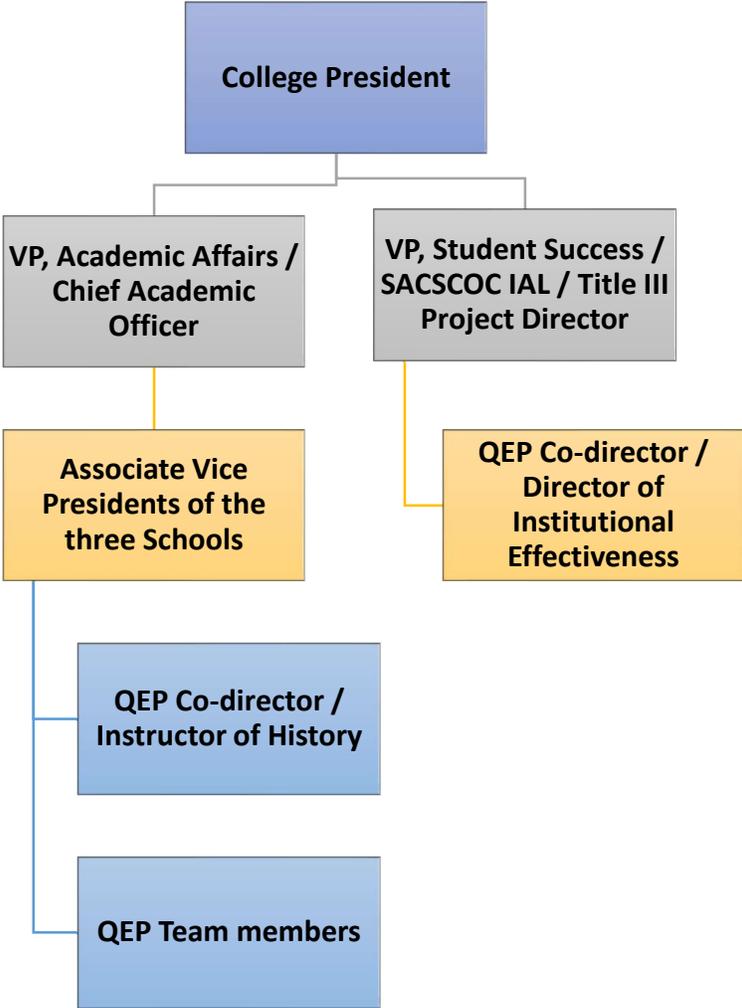
	2028-2029	\$0	
Survey Monkey (software for assessment)	2024-2025	<none>	\$900
	2025-2026		\$900
	2026-2027		\$900
	2027-2028		\$900
	2028-2029		\$900
Marketing materials	2024-2025	<none>	\$7000
Travel costs for QEP co-director(s) to attend SACSCOC Annual meeting and/or Summer Institutes in Years 3-5.	2024-2025	<none>	\$0
	2025-2026		\$0
	2026-2027		\$3000
	2027-2028		\$3000
	2028-2029		\$3000
<b>TOTAL</b>	2024-2025	\$162,337	In excess of \$7900
	2025-2026	\$151,665	In excess of \$900
	2026-2027	\$206,834	In excess of \$3900
	2027-2028	\$246,360	In excess of \$3900
	2028-2029	\$0	In excess of \$3900

The organizational chart for SCC is included in full as a submission separately from this plan. Figure 8 provides a brief overview of the reporting structure for the QEP co-directors and other QEP Team members.

### QEP Co-Directors

The co-directors were selected for their expertise and the respect they have earned from their peers. Both co-directors are existing permanent full-time employees of SCC who are on campus at least 30 hours per week. Dr. Cindy Dean has over 25 years' experience as an instructor at SCC and has worked as the Director of Institutional Effectiveness since 2018. She has participated as a team member on two previous quality enhancement plans. Moreover, she has direct student services experience as the Title IX coordinator for SCC. Dr. Dean is a 12-month contracted staff member. Dr. Alan Campbell started at SCC in the Academic Support Center leading tutoring services, and upon completing his doctorate, he began teaching full-time. In addition to 13 years working in higher education, Dr. Campbell has practical experience in retail management, having previously been employed as a store manager with a national auto parts chain. Dr. Campbell is a 9-month faculty member who is also assigned a non-instructional contract to satisfy his duties as a QEP co-director during the remaining three months of the year. Both co-directors bring a wealth of experience serving student needs in and out of the classroom.

Figure 8: QEP Organizational Structure and Reporting



## Chapter 7. Assessment Plan

Stanly Community College's QEP Team has designed *LEAP* to help ensure that students possess a core set of soft skills necessary for success in the workplace. If *LEAP* is successful, AMIT students will have developed the knowledge of and ability to demonstrate the soft skills necessary for career success, accompanied by an increased self-confidence in the performance of these skills. Assessment findings will not only help illustrate *LEAP*'s success but will also inform any necessary revisions to *LEAP* interventions and processes throughout its development and implementation. To determine whether *LEAP* is successful in promoting soft skills readiness and self-efficacy, the QEP Team will evaluate *LEAP*'s goals, objectives, and student learning outcomes through a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods summarized in Table 18 and detailed below.

*Table 9: Summary of Goals and Objectives*

Goals	Goal 1: Equip students with a foundation in critical soft skills, specifically in accountability, dressing appropriately, teamwork, and workplace communication.	Goal 2: Improve students' self-efficacy, awareness, and employability through soft skills development.	Goal 3: Cultivate skills of leadership, employability, accountability and professionalism in students by integrating the key soft skills of dressing appropriately, teamwork, workplace communication, and accountability into the academic curriculum.
Objectives	<p>Objective 1: Develop and enhance students' workplace readiness through the awareness of select soft skills.</p> <p>Objective 2: Increase students' self-awareness, confidence, and leadership potential by focusing on the development of the four <i>LEAP</i> skills.</p> <p>Objective 3: Promote leadership, employability, accountability, and professionalism in students through the mastery of four select soft skills.</p> <p>Objective 4: Improve instructors' and employers' perceptions of students' leadership, employability, accountability, and professionalism as reflected in their use of the key soft skills.</p> <p>Objective 5: Integrate <i>LEAP</i> skills into all relevant program courses.</p>		

## Assessing Student Learning Outcomes

*LEAP's* goals and objectives will be evaluated with formative and summative methods using direct and indirect assessment methods. *LEAP* interventions are designed to be dynamic and will change in content and process as indicated by assessment data and participant feedback. Data will be reviewed each term, analyzed annually over the Summer, and incorporated into intervention revision processes for the subsequent Fall.

Student achievement will be assessed using both direct and indirect methods. The direct assessment of student achievement in mastering the *LEAP* skills will be accomplished through student learning outcomes. Indirect assessment will be made through the administration of a self-efficacy tool, instructor surveys, and employer surveys.

### *Direct Assessment*

Each of the four *LEAP* skills has three student learning outcomes assessing each skill on the same behaviors of *identify*, *discuss*, and *demonstrate*.

- SLO #1: identify the [key elements of...]
- SLO #2: discuss the [concepts and importance of...]
- SLO #3: demonstrate [effective and consistent use of...]

First, students will **identify** the key elements for each skill. This will be accomplished through a direct assessment of students in the ACA-111 Student Success course using a multiple-choice assessment. The multiple-choice assessment for Accountability is provided in Appendix H as a representative example of the assessments which will be used to assess SLO #1 for all four *LEAP* skills. The ACA course is a first-year course which all degree-seeking students are required to take. Second, students will be able to **discuss** the importance and challenges associated with each skill. Students will do this through a direct assessment by the faculty in their program courses using a standardized rubric for assessing understanding developed by the QEP team. The rubric for assessing Workplace Communication is provided in Appendix I as a representative example of the assessments which will be used to assess SLO #2 for all four *LEAP* skills. Finally, students will be able to **demonstrate** use of each skill through a direct assessment by the faculty within their program courses evaluated using a standardized rubric for assessing basic application. The rubric for assessing Teamwork is provided in Appendix J as a representative example of the assessments which will be used to assess SLO #3 for all four *LEAP* skills. The SLOs for all four *LEAP* skills are summarized below.

- Accountability
  - SLO #1: identify the key elements of accountability (responsibility, transparency, ownership).
  - SLO #2: discuss the concepts of accountability, their challenges and solutions.

