Washington State University Critical Thinking Project
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Fostering critical thinking skills in undergraduates across a university’s curriculum presents formidable difficulties. Making valid, reliable, and fine-grained assessments of students’ progress in achieving these higher order intellectual skills involves another set of obstacles. Finally, providing faculty with the tools necessary to refocus their own teaching to encourage these abilities in students represents yet another formidable problem. These, however, are precisely the problems Washington State University is addressing through one concerted strategy. Washington State University has received a three-year, $380,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Education FIPSE Comprehensive Program to integrate assessment with instruction in order to increase coherence and promote higher order thinking in a four-year General Education curriculum at a large, Research-I, public university, and to work with our two- and four-year counterparts in the State of Washington. As a result of a Washington State HEC Board funded pilot study, we have substantial evidence that we can significantly improve student learning, reform teaching, and measure the critical thinking gains of students at Washington State University. This project represents a collaboration among WSU’s Campus Writing Programs, General Education Program, and Center for Teaching, Learning, and Technology, and it builds upon WSU’s nationally recognized leadership in assessment in writing and learning with technology.

When WSU began a General Education reform in the late-1980s, we proposed to achieve these desired goals through General Education curriculum and writing-across-the-curriculum initiatives. While Washington State University has fully integrated writing into all aspects of its undergraduate curriculum, particularly General Education,
Scant                                Substantially Developed

Merely repeats information provided, taking
it as truth, or denies evidence with out
adequate justification.

Confuses associations and correlations with
cause and effect.

Does not distinguish between fact, opinion,
and value judgments.

Examines the evidence and
source of evidence;
questions its accuracy,
precision, relevance, and
completeness.

Observes cause and effect
and addresses existing or
potential consequences.

6) Identifies and considers the influence of the context* on the issue.

Scant                                Substantially Developed

Discusses the problem only in ego-centric or
socio-centric terms. Does not present the
problem as having connections to other
contexts i.e. cultural, political, etc.

Analyzes the issue with a clear sense of
scope and context, including an
assessment of the audience of the
analysis. Considers other pertinent
contexts.

7) Identifies and assesses conclusions, implications, and consequences.

Scant                                Substantially Developed

Fails to identify conclusions,
implications, and consequences
of the issue or the key
relationships between the
other elements of the problem.

Identifies and discusses
conclusions, implications,
and consequences considering
context, assumptions, data
and evidence objectively.

*Contexts for Consideration

Cultural/Social
Group, national, ethnic behavior/attitude

Educational
Schooling, formal training

Technological
Applied science, engineering

Political
Organizational or governmental

Scientific
Conceptual, basic science, scientific method

Economic
Trade, business concerns, costs

Ethical
Values

Personal Experience
Personal observation, informal character