

QEP Executive Summary
Critical Thinking through Writing
Georgia State University

Contact: Mary Finn, Ph.D., Associate Provost for Institutional Effectiveness, e-mail:
mfinn@gsu.edu

Critical Thinking through Writing (CTW) seeks to enhance our baccalaureate students' capacity for critical thinking by increasing their opportunity to evidence critical thinking through writing in their academic major. Consistent with our university's mission, one of the primary aims of undergraduate education is to develop citizens who are able to engage in critical thinking and clear writing. Based upon review of our institutional assessment data, critical thinking and writing are two of the most important learning outcomes identified in nearly all of our 54 disciplines/fields. Further, results from the National Survey of Student Engagement indicate our seniors judged their own abilities to engage in critical thinking lower, and reported writing fewer shorter papers, than their peers at other doctoral extensive universities. Incorporating writing as a conduit for the expression of critical thinking emerges from our experiences with existing student-centered learning initiatives, such as Writing across the Curriculum and the Writing Studio.

Enhancement of critical thinking and writing will be accomplished by implementing a university-wide graduation requirement (effective fall 2009 and thereafter) that undergraduates pass two CTW courses in their major. Each course, designed by the major department and approved by the University Senate's Committee of Academic Programs, contains multiple writing to learn activities and assignments that address issues relevant to that major. CTW activities and assignments are structured to permit frequent feedback to students and opportunities for revision. Course assignments align with the University's adopted definition of critical thinking. The student/instructor ratio in a CTW course may not exceed 25:1.

Both the creation and implementation of CTW involves broad-based support and participation of administrators, faculty, staff and students. Leading the development and implementation of CTW is a team comprised of senior administrators with knowledge in assessment and experience in project management and faculty with specific expertise in critical thinking and writing. The University Senate endorsed a "train the trainer" model that requires departments to select one or more CTW Ambassadors for each degree major who are trained in workshops conducted by CTW Coordinators. The CTW Coordinators are a core group of faculty with specific expertise in critical thinking and writing and other relevant disciplinary experience. CTW Ambassadors are responsible for working with their departments to develop CTW plans that include curriculum development, preparation of instructors to teach CTW courses, and assessment of student learning in CTW courses. Methods of assessment include both direct (course-embedded) and indirect (surveys) measures of student learning reported annually and shared with the University community at an annual forum.