



Tarrant County College District PowerOn: Critical Thinking

Executive Summary

PowerOn: Critical Thinking is Tarrant County College District's (TCCD) comprehensive plan to enhance the quality of student learning. The plan targets the development and improvement of critical thinking skills in students taking key Core Curriculum courses. Faculty members will provide intensive learning experiences, focusing on explicit critical thinking pedagogy in the classroom, which is vital to the success of this plan. Campus support systems in academic laboratories, tutoring centers, libraries and other support services will supplement the key efforts of faculty members. The plan's broad-based efforts align with TCCD's mission and goals of emphasizing student learning, as established in the District's strategic plan, *Vision 2015*.

TCCD is a large urban multi-campus community college receiving a high percentage of incoming students who need developmental course work. Success in these courses impacts success in college-level courses. With efforts already in place to improve student learning at the developmental level, faculty members demonstrated a keen interest in improving student learning in college-level courses. The following courses form the foundation for the QEP because they are high-enrollment courses taken by students beginning their college work: English Composition I, Federal Government, General Psychology, Introduction to Speech Communication and United States History I to 1876. In the course of implementation of the five-year plan, more courses will be added with more than 400 faculty members expected to participate.

TCCD developed the fundamental components of the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) through a process that involved students, faculty members, staff and administration. Essential to the plan was the development of an operational definition of critical thinking as *an active, explicit process involving*:

- (a) *The effective use of knowledge or techniques,*
- (b) *A deliberate examination of the elements of information,*
- (c) *The logical formulation of sound judgments and*
- (d) *The purposeful synthesis of information.*

From this definition, TCCD identified four student learning outcomes: (a) apply, (b) analyze, (c) evaluate and (d) create.

The overall objectives of *PowerOn: Critical Thinking* are to (a) enhance students' ability to use critical thinking skills, (b) provide a foundation and locus of sustainable development that empowers faculty members to strengthen students' critical thinking skills and (c) employ effective assessment measures to fortify the plan.

Student learning outcomes will be assessed using direct and indirect measures. Direct methods include the California Critical Thinking Skills Test, given to targeted sections of Introduction to Sociology, and course-level assessment of student artifacts using faculty-created rubrics. Indirect methods of assessment include select questions from the *Community College Survey of Student Engagement* and the TCCD graduate survey. Other locally-created surveys of students, faculty members, staff and administration will be given at specific times throughout the plan.

With an enrollment of approximately 50,000 students and more than 1,800 faculty members, the District devised a plan that is fiscally responsive to (a) state reductions in financial assistance, (b) the economy, (c) the needs of the faculty members and students, (d) TCCD's resources and (e) the requirements of a QEP. TCCD has demonstrated commitment for the QEP by allocating a substantial amount of new funds toward the first year of implementation.

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