

QEP Executive Summary Gulf Coast State College

Gulf Coast State College (GCSC) in Panama City, Florida, began in 1957. The college serves a population of over 191,000 in a growing region of the Panhandle of Florida, a service area that includes the three-county area of Bay, Franklin, and Gulf counties. Currently serving over 8,000 students each semester, GCSC is committed to delivering life-changing learning opportunities for students, whom the college continually holds in a place of central importance, providing a range of relevant and useful learning opportunities for student learners.

In the fall of 2008, the Quality Enhancement Plan Steering Committee initiated a discussion on the need to encourage pedagogical changes and to improve student learning at Gulf Coast. To find a suitable topic, the Steering Committee facilitated campus-wide forums to discuss the potential QEP topics, which would culminate with an agreed upon topic embraced by the entire college. The results of forums, division discussions, and broad-based QEP subcommittee work yielded a variety of topics, culminating in a consensus selection of Critical Academic Literacy (CAL) for the college's QEP.

A review of the literature on Critical Academic Literacy, joined with analysis of GCSC's institutional data, revealed that our students face similar challenges to those faced by college students across the nation. A majority of individuals are critically illiterate, or as Horning puts it, "... they cannot summarize a text accurately, but more importantly, they cannot go beyond summary to analysis, synthesis and evaluation. They have no sense about appraising a piece of written text for accuracy, currency, relevance, authority . . ." ("Defining Literacy and Illiteracy" 73). Essential reasoning skills transcend students' abilities to read and make meaning from text. The demands of critical literacy are just as present for appraising information from other sources, e.g., audio and video in a variety of forms, data bases, web information sources, and a number of emerging communication peripherals.

Critical Academic Literacy is the ability to:

- Demonstrate knowledge and higher order thinking skills in analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of textual materials and electronic media
- Demonstrate knowledge and functional application skills concerning the clarity, accuracy, currency, relevance, and authority of textual and other information sources, including electronic materials (Horning 73)
- Demonstrate the ability to connect and bind both related and diverse ideas within target textual material, as well as making connections to ideas outside the text, within the field of study, and among a variety of disciplines

Gulf Coast State College's QEP topic seeks to impact the education offered to students by improving students' Critical Academic Literacy (CAL) skills through enhancements in classroom pedagogy, implementation of CAL connections to academic support units, and college-wide acceptance of CAL as important to the improvement in student learning. Through study of the literature on literacy and academic best practices, trained faculty and instructional support staff will design and implement changes to their own classroom practices and materials and to college-wide academic support practices and materials that will improve student learning outcomes in the important area of Critical Academic Literacy.