- SLO #3: demonstrate consistent application of accountability principles in various workplace and professional contexts.
- Dressing Appropriately
  - SLO #1: identify relevant industry standards for appropriate attire for the given workplace.
  - SLO #2: discuss the importance of dressing appropriately for the workplace.
  - SLO #3: demonstrate consistent application of appropriate dress in various workplace and professional contexts.
- Teamwork
  - SLO #1: identify the key elements of effective teamwork (communication, roles, conflict resolution).
  - SLO #2: discuss the challenges, solutions, and importance of teamwork in achieving project goals.
  - SLO #3: demonstrate consistent and effective use of teamwork principles in various workplace and professional contexts.
- Workplace Communication
  - SLO #1: identify key elements of professional communication (clarity, conciseness, tone, non-verbal cues).
  - SLO #2: discuss the importance of effective workplace communication, its strategies and challenges.
  - SLO #3: demonstrates consistent use of effective communication skills in various workplace and professional contexts.

**Student learning outcome #1: students will be able to *identify* the key elements for each LEAP skill.** Foundational instruction and assessment for this outcome will occur in the AMIT section of the ACA-111 Student Success course. As a central feature of the QEP, the ACA-111 Student Success course will provide foundational instruction in all four *LEAP* skills beginning in the Spring 2025 semester. The CTL, informed by input from AMIT faculty, employer advisory boards, and research on soft skills, is redesigning the course to include contextualized content focused on the four *LEAP* skills. The degree to which students are able to identify the key elements of each LEAP skill will be assessed using scenario-based multiple-choice assessment tool. Success for Student Learning Outcome 1 will be achieved when 80% of students score a minimum 80% on the scenario-based multiple-choice assessment tool.

**Student learning outcome #2: students will be able to *discuss* the importance and challenges associated with each *LEAP* skill.** Students will do this through a direct assessment by the faculty in their program courses using a standardized discussion rubric for knowledge and understanding developed by the QEP team. See Appendix I for a representative example of the assessments which will be used to assess SLO #2 for all four *LEAP* skills.

In addition to the instruction received in the Student Success course, students will be exposed to additional instruction on all four *LEAP* skills in individual program courses. This instruction, because it is done within the individual program courses, will provide students with exposure to these skills within the context of their programs' relevant workplace environment. The intervention for this goal and student learning outcome involves a course redesign strategy that includes:

- Quality Matters™ (QM) training for instructors of AMIT courses
- specialized Association of College and University Educators™ (ACUE) training for AMIT faculty focused on designing learner-centered and equitable courses with a concentration in career guidance and readiness.
- a course redesign review process in which the CTL and peer faculty suggest improvements for the courses of their colleagues.

Success for Goal 2 and Student Learning Outcome 2 will be achieved when 80% of students score a minimum of 3 (satisfactory) out of 5 on the standardized *Assessing Understanding* rubric.

**Student learning outcome #3: students will be able to *demonstrate* use of each *LEAP* skill.** The instruction and intervention for this goal and outcome will also result from the individual course redesign process outlined above. AMIT faculty will provide instruction in and proper demonstration of appropriate dress in their relevant trades. Students will be assessed using an instructor-designed assessment scored on a standardized rubric to assess application developed by the QEP team. See Appendix J for a representative example of the assessments which will be used to assess SLO #3 for all four *LEAP* skills. Success for Goal 3 and Student Learning Outcome 3 will be achieved when 80% of students score a minimum of 3 (satisfactory) out of 5 on the standardized *Assessing Basic Application* rubric.

The threshold for success for QEP's course-level student learning outcomes is an achievement value of 80% as informed by the Title III grant. The Title III Strengthening Institutions Program grant, *Guided Pathways: Career and Workforce Services from Connection to Completion*, includes an assessment for career engagement by students. The Title III grant envisions an increase in the percentage of curriculum students (*i.e.*, those enrolled in credit-based programs) who demonstrate essential employability skills specific to their program pathways on newly designed employability skills assessments embedded within specific courses in each program. The goal of the Title III grant is that the percentage of students demonstrating the essential employability skills will increase to 80% of students. To achieve that result at the

individual level, SCC will require the threshold for success for SLOs to mirror that percentage at a success rate of 80%.

### *Indirect Assessment*

In addition to being able to identify, discuss, and demonstrate the use of the four *LEAP* skills as reflected in the student learning outcomes, the QEP is also designed to enhance student self-efficacy and confidence in the use of soft skills as well as enhance instructors' and employers' perceptions of students' use of these skills. Student self-efficacy and instructor and employer perceptions will be assessed using indirect assessment methods.

Assessment of student self-efficacy will occur in the ACA-111 Student Success course and will be measured using a pre- and post-self-efficacy assessment tool (Appendix K) initially administered in the Student Success course. Prior to exposure to *LEAP* skills instruction in ACA-111, students will complete a comprehensive pre-test that includes items assessing student self-efficacy vis-à-vis the four *LEAP* skills. Upon completion of the ACA course, each student will take a post-test for these same skills. A comparison of pre- and post-test scores will indicate the degree to which student confidence has increased. The data will be analyzed both on an individual student basis and on an aggregate level. For the latter, average pre-test and post-test scores will be tracked per term. Students will be surveyed again at the end of each semester using a similar assessment tool to gauge ongoing and increasing confidence in their knowledge and use of the four *LEAP* skills. Success for the self-efficacy aspect of *LEAP*'s goals and objectives will be achieved when a comparison of student scores on pre- and post-test self-efficacy surveys show an increase in confidence for 80% of the students.

Additionally, instructors and local employers will be surveyed to measure their perceptions of students' leadership potential, employability, accountability, and professionalism, based on how well students apply accountability, dressing appropriately, teamwork, workplace communication in their roles. Both instructors and employers will be surveyed in Spring 2025 to determine a baseline of perceptions of students' use of the four *LEAP* skills. Going forward, these same groups will be surveyed each subsequent Spring and survey results will be compared to the baseline data. Success will be achieved when the Spring 2026 surveys show an improvement in perceptions among both instructors and employers, and each subsequent annual survey shows perceptions remaining consistent or showing an increase.

### **Assessing QEP Impact on Students**

In addition to impacting student learning, the QEP activities will change the experience of students in the classroom. Faculty will incorporate soft skills activities into the curriculum. To measure the success of the integration, faculty and students will assess the impact of this integration through regular feedback surveys, aligning the outcomes with the strategic pillars of Student Success and Employee Success.

### **Assessing Program-level Improvements**

Tasks planned for the QEP will make changes to how programs plan for soft skills development. Program faculty will identify key soft skills to integrate into their courses and develop course content that focuses explicitly on the identified skills. Teaching the new course content will include technology and interactive learning tools to engage students in soft skills activities. The faculty will incorporate the assessments of soft skills in their existing grading systems. Throughout these activities, the QEP Team will monitor their completion and application for each program. These program-level improvements align with the strategic pillars of Student Success and Employee Success.

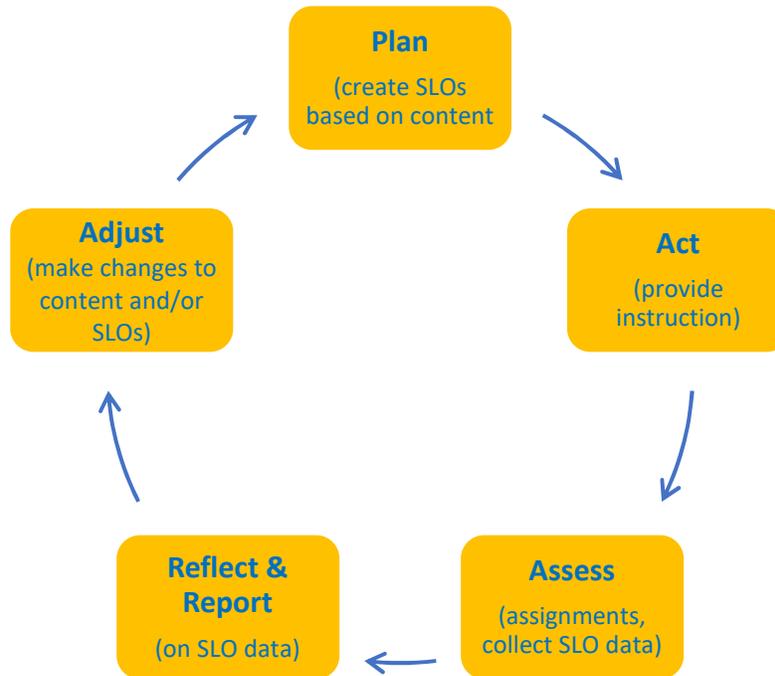
### **Assessing Institution-level or Structural Improvements**

SCC will support program faculty in the continuous improvement processes that are part of the QEP. While programs may choose how to embed each *LEAP* skill, the QEP Team will develop a universal assessment tool in the form of master rubrics for all three SLOs for all four skills such that there is consistency of assessment throughout. During Fall 2024, the QEP Team will develop individual master rubrics thoughtfully, collaboratively, and informed by research and best practices for assessment. The Team will also ensure the rubrics are relevant to each skill and SLO being assessed, yet broad enough to be applied in and remain relevant to the different program and course contexts. The QEP Team intends that each master rubric assesses its associated skill's SLO appropriately and adequately while maintaining consistency of assessment across programs and courses. The master rubric for each skill provides the foundation for faculty assessments in course work, student self-assessments of their own skill-building, and community partner assessments of student performance in work-related settings. In this way, each type of assessment will use a common framework to evaluate the students' mastery of the skills.

