

Quality Enhancement Plan
CLEAR Thinking: Consider, Learn, Evaluate, Argue, Reflect

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Introduction

To develop citizens who are adequately prepared to face the ever-changing issues of our local and global communities, Morehead State University must provide graduates with the skills to effectively address complex problems. Our graduates must acquire knowledge in order to be successful. But they must also develop the fundamental competencies that will enable them to apply this knowledge in their personal and professional lives. Critical thinking (CT) is one such competency. Critical thinking is essential to enabling the individual to use the information encountered to make wise decisions and to perform responsible actions. The importance of critical thinking is not disputed. Prospective employers place the highest value on the capacity of employees to think critically. And the capacity imparts enormous benefits, from enabling the individual to navigate the flood of information and misinformation; to liberating the individual from falling prey to superstition, irrationality, unfounded opinion, fashion, and illegitimate authority; to improving career prospects; to fostering an appreciation of diversity and of global perspectives. Unfortunately, a variety of assessments indicate that the critical thinking of our students is unsatisfactory. Given these circumstances, we have chosen as the goal of our Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) enhancing the ability of our students to think critically.

Goal, QEP Objective, and Student Learning Outcomes

QEP activities are part of a longer-term goal to integrate the teaching of critical thinking and effective communication throughout the undergraduate program. QEP activities involve implementing the first phase of this effort. The objective of this first phase is to introduce critical thinking to students in the First Year Seminar (FYS). Three student learning outcomes are involved in achieving this objective, including defining, developing, and applying important components of critical thinking.

QEP Activities

The QEP assesses the effectiveness of a small-scale critical thinking program deployed in First Year Seminar. A Pilot is being conducted, with feedback used to plan a Study. Experimental methodology is used to identify effective practices and make modifications to the program. Control sections of FYS do not include the CT program, whereas experimental sections do. This experimental orientation is one feature that differentiates this QEP from similar ones. In experimental sections, students are engaged in activities designed to have them define CT, use different major components of CT, and apply the CT capabilities previously encountered. Training seminars, expert guest-speaker workshops, webinars, and retreats are made available to assist instructors with the development of specific classroom activities, assignments, assessments, and rubrics that support active learning.

QEP Assessment

Multiple assessments are used to determine the degree to which the QEP objective is met. The QEP Coordinator working with the FYS instructors is developing assignment descriptions and scoring guides that instructors teaching FYS courses can apply. Though the creation of specific scoring guides is left to each instructor, the QEP office provides templates, guidelines, and training for their construction. Improvements in critical thinking is evaluated using two proprietary assessment instruments, the CAAP and the NSSE/FSSE.

