

Title: Enhancing Critical Thinking Through First-Year Seminars

Institution: Christopher Newport University

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Executive Summary

Using a campus-wide, community-based process spanning over two years, the faculty, administration, and staff at Christopher Newport University (CNU) evaluated numerous topics before selecting *Enhancing Critical Thinking Through First-Year Seminars* as its Quality Enhancement Plan. According to the literature, critical thinking lies at the crux of liberal learning, and the first year of college is an optimal time to cultivate these skills. Specifically, all students will learn to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate information in the contexts of their First-Year Seminar topics. CNU will launch several interventions intended to strengthen students' proficiency in these areas. The interventions include offering expert-led workshops for faculty on teaching critical thinking, building a library collection on the subject, and supporting faculty travel to learn more about critical thinking pedagogy. Three basic questions are addressed by assessment: (1) To what degree is critical thinking emphasized in the First-Year Seminars (FYSM)? (2) To what degree have students made gains in critical thinking? (3) How do the interventions, instructional style, co-curricular activities, and information literacy in FYSM impact gains in critical thinking? Instruments, data collection processes, and analyses were selected specifically to answer these three questions. During the last two years, CNU has prepared for the QEP, formed a capable leadership team, and earmarked appropriate resources. Throughout the next five years, CNU will document the degree to which students have made gains in critical thinking and will be able to ascertain which elements in the FYSM contributed to these gains.