The implementation model will be developed during Fall 2024 for initial pilot work in the AMIT programs during Spring 2025. Program faculty will have the standardized assessment model as a starting point for grading students on skill-building. Training faculty in career guidance is a key component of the QEP and has been ongoing since Spring 2024. In addition, the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) will create a resource repository for faculty to glean information on best practices for their work. Moreover, the CTL will facilitate faculty collaboration as they incorporate teaching employability skills in their curricula.

The institutional effectiveness processes at SCC provide additional support for QEP activities. Departmental planning for academic areas is facilitated by the Learning Evidence Committee (LEC), a subcommittee of the Institutional Effectiveness Council (IEC), that manages the mechanics of the faculty-led learning evidence planning and assessment cycle. This is a classic process of continuous improvement modeled on the theme, Plan - Do - Study - Act as shown in Figure 9.

Figure 9: Learning Evidence Continuous Improvement Model



Learning evidence processes align with the academic calendar. Faculty complete submissions for the previous academic year in September, after 9-month faculty return to campus and classes have begun for the new academic year. Advisory board meetings and faculty meetings in the middle of the Fall term provide opportunities to evaluate the results and plan for the next cycle of assessments. Implementation and assessment of employability skills in course and program curricula will follow this same model. Long term objectives for the QEP include integrating *LEAP* into the permanent curriculum and regular student learning outcome (SLO) assessment processes.

### Assessing the Success of the QEP

The QEP Team will compile data from formative assessments to produce regular summative updates for college stakeholders. The reports will be published on the SCC website to be accessible to the community as a whole. Summative evaluations will report conclusions on the QEP's success toward attaining project objectives and achieving the goals of the QEP by answering the key summative evaluation question: *Whether, to what extent, and how were the project's intended outcomes realized?* Summative evaluation will assess the total impact and the effect of each component of the QEP on the institution.

The QEP Team will monitor progress and issue QEP Semiannual Reports from approximately June 2025 to December 2030 to inform stakeholders of the implementation and assessment progress of *LEAP*. In each quarterly report, the QEP Co-Directors will provide information to the college on key areas tracking *LEAP* processes. The Title III Project Director will monitor the progress of Quality Matters and ACUE professional developments for faculty as

part of the Title III grant activities and will provide updates to the QEP Team. The goals, objectives, and SLOs are summarized below.

### *Summary of Assessment of Goals and Objectives*

Goal 1: Equip students with a foundation in critical soft skills, specifically in accountability, dressing appropriately, teamwork, and workplace communication.

- Objective 1: Develop and enhance students' workplace readiness through the awareness of select soft skills.
  - Student learning outcome #1: students will be able to identify the key elements for each LEAP skill.
    - Accountability - identify the key elements of accountability (responsibility, transparency, ownership).
    - Dressing appropriately - identify relevant industry standards for appropriate attire for the given workplace.
    - Teamwork - identify the key elements of effective teamwork (communication, roles, conflict resolution).
    - Workplace communication - identify key elements of professional communication (clarity, conciseness, tone, non-verbal cues).
  - Method: measured using a scenario-based multiple-choice lesson administered in the ACA-111 Student Success Course.
  - Target: 80% of students will score 80% or higher.
- Objective 2: Increase students' self-awareness, confidence, and leadership potential by focusing on the development of the four *LEAP* skills.
  - Administer a pre- and post- self-assessment survey to students enrolled in the redesigned Student Success class and at the conclusion of each semester, focusing on the development of dressing appropriately, teamwork, workplace communication, and accountability.
  - Target: 80% of students will report an increase in awareness of and self-confidence in the use of key soft skills.
- Objective 3: Promote leadership, employability, accountability, and professionalism in students through the mastery of four select soft skills.
  - Student learning outcome #2: students will be able to discuss the importance and challenges associated with each LEAP skill.
    - Accountability - discuss the concepts of accountability, their challenges and solutions.

- Dressing appropriately - discuss the importance of dressing appropriately for the workplace.
    - Teamwork - discuss the challenges, solutions, and importance of teamwork in achieving project goals.
    - Workplace communication - discuss the importance of effective workplace communication, its strategies and challenges.
  - Method: Instructors will assess students' ability to discuss the use of each soft skill using the appropriate standardized **LEAP** skills rubrics applied to the relevant instructor-created activity.
  - Target: 80% of students will demonstrate effective use of soft skills in activities by scoring at least 3 (satisfactory) out of 5 the standardized *Assessing Understanding* rubric.
  - Student learning outcome #3: students will be able to demonstrate use of each LEAP skill.
    - Accountability - demonstrate consistent and effective use of teamwork principles in various workplace and professional contexts.
    - Dressing appropriately - demonstrate consistent application of appropriate dress in various workplace and professional contexts.
    - Teamwork - demonstrate consistent application of accountability principles in various workplace and professional contexts.
    - Workplace communication - demonstrates consistent use of effective communication skills in various workplace and professional contexts.
  - Method: Instructors will assess students' ability to demonstrate the use of each soft skill using the appropriate standardized **LEAP** skills rubrics applied to the relevant instructor-created activity.
  - Target: 80% of students will demonstrate effective use of soft skills in activities by scoring at least 3 (satisfactory) out of 5 on the standardized *Assessing Basic Application* rubric.
- Objective 4: Improve perceptions of students' leadership, employability, accountability, and professionalism as reflected in their use of the key soft skills:
  - Method of Assessment 1: survey instructors to assess their perceptions of students' use of the key soft skills of accountability dressing appropriately, teamwork, workplace communication, and accountability in their roles.
  - Target: instructors will report an improvement in students' use of the key soft skills

- Method of Assessment 2: survey employers on their perceptions of students' leadership, employability, accountability, and professionalism, with a focus on how well they apply dressing appropriately, teamwork, workplace communication, and accountability in their roles.
- Target: employers will report satisfaction with graduates' leadership and soft skills proficiency, specifically in the areas targeted by the *LEAP* initiative.
- Objective 5: Integration of Leadership and Soft Skills in Later Courses Measurement:
  - Method of Assessment: Review syllabi and course content in courses following the Student Success class to determine the inclusion of LEAP-related content, with a strong focus on the four key soft skills.
  - Target: 100% of the selected courses will include elements of leadership, employability, accountability, and professionalism, all driven by the development and application of dressing appropriately, teamwork, workplace communication, and accountability.

## Chapter 8. Summary

Stanly Community College (SCC) has designed an acceptable quality enhancement plan (QEP) capable of increasing student learning. Through its ongoing, comprehensive planning and evaluation processes, SCC identified a topic with input and support from a broad cross-section of institutional constituencies. The implementation plan focuses on improving specific student learning outcomes for building soft skills for students to exhibit in their careers. The QEP has ample human and monetary resources allocated to ensure SCC can initiate, implement, and complete the QEP. The assessment plan assesses student achievement and the impact of the QEP. For these reasons as illustrated below, Stanly Community College has met the “Exceptional” benchmark for SACSCOC’s Evaluative Framework for Standard 7.2.

### **Topic Identified Through Ongoing, Comprehensive Planning and Evaluation Processes**

*A clear and well-defined topic of soft skills is directly related to and arose out of institutional planning processes. The selection of soft skills as the QEP topic involved a wide range of constituents and was determined by a representative process that considered institutional needs and viability of the plan.*

Using qualitative and quantitative data collected through focus groups and surveys involving all stakeholders (SCC employees, SCC students, local employers, and community members) SCC’s Institutional Effectiveness Council (IEC) voted to make “soft” skills the focus of the QEP. As described in Chapter 2, the IEC went through a rigorous process of evaluation of all stakeholder input, committee member research, and consideration of existing college initiatives and resources. They determined soft skills best served the needs of students and the community, while also being financially viable for the college.

### **Has Broad-based Support of Institutional Constituencies**

*SCC’s QEP identifies important constituent groups engaged in developing and initiating the plan.*

As detailed in Chapter 2, SCC sought the input of essential stakeholders in the development of the QEP topic and plan. Input from students, SCC employees, local employers, and community members helped the college identify soft skills as the QEP topic. The QEP Team selected a name which reflects the topic and spirit of the QEP’s purpose: Leadership Employability, Accountability, and Professionalism (*LEAP*). Then, through the process of research and once again turning to stakeholders for input, the QEP Team selected four skills on which to focus:

1. Dressing appropriately
2. Teamwork
3. Workplace communication
4. Accountability

*Stakeholders are well-informed and appropriately engaged in the implementation and assessment of the plan.*

Throughout the process of developing *LEAP*, the QEP Team has endeavored to keep students and employees updated on every step of the development process. The Team has

developed a comprehensive communication plan to keep all constituencies informed of *LEAP's* progress. Students and employees have been regularly updated since Summer 2023 through monthly newsletters. A dedicated QEP webpage is available to the public on the SCC website. *LEAP's* assessment plan includes obtaining feedback from faculty, students, and local employers. Institutional constituencies have provided input, have been kept informed, and will continue to be engaged throughout all phases of the QEP development, implementation, and assessment.

