

Teaching and Learning Project Assessment Report

Program or Unit: General Education Program

Submitted by: Myra Snell on behalf of the GE Committee

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What we wanted to learn about our students:

This assessment project was designed to assess student achievement in Creative Arts and Humanities courses of the following ISLO for the General Education Program:

At the completion of the LMC general education program, a student will think critically and creatively.

Background:

The motivation for this project comes from

1. LMC's previous accreditation report that called for the assessment of the GE program
2. new accreditation standards requiring degree-level assessment of student learning
3. the desire of instructors in the Creative Arts and Humanities to improve students' ability to think critically.

What we did:

From FA 04 through SP 07, the Teaching and Learning Project, in conjunction with the GE Committee, sponsored a Teaching Community for faculty in the Creative Arts and Humanities that focused on the teaching and learning of critical thinking. This project is part of a series of projects on the assessment of critical thinking in the General Education Program at LMC.

The Creative Arts and Humanities Teaching Community did the following as part of their assessment project:

- “operationalized” the critical thinking assessment criteria written by the GE Committee to better fit the focus on moral and ethical issues in Creative Arts and Humanities
- reviewed critical thinking course objectives for the courses in the Creative Arts, Humanities, and Philosophy
- developed a template for critical thinking assignments and rubrics in the Creative Arts and Humanities
- wrote, critiqued, revised, and administered critical thinking assignments
- conducted rubric-based assessment of student work with a focus on critical thinking
- designed and analyzed class activities to promote critical thinking
- produced websites documenting assessment results and plans for improving students' critical thinking skills

To assess students' critical thinking, each instructor wrote an assignment (or revised an existing assignment) and developed a rubric that met the agreed upon specifications. Assignments were discussed in the Teaching Community and revised based on feedback from the group. The group analyzed class sets of student work using the instructor's rubric. Each instructor then discussed plans for adjusting the assignment or instruction to improve students' critical thinking skills.

Class sets of student work from the following courses were analyzed in this project:
Art 5, Drama 15, English 30 and 100, Journalism 35, Philosophy 2, 40 and 42

Instructors participating in this project: Casy Cann, Ia Carbonell, Curtis Corlew, Rick Flynn, Dave Hobbs, Cindy McGrath, Danny Rameriz, Jennifer Smith, Mary Snell, Myra Snell (facilitator), Ursula Velonis, Nancy Ybarra (facilitator)

What we learned about our students:

Across courses, the percent of students rated as “proficient” in critical thinking ranged from 44% to 61%.

We identified the following general attributes in student work across courses:

- In general students were able to analyze better than they were able to synthesize.
- Many students had difficulty developing a clear thesis that demonstrated a synthesis of elements discussed in their analysis.
- In better papers students formulated a question, a problem, or a conflict from the assignment prompt, then wrote in response to this.
- Weak papers did not demonstrate an understanding of the purpose of the assignment. These papers tended to be lists of course information or concepts, often using stock phrases from course content with little paraphrasing or explanation.
- In classes where instructors used specific strategies for teaching critical analysis, e.g. Potter’s Box, students rated as “proficient” made explicit use of the strategy in the writing of the paper (as opposed to using the strategy as a “critical thinking tool”). The result was sometimes again a list of sorts, instead of a coherent essay, and a less “creative” paper.

What we plan to do next to improve student learning:

The group attended the spring 2006 critical thinking flex workshop by Gerald Nosich from the Foundation for Critical Thinking. Instructors plan to rethink their approach to teaching and assessing critical thinking by using the framework presented by Dr. Nosich.