



NEWBERRY

COLLEGE

“Habits of the Heart: Critical Thinking for Personal and Social Responsibility and Vocational Reflection”

The Newberry College Quality Enhancement Plan promotes student development of critical thinking skills, personal and social responsibility, and reflection on vocation. The QEP focuses on issues fundamental to the mission and Lutheran heritage of Newberry College and essential to the liberal arts tradition. The goal of the QEP is to help students develop their moral and intellectual dispositions so they can emerge as critical thinkers who have the personal and social responsibility to participate in community issues and the opportunity to reflect on vocational callings.

The QEP was initially integrated into the curriculum of our First Year Experience classes. Students read a common book (*Ender’s Game* by Orson Scott Card) then wrote a series of reflections on a common set of directed questions requiring them to think critically about social responsibility, for example, the use of Ender by the military and his lack of choice regarding vocation. End of semester assessment data demonstrated that there was not a clear definition of critical thinking on campus. The committee came together to develop common definitions of critical thinking, vocation, and personal and social responsibility. Taken together, these definitions form the foundation for assessment of the QEP. Based on the new definitions, the QEP assesses improvement of critical thinking through the use of an internally developed rubric that measures a student’s ability to 1) identify a problem, 2) reconsider personal assumptions, 3) gather new information, and 4) use that information to form and apply new insights. (We are happy to share our rubric. Contact me at the email address below.) Using the data from the second semester assessment cycle, it was clear that consistency in the use of the rubric among faculty needed to be a primary focus for the QEP committee. We developed a training session in which we taught a select group of faculty the best use of the rubric and the rationale behind the rubric. The rubric has been implemented in new first year Inquiry courses, which represent a variety of disciplines and topics. Faculty have used the rubric on assignments such as papers, debates, and lab experiments, demonstrating its versatility. It is evident from our second year assessment data that there is increasing consistency in the use of the rubric, which we expect will result in improved learning for our students. At the end of the sophomore year, a sample of students will re-take the CLA+ as a pre/post external assessment of the QEP learning outcomes. The QEP committee continues to engage the campus community in discussions about the use of the rubric with various types of assignments, its flexibility in being combined with other rubrics, and its place in the wider assessment goals of Newberry College.

Based on data from the first two years of implementation, the QEP committee is poised to incorporate the QEP into additional first and second year general education courses, develop a database of resources related to critical thinking, and continue campus discussions focused on the best way to assess and improve critical thinking for personal and social responsibility and vocational reflection.

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