### **Focuses on Improving Specific Student Learning Outcomes and/or Student Success**

*The QEP is focused on important outcomes related to student learning and/or student success. Outcomes are specific and measurable. Baseline data is present and has been analyzed. Targets for improvement are appropriate.*

SCC has designed the QEP to enhance students' employability skills to ensure they are workplace-ready upon leaving the college. SCC's primary objective for *LEAP* is to empower students to develop employability skills that are in high demand by employers. *LEAP* will integrate soft skills into the Advanced Manufacturing, Industry, and Trades programs and courses, train faculty to enhance employability skills in coursework, and better prepare students for success in their future careers. When setting goals and objectives for implementing employability skills into the curriculum, SCC considered the specific needs of the students, the academic disciplines involved, and the desired outcomes.

A comprehensive assessment plan has been developed as detailed in Chapter 7 providing assessment of student learning outcomes, faculty training and implementation, and institutional effectiveness. The QEP Team will use formative and summative assessments to track the progress and effectiveness of implementation as well as student outcomes. Baseline data is not available or applicable to this QEP as students' aptitude in soft skills has never been formally assessed. However, an appropriate target of 80% has been established for student learning outcomes, in alignment with the Title III Strengthening Institutions Program grant, *Guided Pathways: Career and Workforce Services from Connection to Completion*.

### **Commits Resources to Initiate, Implement, and Complete the QEP**

*Human and financial resources are clearly identified for all stages of implementing and completing the plan.*

The commitment of SCC to *LEAP* is demonstrated through the allocation of human resources, integration of employability skill-building in planning for allocating federal funds from the Title III Strengthening Institutions Program grant, *Guided Pathways: Career and Workforce Services from Connection to Completion*, extensive strategic planning for the intersection of student and community success in the SCC five-year plan, and funding designated to support the QEP.

A QEP Team was created to oversee the project's development and implementation. The Team is led by co-directors, two permanent full-time employees (one staff and one faculty)

with extensive backgrounds in instruction and student success. The first co-director is the Director, Institutional Effectiveness whose job description includes QEP oversight. The second is a faculty member contracted to work 9 months which the college supplements with an additional non-instructional contract to provide compensation for his QEP responsibilities.

Additional financial resources provided through both the college's annual budget as well as a Title III grant have also been allocated to the QEP for personnel to assist with administrative tasks and data analysis, stipends for faculty support during training, professional development services, survey software subscriptions, materials funding for marketing, and travel costs for the QEP co-directors to attend SACSCOC-sponsored professional development.

The minimum estimated financial commitment totals more than \$760,000.00 through the first four years of the QEP. Before Year Five of the QEP, SCC will have completed the course design and faculty professional development. New positions created under the Title III grant will undergo incremental institutionalization and will be fully funded by SCC following the conclusion of the Title III Strengthening Institutions Program grant, *Guided Pathways: Career and Workforce Services from Connection to Completion*. During Year Five of the QEP, SCC will commit 100% of the salary and fringe benefits required to continue employing the two new grant-funded employees who contribute to the success of both the Title III grant and the QEP.

*Institutional stakeholders are involved in ongoing planning and evaluation to adjust the resources as the plan proceeds, if necessary.*

The QEP Team, consisting of a cross-section of faculty and staff, will oversee the implementation and assessment of LEAP throughout its 5-year span. The QEP Team will compile data from formative assessments to produce regular summative updates for college stakeholders. The assessment plan as described in Chapter 7 includes feedback from all stakeholders including faculty, students, and local employers. This feedback will be used to monitor progress and inform changes to both processes and financial resources as warranted. The QEP Team publish QEP Quarterly Reports from approximately March 2025 to December 2030 to inform stakeholders of the implementation and assessment progress of *LEAP*. In each quarterly report, the QEP Co-Directors will provide information to the college on key areas tracking *LEAP* processes, including documentation of any changes made and the rationale for such changes.

#### **Includes a Plan to Assess Achievement**

*Outcomes are specific, measurable, and clearly related to student learning and/or student success. Assessments are appropriate and directly assess the outcomes. The plan includes both formative and summative assessments.*

The QEP assessment plan is comprehensive providing for both formative and summative assessments. It includes a mix of direct and indirect assessment of student learning outcomes, faculty training and implementation, and institutional effectiveness. Assessment of *LEAP* stems from its goals and objectives as summarized below.

*Institutional personnel responsible for gathering and analyzing assessment data are identified and appropriately supported. A timeline for interim formative analysis and plan adjustments is outlined.*

The QEP Team will compile data from formative assessments to produce regular summative updates for college stakeholders. The Title III Project Director will monitor the progress of Quality Matters and ACUE professional developments for faculty as part of the Title III grant activities and will provide updates to the QEP Team. Semiannual reports will be published on the SCC website to be accessible to the community as a whole. In each report, the QEP Co-Directors will provide information to the college on key areas tracking *LEAP* processes.

### **Conclusion**

SCC is excited to embark on this quality enhancement plan. We intend that *LEAP* will successfully enhance students' employability skills and that the model created for the QEP will be integrated permanently into SCC's academic culture. The new processes and training provided in the QEP are designed to be sustainable for SCC once the formal QEP concludes. Students will complete their studies at SCC empowered by the learning they experience to develop employability skills. They will bring that success into their workplaces to contribute these necessary skills for local employers.

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<https://doi.org/10.3390/buildings13020522>
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**Appendix A. Timeline of QEP Planning and Development**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Constituency</b>
February 16, 2022	IEC meeting	Initial discussion of QEP	Faculty & staff
August 4-October 6, 2022	Focus groups, surveys	Identify potential needs to address through QEP	Students, community, faculty, staff, administration, trustees
August 31-November 16, 2022	IEC meetings	Overview, timeline; Preparation for research; coding software; rubric; Discussion of themes; Narrowing topics	Faculty & staff
January 18, 2023	IEC meeting	Rubric results; recommendation for topic	Faculty & staff
January 23, 2023	ELT meeting	Accepted recommendation	Administration
February 28-March 28, 2023	Faculty Senate meetings	Nominations & selection for QEP co-director	Faculty
May 4, 2023	Trustees meeting	QEP update & discussion	Trustees
June 5-21, 2023	QEP Team meetings	Initial meeting; Communication plan	Faculty & staff
September 20, 2023	IEC meeting	QEP Team update, gathering survey results for selecting specific skills	Faculty & staff
October 9, 2023	QEP Team meeting	Specific skills discussed	Faculty & staff
November 6, 2023	QEP Team meeting	General discussions	Faculty & staff
November 27, 2023	QEP Team meeting	Timeline, skills	Faculty & staff
Spring 2024	Graphic design class	Students prepare QEP logo designs for art show contest	Students
January 18-April 11, 2024	QEP Team meetings	Skills definitions, implementation, Goals & objectives	Faculty & staff
April 8, 2024	SCC Art Show	Voting on student-designed logos begins	Students
April 25, 2024	QEP Team meeting	Webpage, lead evaluator	Faculty & staff
June 3-July 8, 2024	QEP Team meetings	Logo contest update, narrative writing	Faculty & staff

## Appendix B. Surveys of Students, Faculty, Staff, and Community

### Strategic Planning Survey

My primary relationship with SCC is as

Current Student

Former Student

Advisory Board member

Stanly County or area municipality official

Donor to the SCC Foundation

Employee

Other member of the public

My age group:

Under 25

Age 25 to 45

Over 45

1. What do you value most about your community college?
2. How might SCC's current relationships, partnerships, or community assets bring added vitality to SCC's service to Stanly County?
3. What are your hopes and dreams for your community college?
4. You have three wishes to improve SCC. How might you make SCC better? Feel free to list any resources you wish the college could offer.
5. Imagine in five years that SCC has won a major, national award for educating Stanly County students. How did we do that?

On the scale below, please rate your level of agreement with each of the following statements:

I am confident in the direction SCC is going.

