



Executive Summary—Meredith College Quality Enhancement Plan

PRISM: *Purposeful Reasoning, Inquiry, and Scholarship at Meredith*

Contact: Dr. Tim Hendrix, Associate Professor of Mathematics & PRISM Director, hendrixt@meredith.edu

Web: <http://www.meredith.edu/prism/>

The Meredith College Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) focuses on equipping students with the intellectual skills and traits that encourage *critical thinking* and *active engagement in the learning process*. PRISM will integrate critical thinking through a variety of courses and will enable students to excel in life-long learning, careers, leadership roles, and service. Building on its strong tradition and mission of equipping women to excel, Meredith College's QEP is the **PRISM Experience**—an acronym for the type of critical thinking this plan seeks to strengthen—*Purposeful Reasoning, Inquiry, and Scholarship at Meredith*.

The development of **PRISM** involved a campus-wide effort over the course of two years, gathering input from students, faculty, and staff; examining student engagement data; and seeking consensus through written and oral feedback on possible initiatives to strengthen critical thinking in our students. Grounded in current research and crafted with the unique strengths and potentials of our student body in mind, we formulated a definition of critical thinking for our campus:

*We define **critical thinking** as a purposeful, self-directed process in which we take charge of knowledge, use reason to propel our scholarship and solve problems, and integrate these essential skills in intellectual endeavors and actions.*

To address critical thinking, **PRISM** will involve three campus-wide initiatives, implemented incrementally, over a five-year period.

Initiative 1: *Implement first-year, discipline-based seminars designed to promote critical thinking that will introduce students to a common framework (using the Paul and Elder model) as well as invite students into the discipline through in-depth study of a focused topic. The seminars will introduce strategies and encourage practice of critical thinking through experiential learning.*

Initiative 2: *Infuse the teaching of critical thinking throughout a student's undergraduate career through Critical Thinking (CT)-designated courses that address key critical thinking skills intentionally at the middle and upper levels of a student's major program, through co-curricular activities that apply those skills, and through departmental initiatives to promote deeper levels of critical thinking in existing coursework and capstone experiences.*

Initiative 3: *Build capacity to better scaffold student growth in critical thinking abilities by providing faculty and staff professional development in critical thinking research and best practice. Each year, PRISM will work with Faculty Development to offer opportunities for professional development for both faculty and staff including a Critical Thinking Institute.*

Over the course of the next five years, we will use multiple measures to assess PRISM learning outcomes and the process itself, including student surveys, critical thinking tests, rubric-scored samples of student work using AAC&U VALUE Rubrics, and interviews. Through a process of evidence-based decision-making, **PRISM** initiatives will develop a campus culture committed to improving critical thinking skills in the most transformative of ways.

Thinking About...Thinking Within...Thinking Beyond