**Assessment of critical thinking in ASC 400**

The current College of Arts and Sciences goals and objectives for critical thinking are:

**Students will be able to think, read, and communicate critically.**  
6.1  Students will examine, evaluate and refine their habits of thinking, and accept ambiguity while questioning assumptions and ideas.  
6.2  Students will be able to make claims and draw conclusions supported by the marshalling and evaluation of evidence.  
6.3  Students will synthesize divergent contents, methodologies, and models as reflective learners and thinkers across and within disciplines.

Four of the faculty teaching in the values seminar in the spring 2010 semester met in January 2010 and developed two different methods to assess the critical thinking objectives. It was determined that objectives 6.2 and 6.3 could be assessed by using a modified rubric that had originally been developed to assess communication. To assess objective 6.1, a reflective essay would be employed. The guidelines for the reflective essay and the rubric for 6.2 and 6.3 can be found at the end of this report.

During the spring 2010 semester, there were three different Values Seminar courses being taught. The reflective essay was used in two of the three classes. Students were asked to write the essay at the end of the semester. The rubric for outcomes 6.2 and 6.3 was used on the students’ final research paper. The evaluation with the rubric occurred after the end of the semester and was not part of the grading process for the paper.

During the summer of 2010, the reflective essays and final paper were assessed. Approximately half of the reflection papers and half of the research papers were assessed.

**Findings**

6.1 – Reflective Essay

Analysis of the reflective essays made it clear that students could often understand the value of refining their thinking and accepting ambiguity. When the reflective essays were compared to the final research paper, it was evident that students failed to put this understanding into practice. Students also aspired to use these methods outside of the Values Seminar class and in their other classes. There were still students who, even after taking the class, still had difficulty, or found no value, in refining their habits of thinking or questioning assumptions or ideas.

6.2 – Critical Thinking rubric.

Students had some success in developing arguments. Some students were quite good at this while others were not. Students had difficulty in constructing their own argument and in critiquing other arguments. Most students tended to be able to do one but not the other. Quite often counter arguments were ignored. Most of the papers that were assessed saw students in the competent range for the criteria being used to assess 6.2. The marshalling of evidence was also weak judging by the quality, or lack there of, of sources being used by the students.

6.3 – Critical Thinking rubric

This objective was a bit more problematic. While there was synthesis occurring within a discipline there was little or no synthesis occurring across disciplines. Objective 6.3 was generally found to be lacking in all papers that were assessed.

General Findings

As mentioned previously, one of the weaknesses seen in the final research papers was a lack of appropriate sources. Students were having difficulty finding and using appropriate sources. Sources drawn from popular culture were often found. Another weakness was the general quality of writing that was found in all of the papers that students would write. This hindered the students’ ability to demonstrate competency in critical thinking.

**Recommendations**

The faculty involved with this pilot study found that the methods employed for assessing students’ critical thinking were fairly successful. In the future both of these could be used to assess critical thinking in ASC 400. The main change with the reflective essay would be to use it earlier in the semester, possibly around the time of the due date of the first draft of the research paper.

This study was limited in the fact that only two of the three sections employed the reflective essay and that a representative sampling of the research papers could not be obtained. The usefulness of the assessment would be increased if the assessment of critical thinking in the Values Seminar was put on a regular schedule (perhaps once a year) and if a representative sampling of all research papers were assessed. At that point there could be an attempt to better quantify the results.

To achieve this end, this report should be brought to the Values Seminar Committee and discussed. One goal of that discussion would be to begin the implementation of the assessment methods on a regular basis. Also the Values Seminar Committee should examine the results in the synthesis assessment to examine changes that could be made to the seminar to better prepare students to achieve this competency. Or, alternatively, to explore the question as to whether the Values Seminar is the appropriate place to assess this objective.

Lastly, the level of writing skill of our students remains troubling. The Values Seminar Committee needs to work more closely with the composition faculty to develop strategies to improve the level of writing of our students.

ASC 400

Response Paper #5

The course description for ASC 400 states that it “involves a discussion of values as affecting individual and societal decision making.” The aim of the course is for students to consider some large and complex issue from multiple viewpoints and with critical, thoughtful insight.

This essay is your chance to comment both on whether that goal was reached and whether it is worth reaching. In a paper of at least three pages, write with critical reflection on what you have learned about the process of learning itself. In other words, this reflection is not about any facts or methods you may have discovered in class, but about your own thought process—how you understand and evaluate information, how you think about ideas and claims, how you decide what is true, right, or valuable.

Some questions to consider as you write:

* Have you changed the way you examine or evaluate information, ideas, claims?
* How do you view ambiguity in ideas or claims? Has this changed?
* Have you changed the way you make arguments, either written or oral?
* Do you feel comfortable using methods and models from different disciplines to understand and make arguments?
* Has this course influenced your thinking in other classes or in your non-academic life? How?

A special note: Please do not claim things that are not actually true. Remember that your professors have been working with you all semester, reading your work, listening to your ideas in class. The grade for this paper is **not** based on the level of critical thinking you have achieved, nor is this paper about saying nice things about the professor (you should, in fact, strive to say nothing about the professors. This is about you).

This paper will be graded based on how well you articulate your own thought process and learning curve, as well as on your use of proper grammar, syntax and style. While this paper is necessarily more informal than your final paper, it must be written well.

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| **Level** | **Masterful** | **Competent** | **Developmental** | **Comments** |
| ***Criteria*** |
| ***Claim***  *6.2 Students will be able to make claims and draw conclusions supported by the marshalling and evaluation of evidence.*  *6.2 Students will be able to make claims and draw conclusions supported by the marshalling and evaluation of evidence.* | Writer presents an arguable claim, grounded in deep understanding of the discipline and reflecting critical and original thought.  Writer reaches reasonable and interesting conclusions based on claims and evidence | Writer presents an intelligible claim, evidencing basic understanding of the discipline and some critical thought.  Writer reaches conclusions that are, for the most part, solid. | Writer presents a shaky or simplistic claim which seems to reflect weak grasp of the discipline.  Writer reaches tenuous, illogical, or irrelevant conclusions. |  |
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| ***Evidence***  *6.2 Students will be able to make claims and draw conclusions supported by the marshalling and evaluation of evidence.*  *6.3 Students will synthesize divergent contents, methodologies, and models as reflective learners and thinkers across and within disciplines.* | Writer provides appropriate, relevant evidence, chosen to further claims and establish credibility and evaluated and analyzed according to writer’s purpose and context.  Writer demonstrates an awareness of disciplinary contributions and synthesizes the ideas of others with his/her own. | Writer provides some evidence that while not fully analyzed is mostly relevant.  Writer demonstrates some awareness of disciplinary contributions, although synthesis may be lacking. | Writer provides no evidence, or evidence presented has little to do with the purported claim.  Writer offers little or no synthesis of information or research with the writer’s own ideas. |  |
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Assessment Criteria for 6.0 “Students will be able to think, read, and communicate critically”

Student’s Name\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Reviewer\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_Course\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Assignment\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_