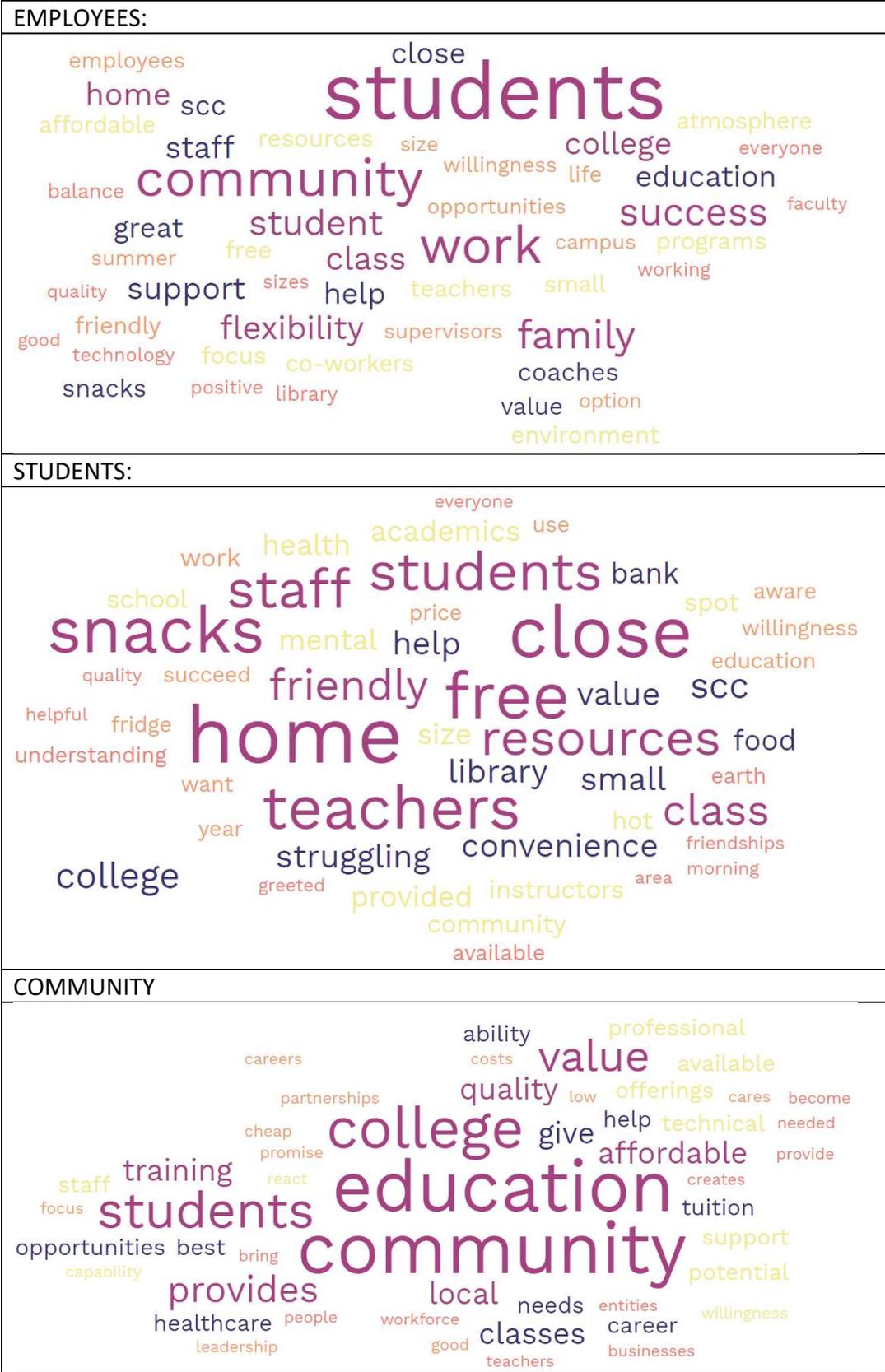
SCC prepares students in Stanly County to compete in the work force.

SCC supports its students to succeed.

SCC provides a quality education.

Please provide any other comments you want to share with SCC.

What do you value at SCC?



### **Appendix C. Community Feedback Demonstrating Evaluation and Support**

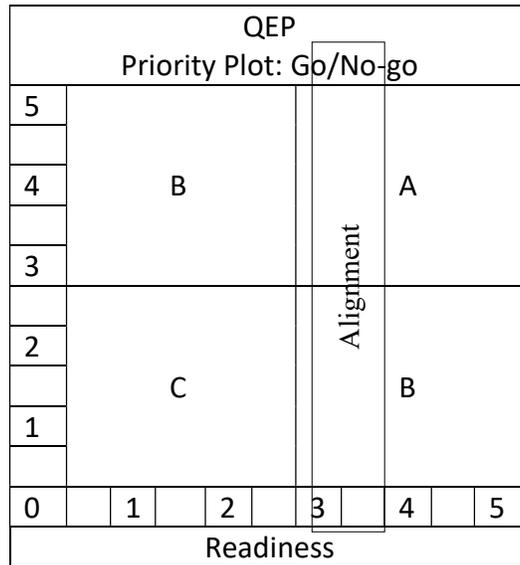
Stanly County Builders Association feedback; June 21, 2022; 28 members present

- Can SCC help with counseling students in work ethic (attendance, willingness to learn, willingness to earn greater responsibilities)? I know that [redacted name of faculty member] counsels students but is there a program at SCC to prepare students for a working environment? (completing applications fully, interpersonal skills, showing up for job interviews, etc.)
- The employees are running the business. There is a lack of concern for the job, poor communication skills.
- Interpersonal skills, Knowing not to expect anything; working at doing their best and doing the right thing.
- The employers that he interacts with complain that their employees cannot complete paperwork, lack communication skills, are late or don't show up to work.
- Employability skills

Stanly County High School Career Fair, May 16, 2023; Selected results of a feedback survey employers submitted after the career fair. Employers answered the question, "What are some soft skills that SCC could teach our students to prepare them to become better employees (customer service strategies, professionalism on the job, etc.)?"

- effective communication, conflict resolution
- Honesty and integrity
- Accountability, coming to work and being on time. Just because you have a belly ache, go to work. communicate withOUT a phone in your hand
- Communication and how to dress for an interview
- Professionalism
- Professionalism - coming to work and coming to work on time, being engaged while at work
- Job interviewing, Dress attire
- Be kind, smile, be prompt, good body language and listening skills, be attentive
- Dressing professionally and punctuality are the major issues in schools right now
- Customer service, basic money counting, public speaking
- Ethics: Honesty, Attendance expectations, Willingness to learn, Initiative, etc
- Time management; being on time; interviewing skills

**Appendix D. QEP Topic Selection Rubric and Results**



**A = Potential QEP**

**B = Include with next strategic plan**

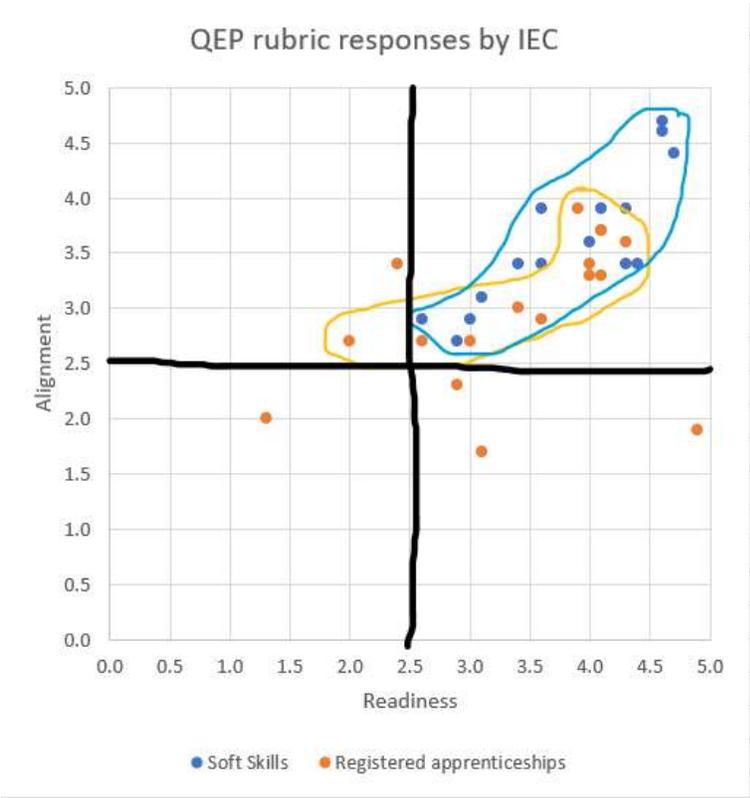
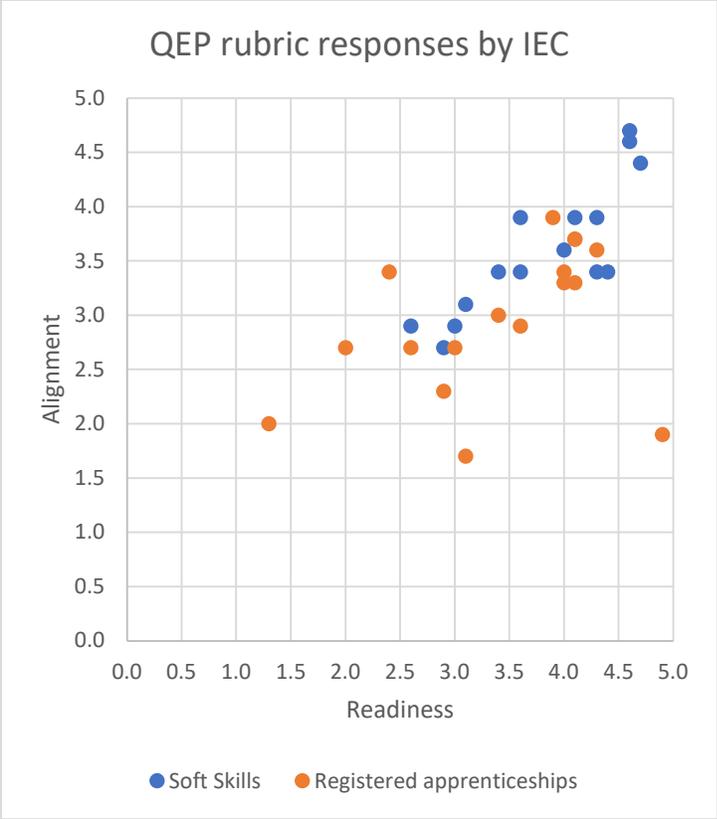
**C = topic is either not closely aligned to SCC mission or SCC does not have capacity to implement.**

