

Alice Lloyd College QEP Executive Summary

THINKING WITH PURPOSE: ENTERING THE REALM OF RESPONSIBILITY THROUGH ENHANCED CRITICAL THINKING

Alice Lloyd College

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The Alice Lloyd College Quality Enhancement Plan will focus on developing students' critical thinking skills through explicit instruction and active learning approaches. Following an in depth review of the Alice Lloyd College Institutional Effectiveness Plan, institutional assessment data, and needs assessments, several potential topics were identified and the data strongly supported the need to address critical thinking development. The literature review showed that strong critical thinking abilities are important to leadership development, which is a central aspect of the College's mission. Also, the review of institutional data showed a deficiency in critical thinking skills for ALC students.

The proposed program is expected to enhance student learning, the environment supporting student learning, and aid the institution in accomplishing its mission. The program also integrates seamlessly with the Purpose Road Philosophy that represents the essence and spirit of why Alice Lloyd College exists. The relationship that exists between critical thinking, the Purpose Road Philosophy, and the College mission is reflected in the program's title: Thinking with Purpose: Entering the Realm of Responsibility through Enhanced Critical Thinking.

A QEP focusing on improving students' critical thinking skills will benefit the College and its students in a number of ways. The most important benefit pertains to improving students' academic success, which, according to the Steering Committee's research, could also lead to improved retention. Research strongly links critical thinking skills in college students to their academic performance. The literature review showed that students who participated in explicit critical thinking training were twice as likely to be retained and graduate as students who did not participate in the training. The most impactful result of this type of training pertained to first-generation college students. In one study reviewed, the first-generation college students who successfully completed the training in their freshman year were four times as likely to return for a second year as the first-generation students who did not complete the training (Ahuna, Tinnesz, & VanZile-Tamsen, 2011).

The plan identifies four learning outcomes that address SACS' four required categories of learning outcomes. Interestingly, these four areas are consistent with the four areas that contemporary theorists have identified as crucial in assessing critical thinking development programs and they are also reflected

in the Purpose Road Philosophy. The outcomes include (1) improving students' knowledge of critical thinking concepts, (2) improving students' ability to effectively practice critical thinking, (3) enhancing students' confidence in their ability to think critically and their willingness to apply critical thinking skills, and (4) changing students' attitudes about critical thinking. Several sources of data will be used to assess the achievement of these learning outcomes including: (1) the Educational Testing Service Proficiency Profile, (2) the California Critical Thinking Disposition Inventory, (3) a critical thinking concepts test that will be developed by the Implementation Team, (4) graduation and retention rates, and (5) course grids and evaluations.

There are four primary components of the plan. First, cultural artifacts represent visual or aesthetic changes that will enhance awareness of the effort to develop critical thinking skills on campus. Second, the faculty/staff development program will provide on campus training to all faculty and staff and more targeted training for focus course faculty. Third, the student development program will target students at different points in their academic careers through explicit instruction and innovative pedagogies. The plan targets all students and faculty, but for assessment purposes focus courses were identified. These courses will include curriculums and assignments intended to train students in the theoretical foundations of critical thinking and give them ample opportunities to practice critical thinking in both general education and major specific courses. The last component of the plan is evaluation and assessment of outcomes. Evaluation will be ongoing and comprehensive using the aforementioned instruments and institutional data.

The College community including the board of trustees, administration, faculty, staff, alumni, and students are excited about the opportunity to implement a plan that has the potential to impact the College and its service community in such a positive way. The board and college administration have approved a budget that will provide the resources to successfully implement the plan and are excited about its potential to impact the future of the institution.