The Sul Ross State University quality enhancement plan, “Lobo Stars: Enhancing Academic Learning through Student Engagement,” concentrates on critical thinking as a learning goal. A broad-based committee composed of students, faculty, staff, and community representatives determined academic engagement as our most serious problem. Higher education research indicates that the opportunity to practice higher order thinking is the key to enhancing student engagement, improving their academic performance across the disciplines, and improving their chances of success in both life and career after graduation. Three strategies will encourage more critical thinking practice opportunities for students:

1) **Outdoor Learning.** Our physical and cultural location as a border-serving university in the scenic, low-population area of far West Texas provides an ideal outdoor laboratory to increase opportunities for hands-on, active learning in all academic disciplines as well as cooperative activities with student life and future employers. We will enhance our outdoor learning facilities, develop liaisons, and encourage regional connections to course work in order to increase student interest.

2) **Pilots of Engagement.** We believe our current faculty, staff, students, alumni, and community know our strengths and weaknesses best, so we encourage innovation through this broad pilot system. We will award small funding grants on a competitive basis. Promising ideas will be shared to encourage broader participation. Awards will be given on an annual basis.

3) **Faculty Support.** A new Faculty Support and Outdoor Learning Center will provide resources and incentives to inspire learning strategies, provide assistance with the logistics of hands-on outdoor activities, and monitor QEP assessment. The support center will organize interdisciplinary faculty seminars whose members will meet monthly for one-year to share success stories, help solve each others’ problems, and create a community of support leading to improved teamwork. Faculty syllabi will also be used to monitor increased awareness and incorporation of higher-order thinking in all courses.

Deans of the three academic schools (Agriculture and Natural Resource Sciences, Arts and Sciences, and Professional Studies) as well as the Dean of Student Life have pledged 10% participation each year from their respective areas. SRSU will use the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) to diagnose situations where student engagement can be improved, the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) to measure improvement in critical thinking, and in-house rubrics to measure critical thinking at course and program levels.

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