	Decision Factors	Decision Factors (0 = none; 5 = the most)	Notes (affirmatively state why the decision factor was selected)
<b>Alignment (Linkage with Strategy; Return on Investment)</b>			
1	Project aligns with Strategic Plan 2021-2024 and/or the equity awareness plan.	0 1 2 3 4 5	
2	Project aligns with funding goals and priorities (may include donor funding).	0 1 2 3 4 5	
3	Project derives from SCC assessments (learning evidence, service evidence, data analysis).	0 1 2 3 4 5	
4	Project increases student success outcomes.	0 1 2 3 4 5	
5	Project provides relief to operational expenses or increases revenue.	0 1 2 3 4 5	
6	How easy is the project to bring to scale? (Consider	0 1 2 3 4 5	

	administrative burden or hours to develop.)		
7	How easy is the project to implement? (Consider administrative burden, time commitment, costs, reasonableness for SCC's current capacity.)	0 1 2 3 4 5	
	<b>Decision Factors</b>	<b>Decision Factors</b> (0 = none; 5 = the most)	<b>Notes</b> (affirmatively state why the decision factor was selected)
<b>Readiness (Capacity and Knowledge)</b>			
8	Project requires significantly altering an existing program or service but within a feasible timeline.	0 1 2 3 4 5	
9	Project is backed by evidence-based research and theory.	0 1 2 3 4 5	
10	SCC employs sufficient available subject-matter-experts to manage the implementation of project.	0 1 2 3 4 5	
11	Project includes sufficient data/ info about student learning to support proposed actions.	0 1 2 3 4 5	
12	SCC has sufficient resources (human, equipment, funds) to ensure project success.	0 1 2 3 4 5	
13	Project includes a sustainability plan to institutionalize the project activities after QEP complete.	0 1 2 3 4 5	
14	Any community partnerships are identified and in place.	0 1 2 3 4 5	
<b>Scoring guide:</b> Total points divided by the number of questions answered		<b>Decision:</b> Plot alignment score with readiness score	

**Average Rubric Scores submitted by Institutional Effectiveness Council (IEC) members**

	Readiness	Alignment
Soft Skills	<b>3.70</b>	<b>3.47</b>
Registered apprenticeships	<b>3.53</b>	<b>3.01</b>



Appendix E. July 2023 *SCC Insider*

## THE QEP IS COMING!

As required for its SACSCOC 10-year reaffirmation of accreditation coming up in 2024, the College has embarked on a new Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), a broad-based college-wide initiative focused on improving student learning outcomes and/or student success. Through a comprehensive process involving feedback from you, the community, and our students, we have identified professional/employability skills (aka soft skills) as the focus.

### Meet Your QEP Committee!

We have formed a committee to oversee the development and implementation of our QEP. It consists of representatives from a cross-section of the college, specifically from academic affairs.

- **Dr. Alan Campbell** (acampbell18483@stanly.edu) – Co-director
- **Dr. Cindy Dean** (cdean5600@stanly.edu) – Co-director
- **Josh Gooch** (jgooch9259@stanly.edu) – AMITT Technology & Engineering representative
- **Dr. Beth Hopkins** (bhopkins7671@stanly.edu) – Transfer & Business representative
- **Ashlyn Isenhour** (aisenhour7250@stanly.edu) – Allied Health co-representative
- **Ryan Love** (rlove9440@stanly.edu) – AMITT Industry & Trades representative
- **Joe Pollard** (wpollard4980@stanly.edu) – CTL representative
- **Jaime Shelton** (jshelton1944@stanly.edu) – Public Services representative
- **David Smith** (dsmith5076@stanly.edu) – Transfer & Business representative
- **Amy Witschey** (awitschey1649@stanly.edu) – Allied Health co-representative

Because the implementation of the QEP will primarily involve the academic side of the college, it is important that it is guided by faculty. However, we welcome input from everyone, regardless of position or department. To this end, we have deployed surveys to you, our students, and local employers inviting feedback on specific skills to include in the QEP. If you haven't yet responded to the survey, the link is provided below. Thank you to those who have already responded

QEP Survey: [https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/2023\\_Soft\\_Skills-SCCEmployees](https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/2023_Soft_Skills-SCCEmployees)

Please feel free to reach out to any committee member with any questions, comments, or suggestions. Watch for regular updates throughout the next year in the monthly newsletters and at our various committee, staff, and faculty meetings.

Appendix F. August 2023 News Flush



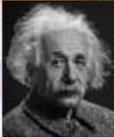
# SCC News Flush

Brought to you by Counseling & Special Services

August  
2023

### HISTORIAN HIGHLIGHT

Albert Einstein



One of history's most outstanding scientists, developed his theory of relativity at age 37. Nobody revolutionized physics like he did. He won a Nobel Prize in physics in 1921 for his services to theoretical physics and especially for his discovery of the law of the photoelectric effect.

**Q:** Why did the math book look so sad?

**A:** Because it had so many problems.

**"TEACHERS OPEN THE DOOR, BUT YOU MUST ENTER BY YOURSELF."**

-- CHINESE PROVERB

### TIME FOR SOMETHING NEW!

**NEW COLLEGE-WIDE INITIATIVE TO FOCUS ON IMPROVING STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES**

This initiative called, **Quality Enhancement Plan or QEP**, evolved through a comprehensive process involving feedback from students, community, and college employees to identify professional/employability skills (aka soft skills) as the focus.

The QEP committee oversees the development and implementation of our QEP and consists of representatives from a cross-section of the college, specifically from academic affairs. Please feel free to reach out to any committee member with any questions, comments, or suggestions. Your input is welcome!

We have launched a survey and invite your feedback in helping shape the QEP. If you haven't yet completed it, you may do so by clicking on [https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/2023\\_Soft\\_Skills-SCCStudents](https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/2023_Soft_Skills-SCCStudents)

### QEP Committee

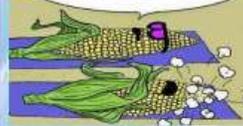
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**CAMPUS SAFETY**

**CAMPUS SAFETY IS IMPORTANT!**

For detailed SCC safety information go to [www.stanly.edu](http://www.stanly.edu) and the Campus Safety page. For non-emergencies please contact 704-991-0300 or 704-991-0123. For all emergency situations please call 911. When calling 911 state the nature of the emergency and your location. SCC officers will be informed of the situation by 911 communications.

