

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA BEAUFORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ENGAGING MINDS: CRITICAL READING FOR COLLEGE SUCCESS

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Engaging Minds: Critical Reading for College Success, the University of South Carolina Beaufort's Quality Enhancement Plan, aims to improve the quality of education at USC Beaufort by improving our students' skills as critical readers. Key to this plan is the creation of a campus-wide interdisciplinary community of scholars—faculty, students, and staff—engaged in and devoted to critical reading. To prepare students to join this community, an improved freshman composition curriculum will train students in basic research skills and teach them how to better analyze, evaluate, and construct arguments. To prepare faculty to lead this community, instructors across the curriculum will receive training in how best to teach critical reading.

To create and sustain a campus community of critical readers, USC Beaufort will adopt *The New York Review of Books (NYRB)* as a common reading for all students, faculty, and staff. USC Beaufort's faculty selected the *NYRB* as its common reading because this publication met the major criteria defined by the faculty: (1) we wanted a publication that would both *model* and *provoke* critical reading; (2) we wanted a publication that would *engage* our students through its *relevance* and by *challenging* them to grow as readers; (3) we wanted a publication that would be diverse enough in its offerings to appeal to faculty and students across the disciplines, challenging our students to expand their range of interests and embodying what we mean by “a well-rounded liberal arts education.” Because we recognize that a common text cannot by itself make an effective common reading program, we will provide students, faculty, and staff with multiple events, activities, and forums to engage them with this reading and to forge a common community of critical readers. Regardless of format, these events and activities will all be structured to improve the way our students analyze, evaluate, and construct arguments.

USC Beaufort will revise its freshman composition courses to successfully initiate students into our community of critical readers, giving them the skills to critically read texts as sophisticated as the *NYRB*. This new curriculum will incorporate essays from the *NYRB*, along with other materials and an improved pedagogy, to teach students how to better analyze, evaluate, and construct arguments. Working closely with university librarians on those basic research skills inseparable from effective critical reading, students will construct their own researched arguments. By the end of this course, students should be well equipped to participate in USC Beaufort's community of critical readers.

To prepare faculty across the disciplines to lead a campus-wide community of critical readers, USC Beaufort will make a significant commitment to faculty development. A series of workshops and seminars will help prepare faculty to make the most of our common reading program and most effectively teach critical reading skills within the context of their own disciplines. English faculty will receive training to teach the revised English composition curriculum, and the library will add resources to its collection to support this new initiative.

Engaging Minds is thoughtfully designed and will be carefully implemented and assessed (using, among other instruments, the ACT CAAP Critical Thinking Test, with a pre-test/post-test structure) to ensure that it has the maximum positive impact on our students' critical reading skills. The entire university community was involved in selecting the topic and designing the plan, which grows out of “a broad based institutional process identifying key issues emerging from institutional assessment.” While USC Beaufort has made a substantial commitment of physical, financial, and personnel resources to *Engaging Minds*, we have been careful to stay well within its institutional capabilities. We believe that this is a plan with enormous potential to enhance student learning. Because critical reading skills are foundational to success in every academic discipline and every career, any plan that promises to significantly improve our students' critical reading skills promises success for our students both in the university and in life.