

QEP title: *Inquiry Arc*

Institution: The University of North Carolina at Asheville

Contact Person: Dr. Lorena Russell, QEP Director (lrussell@unca.edu)

The UNC Asheville Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) is entitled "Inquiry ARC." This project will focus on enhancing students' critical thinking through participation in academically rigorous experiences that involve inquiry, application, reflection, and communication. This project aligns closely with the university's mission to provide a quality liberal arts education and university learning objectives that seek to foster life skills such as critical thinking, and the capacity respond to the conditions and concerns of the contemporary world.

The plan grew out of broad-based input from faculty, staff and students indicating high valuation on activities of open inquiry, critical thinking, creative expression, and effective communication. The campus community also valued engaged learning experiences that allow students to be makers of knowledge. When considered alongside recent data from the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) and the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), we decided on a QEP focused on enhancing critical thinking, and further conceptualized a specific design, the "Inquiry ARC," to provide a mechanism for improving students' critical thinking skills.

Because inquire-apply-reflect-communicate pedagogies and experiences may be present in a variety of forms at UNC Asheville, the QEP will provide professional development opportunities and continuing support to help educators enhance their students' critical thinking with the intentional application of these pedagogies. And, while critical thinking may be a learning outcome in many courses, there is no consistent university-wide application of an intentional pedagogy for critical thinking. During the implementation of the Quality Enhancement Plan, the University will:

- 1 Develop a definition of critical thinking that establishes a shared standard;
- 2 Provide opportunities for professional development and ongoing support in Inquiry ARC and other pedagogies that have been shown to improve critical thinking;
- 3 Iteratively assess changes in students' disposition to use critical thinking;
- 4 Evaluate the assessment results and retool the enhancement plan as appropriate.

Our five-year plan is designed to create a culture of critical thinking that develops incrementally. In the summer of 2012, educators began professional development in critical thinking pedagogy, the Inquiry ARC student experience, and the use of assessment tools. In 2012–2013, these three items were piloted in 18 courses across campus and, during the following four years, they will be included in additional areas across campus through a range of curricular and co-curricular offerings and programs.

Our assessment combines direct and indirect measures to help us track changes in students' critical thinking skills and dispositions, the effectiveness of the Inquiry ARC pedagogies, and the value of the professional development opportunities. The assessment process will allow the QEP team to analyze, expand, or redirect its efforts, improving the project as the implementation moves forward. We will be using rubrics to measure student and faculty artifacts as well as a range of tests and surveys: the California Critical Thinking Inventory test, the CLA, NSSE, student ratings of instruction, and faculty and student surveys.

Successful implementation of the Inquiry ARC will enrich the student experience by adding critical thinking components to courses across the curriculum as well as to interdisciplinary programs, and, ultimately, will create graduates with skills that prepare them to be analytical problem solvers and creative innovators in a complex and evolving world.