**I TOLD you to wear sunscreen.**



### Important Dates & Welcome Back Events

<b>Tuesday, Aug. 1st</b>	Payment Deadline for Fall 2023 16-Week Classes
<b>Monday, Aug. 14th</b>	16-Week Classes Begin/1st Day of Fall 2023
<b>Monday, Aug. 14th</b> 8:00-10:00 am	Back At It Breakfast-stop by any building lobby for a bite to eat.
<b>Monday, Aug. 14th</b> 8:00-10:00 am	"First Day of Class" photos in Snyder and CEC
<b>Aug. 14th-16th</b>	Add/Drop 16-Week Classes
<b>Tuesday, Aug. 15th</b> 3:00-5:00pm	Pop Over to Patterson to check out new locations for Tech Support and Student Life Center. Enjoy popcorn and soda while there!
<b>Wednesday, Aug. 16th</b> 12:00-7:30 pm	Watch a Movie Wednesday! Show your student ID at the ticket counter of Eastgate Cinemas in Albemarle to watch for free!
<b>Thursday, Aug. 17</b> 2:00-4:00 pm	Something Sweet for the Almost End of the Week-stop by any building lobby for a famous Albemarle Sweet Shop Clown Cookie and milk!
<b>Friday, Aug. 18th</b> 11:00 am-1:00 pm	Fun & Games Friday! You made it! Unwind with some gaming in the LRC, com-hole on the Patterson Patio and CEC lawn, or our Welcome Week crossword puzzle. Participation in any of these activities will enter you into a drawing for some SCC Swag!
<b>Friday, Aug. 25th</b>	Payment Deadline for 14-Week Classes (12 PM)
<b>Monday, August 28th</b>	14-Week Classes Start
<b>August 28th-30th</b>	Add/Drop 14-Week Classes

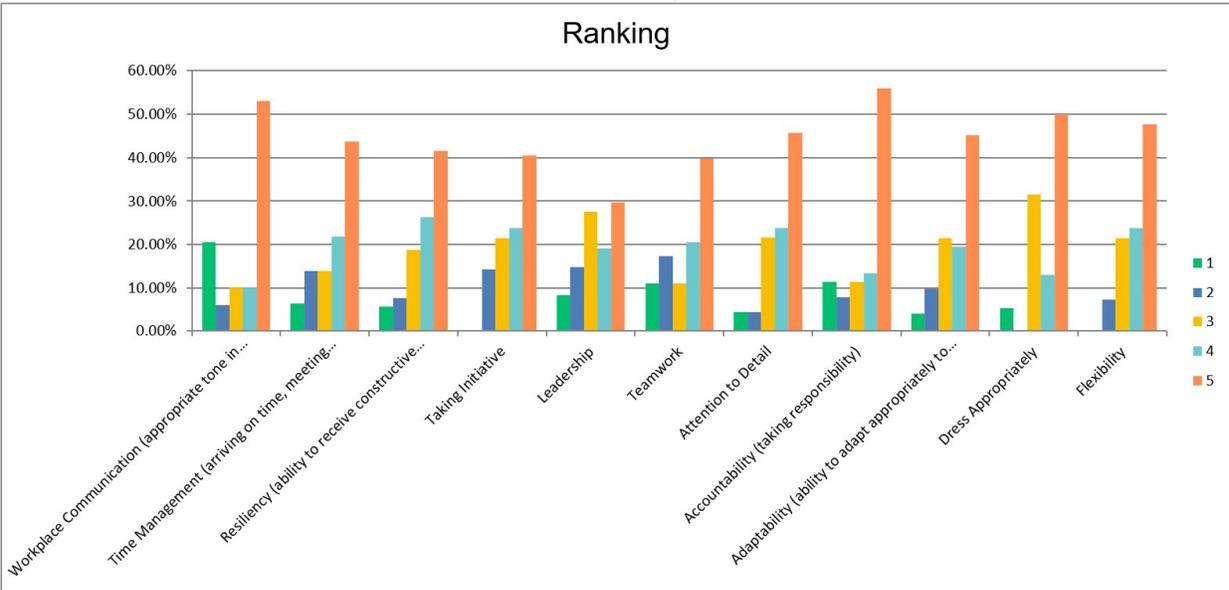
Stanly Community College is an equal opportunity educational institution and employer. The College does not practice or condone discrimination in any form against students, employees, or applicants on the grounds of race, color, national origin, religion, gender, age, or disability consistent with the Assurance of Compliance with the Title IV and VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Executive Order 11246, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1992.

### Appendix G. Soft Skills QEP Student Survey Results

2023 Soft Skills QEP Survey - SCC Students

From the options below, please choose the top five professional skills you think are most important for you to acquire as you prepare to enter the workforce, in order of preference:

Ranking	1	2	3	4	5	Total
Workplace Communication (appropriate tone in email, telephone, face-to-face, etc.)	20.59%	14 5.88%	4 10.29%	7 10.29%	7 52.94%	36 68
Time Management (arriving on time, meeting deadlines in a timely manner)	6.25%	4 14.06%	9 14.06%	9 21.88%	14 43.75%	28 64
Resiliency (ability to receive constructive feedback)	5.66%	3 7.55%	4 18.87%	10 26.42%	14 41.51%	22 53
Taking Initiative	0.00%	0 14.29%	6 21.43%	9 23.81%	10 40.48%	17 42
Leadership	8.51%	4 14.89%	7 27.66%	13 19.15%	9 29.79%	14 47
Teamwork	11.11%	7 17.46%	11 11.11%	7 20.63%	13 39.68%	25 63
Attention to Detail	4.35%	2 4.35%	2 21.74%	10 23.91%	11 45.65%	21 46
Accountability (taking responsibility)	11.54%	6 7.69%	4 11.54%	6 13.46%	7 55.77%	29 52
Adaptability (ability to adapt appropriately to workplace culture)	3.92%	2 9.80%	5 21.57%	11 19.61%	10 45.10%	23 51
Dress Appropriately	5.26%	2 0.00%	0 31.58%	12 13.16%	5 50.00%	19 38
Flexibility	0.00%	0 7.14%	3 21.43%	9 23.81%	10 47.62%	20 42
					Answers	73
					Skipped	0



## Appendix H. ACA-111 Student Success LEAP Multiple-Choice Assessment for Accountability

Understanding Accountability in Advanced Manufacturing and Industrial Trades:

Multiple Choice Questions:

1. Which of the following best defines accountability?
  - a) Doing what you are told without question
  - b) Taking responsibility for actions and decisions
  - c) Completing tasks only when supervised
  - d) Blaming others for mistakesCorrect Answer: b) Taking responsibility for actions and decisions
2. Which of the following is NOT a key element of accountability?
  - a) Ownership
  - b) Transparency
  - c) Defensiveness
  - d) ResponsibilityCorrect Answer: c) Defensiveness
3. An employee misses an important deadline but chooses to inform their supervisor and suggest ways to make up for the delay. This is an example of:
  - a) Avoidance
  - b) Blame-shifting
  - c) Accountability
  - d) Lack of responsibilityCorrect Answer: c) Accountability
4. Why is being late to work more than just a personal issue?
  - a) It only affects your paycheck but not your coworkers
  - b) It can cause a domino effect, impacting the entire crew's productivity
  - c) It shows that work-life balance is more important than punctuality
  - d) It only matters if you are a supervisorCorrect Answer: b) It can cause a domino effect, impacting the entire crew's productivity
5. Which of the following is a likely consequence of habitual lateness at work?
  - a) You will only lose a few minutes of pay
  - b) More reliable workers may be chosen for promotions over you
  - c) Being skilled will always outweigh punctuality
  - d) It has no real impact on your career progressionCorrect Answer: b) More reliable workers may be chosen for promotions over you
6. If your company has a formal dress code, where should you look for guidelines?
  - a) Company handbook or syllabus
  - b) Social media posts from coworkers
  - c) Personal preference based on what others wear
  - d) Asking HR only after getting a warningCorrect Answer: a) Company handbook or syllabus

7. What is a key characteristic of someone with an accountable mindset when they make a mistake?
- a) They hide it to avoid consequences
  - b) They blame external factors for the mistake
  - c) They acknowledge the mistake and learn from it
  - d) They assume no one will notice and move on
- Correct Answer: c) They acknowledge the mistake and learn from it

Multiple Answer Questions:

1. Which of the following are key behaviors of an accountable person? (Select all that apply.)
- a) Admitting mistakes when they happen
  - b) Making excuses for incomplete tasks
  - c) Following through on commitments
  - d) Keeping information hidden to avoid conflict
- Correct Answers: a) Admitting mistakes when they happen, c) Following through on commitments
2. In an industrial workplace, what are some challenges to accountability? (Select all that apply.)
- a) Lack of clear expectations
  - b) Poor communication among team members
  - c) A culture that encourages responsibility and transparency
  - d) Fear of consequences for speaking up
- Correct Answers: a) Lack of clear expectations, b) Poor communication among team members, c) Fear of consequences for speaking up
3. Which of the following behaviors reflect accountability? (Select all that apply.)
- a) Communicating when running late or missing a deadline
  - b) Avoiding responsibility to protect your reputation
  - c) Paying attention to communication methods (e.g., email vs. phone call)
  - d) Taking initiative to adapt to language barriers
- Correct Answers: a) Communicating when running late or missing a deadline, c) Paying attention to communication methods, d) Taking initiative to adapt to language barriers
4. What are potential professional risks of posting about drug use or associating with it on social media? (Select all that apply.)
- a) It could be seen as a professional liability for the company
  - b) It could impact career advancement opportunities
  - c) It has no impact as long as it's not at work
  - d) It could cause coworkers and supervisors to lose trust in your reliability
- Correct Answers: a) It could be seen as a professional liability, b) It could impact career advancement, d) It could cause coworkers and supervisors to lose trust

5. Which of the following best demonstrates an accountable approach to handling mistakes?  
(Select all that apply.)
- a) Seeking feedback from instructors or supervisors to improve
  - b) Accepting mistakes as part of learning and growth
  - c) Ignoring mistakes to avoid appearing weak
  - d) Taking proactive steps to ensure it doesn't happen again
- Correct Answers: a) Seeking feedback, b) Accepting mistakes as learning, d) Taking proactive steps

#### Scenario-Based Question

1. You are assigned to operate a machine during a shift, but you realize you forgot to complete a routine safety check before starting. What is the most accountable response?
- a) Continue operating the machine and hope nothing goes wrong
  - b) Inform your supervisor immediately and complete the safety check
  - c) Ask a coworker to take responsibility for the mistake
  - d) Ignore it since no one noticed
- Correct Answer: b) Inform your supervisor immediately and complete the safety check
2. You are assigned a task and realize that you will not meet the deadline. What should you do?
- a) Wait until the deadline passes and explain later
  - b) Inform your supervisor as soon as possible and ask for guidance
  - c) Ask a coworker to finish your work without notifying the supervisor
  - d) Ignore it and hope no one notices
- Correct Answer: b) Inform your supervisor as soon as possible and ask for guidance
3. You show up to a meeting in casual clothes, but everyone else is dressed formally. What's the best action to take next time?
- a) Check the handbook or ask about the dress code beforehand
  - b) Assume dress code doesn't matter unless someone corrects you
  - c) Wait until HR enforces the rule before adjusting
  - d) Dress more casually next time to see if others follow suit
- Correct Answer: a) Check the handbook or ask about the dress code beforehand
4. A coworker frequently misses deadlines and fails to communicate, causing delays. What should you do?
- a) Avoid working with them whenever possible
  - b) Talk to them directly and encourage better communication
  - c) Ignore it since it's not your responsibility
  - d) Report them to HR immediately without any discussion
- Correct Answer: b) Talk to them directly and encourage better communication

### Appendix I. Rubric for Assessing Understanding of Workplace Communication in AMIT

**SLO:** Discuss the importance of effective workplace communication, its strategies and challenges.

**Criteria:** Knowledge and Understanding of Professional Communication Principles in a Professional Trades Environment.

Level	Description	Indicators
<b>5 - Exemplary</b>	Demonstrates comprehensive understanding of professional communication principles.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Accurately explains the importance of effective communication in the relevant trade.</li> <li>- Identifies key elements of professional communication (clarity, conciseness, tone, non-verbal cues).</li> <li>- Analyzes case studies or examples of successful professional communication and articulates lessons learned.</li> <li>- Actively engages in discussions about communication strategies and challenges.</li> </ul>
<b>4 - Proficient</b>	Shows a solid understanding of professional communication with minor gaps.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Explains the basic importance of effective communication in the relevant trade.</li> <li>- Identifies most key principles of professional communication and their relevance.</li> <li>- Provides clear explanations of effective communication strategies (e.g., active listening, feedback).</li> <li>- Participates actively in discussions, offering relevant examples and insights.</li> </ul>
<b>3 - Satisfactory</b>	Displays basic understanding but lacks depth or consistency.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Recognizes some principles of professional communication but may struggle to articulate their importance.</li> <li>- Provides general explanations of communication concepts with limited detail.</li> <li>- Engages in discussions but contributes minimally.</li> </ul>

Level	Description	Indicators
<b>2 - Needs Improvement</b>	Shows limited understanding of professional communication; frequent gaps in knowledge.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Struggles to identify basic principles of effective communication.</li> <li>- Provides vague or unclear reasons for the importance of professional communication.</li> <li>- Rarely engages in discussions about communication concepts.</li> </ul>
<b>1 - Unsatisfactory</b>	Lacks understanding of the importance of professional communication in a trades environment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Unable to explain the relevance of professional communication to workplace success.</li> <li>- Does not participate in discussions or complete related assignments.</li> <li>- Demonstrates little to no knowledge of communication principles.</li> </ul>

### Appendix J. Rubric for Assessing Basic Application of Teamwork in AMIT

**SLO #3:** Demonstrate consistent and effective use of teamwork principles in various workplace and professional contexts.

**Criteria:** Application of Teamwork Principles in a Professional Trades Environment

Level	Description	Indicators
<b>5 - Exemplary</b>	Demonstrates excellent application of teamwork principles.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Consistently collaborates effectively with team members.</li> <li>- Clearly defines roles and responsibilities within the team.</li> <li>- Actively participates in resolving conflicts and enhances group dynamics.</li> </ul>
<b>4 - Proficient</b>	Shows solid application with minor inconsistencies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Largely collaborates well but may overlook some role definitions.</li> <li>- Communicates effectively with peers about tasks and expectations.</li> <li>- Participates in conflict resolution with some guidance.</li> </ul>
<b>3 - Satisfactory</b>	Displays basic application but lacks consistency.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Occasionally collaborates but may struggle with clear role assignments.</li> <li>- Provides general communication but lacks depth in engagement.</li> <li>- Engages in discussions but contributions are limited and occasionally unclear.</li> </ul>
<b>2 - Needs Improvement</b>	Shows limited application; frequent errors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Struggles to collaborate effectively, leading to misunderstandings.</li> <li>- Provides vague explanations about roles and responsibilities.</li> <li>- Rarely seeks feedback or engages in conflict resolution efforts.</li> </ul>
<b>1 - Unsatisfactory</b>	Lacks ability to apply teamwork principles.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Unable to demonstrate effective collaboration with team members.</li> <li>- Does not recognize the importance of defined roles or conflict resolution.</li> <li>- Does not participate in team discussions or activities.</li> </ul>

### Appendix K. *LEAP* Skills Self-Efficacy Survey

#### Accountability: Self-Efficacy Survey

Scale:

- 1 = Strongly Disagree
- 2 = Disagree
- 3 = Neutral
- 4 = Agree
- 5 = Strongly Agree

1. I take responsibility for my actions, including meeting deadlines and following through on commitments, both in class and in workplace settings.
2. I feel confident in communicating with instructors, supervisors, or teammates when I encounter challenges that might affect my performance.
3. I understand the importance of punctuality and reliability in maintaining a professional reputation and am committed to these values.
4. I believe I can admit mistakes when they happen and take proactive steps to correct them and learn from the experience.
5. I am prepared to hold myself accountable for following workplace safety guidelines and professional expectations, even when not being directly supervised.

#### Dressing Appropriately: Self-Efficacy Survey

Scale:

- 1 = Strongly Disagree
- 2 = Disagree
- 3 = Neutral
- 4 = Agree
- 5 = Strongly Agree

1. I am confident in identifying and following appropriate dress codes for different learning environments, including classroom, lab, and internship settings.
2. I understand the importance of safety attire (e.g., steel-toed boots, protective eyewear, high-visibility vests) and feel prepared to follow these requirements in an industrial setting.
3. I feel comfortable dressing professionally for job interviews, networking events, and workplace interactions with instructors, supervisors, or guest speakers.
4. I believe I can balance comfort, professionalism, and safety when choosing my attire for different learning and work environments.
5. I am prepared to follow professional dress expectations to maintain a strong reputation in my academic program and future career.

#### Teamwork Self-Efficacy Survey

Scale:

1 = Strongly Disagree

2 = Disagree

3 = Neutral

4 = Agree

5 = Strongly Agree

1. I am confident in effectively communicating with my classmates to collaborate on group projects, assignments, and lab work.
2. I feel comfortable addressing conflicts or misunderstandings with team members in a professional and constructive manner.
3. I can adapt my communication style appropriately when working with classmates, instructors, and industry professionals (e.g., guest speakers, internship supervisors).
4. I believe I can actively contribute to a team by listening to others, sharing my ideas clearly, and fulfilling my responsibilities.
5. I am prepared to use professional communication (email, meetings, or discussions) to clarify expectations, ask for help, or provide feedback in a team setting.

Workplace Communication Self-Efficacy Survey

Scale:

1 = Strongly Disagree

2 = Disagree

3 = Neutral

4 = Agree

5 = Strongly Agree

1. I am confident in using appropriate netiquette when communicating with classmates in online discussions, emails, or group projects.
2. I feel capable of maintaining a professional and respectful tone when emailing or speaking with my instructors.
3. I am comfortable engaging in professional communication with guest speakers, industry professionals, or internship supervisors.
4. I believe I can adjust my communication style (formal/informal) appropriately depending on whether I am speaking to a peer, instructor, or industry professional.
5. I feel prepared to actively listen, respond professionally, and ask relevant questions when interacting with instructors, guest speakers, or internship supervisors.