

## **The Case for Critical Thinking**

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*“Thinking is hard work; that’s why so few people do it” -- Henry Ford*

Question 70 on the Noel-Levity Student Satisfaction Survey reads: “I am able to experience intellectual growth here. In 1999, ECC student responses to that statement yielded a score 0.3 points above the national mean; by 2008, the score had fallen to merely meet the national average at a mean score of 5.675.<sup>i</sup> Is it possible that our students are relating dissatisfaction similar to research done in 2008 by the Edge Foundation showing that “43% of students aged between 14 and 19 in England said they found school either “boring” or “irrelevant”<sup>ii</sup>? If so, we gladly advocate for “critical thinking” to be ECC’s selected QEP topic.

Lest our topic be obscured by the cliché of its name or relegated to the realm of “higher-level” classes, we purposefully intend for “critical thinking” to mean a learned approach to reasoned, logical thinking. And, we propose that this learned skill can be observed and assessed in multiple ways, including written work, debates and rebuffs to everyday fallacies and in multiple locations, including the classroom, at school-wide awareness events and within professional development opportunities.

### **Do others at El Centro agree in the worth of this pursuit?**

Yes! Some comments from the Fall 2010 QEP awareness survey regarding “an important issue affecting student learning or success”:

“Lack of critical thinking skills. Students lack ability to integrate ideas, come to logical conclusions and evaluate information.”— faculty member

“Critical thinking skills. Applying the knowledge in the real world. Hands on experience in the lab” --- faculty member

“Ability to solve problems, trouble shoot.” --- advisory board member

“Developing the ability to think critically and logically and provide analysis both verbally and in writing” --- faculty member

“Critical thinking skills, analysis, independent learners” --- faculty member

In his work with the QEP students’ academic and technical skills subcommittee, Mark Thames found that 26 respondents preferred critical thinking in some form as a priority focus for El Centro’s plan. Many more replies suggested interest in seeing us and our students think and problem solve more.

Indeed, our vision articulates that “the college will focus its resources on support of life-long learning.” What could be better preparation for life-long learning than learned, reasoned thought? It is humanity’s unique weapon for slaying the gluttony of information, data, opinions, facts and choices of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## **Is there a national framework for critical thinking to be measurable and assessable in higher education?**

Five out of the 43 track A undergraduate institutions to receive SACS reaffirmation in 2010 have a QEP topic addressing critical thinking.<sup>iii</sup> University of Louisville focuses its “i2a” (ideas to action) on “Using Critical Thinking to foster student learning...”<sup>iv</sup> Additionally, the Association of American Colleges and Universities, has a critical thinking rubric in its comprehensive library of VALUE (Valid Assessments of Learning in Undergraduate Education) rubrics. Many standardized assessments of critical thinking are available. Some noted<sup>v</sup> ones are: The Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal, “Test of Everyday Reasoning”, “Collegiate Learning Assessment Project” “Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency”. The large publishing company, Pearson, has developed the R.E.D. model (Recognize assumptions, Evaluate arguments, Draw conclusions) and a critical thinking boot camp workshop for improving employee skills<sup>vi</sup>.

The El Centro library has a robust section devoted to critical thinking; these resources would allow the college to fully delve in. A cursory treatment of this topic is undesirable and could be likened to “not thinking critically about critical thinking” It would be expected that appropriate goals could be set for academic areas as well as for non-instructional departments and continuing education.

The topic is valuable and worthy of our consideration yet potentially challenging and unwieldy. The selected leadership team should be diverse by content specialties (both academic and technical) as well as by college roles. A good mix of academic and technical faculty, PSS employees, administrators and students could champion this across the college.

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<sup>i</sup> El Centro College Office of Planning, Assessment and Research

<sup>ii</sup> City and Guilds Centre for Skills Development at <http://newsletter.skillsdevelopment.org/summer2010>

<sup>iii</sup> [www.sacscoc.org/2010TrackAQEPsummaries.asp](http://www.sacscoc.org/2010TrackAQEPsummaries.asp)

<sup>iv</sup> <http://louisville.edu/ideastoaction/what/i2a-frequently-asked-questions>

<sup>v</sup> “Critical Thinking: Unfinished Business”, Christine McMahon, editor, copyright: 2005

<sup>vi</sup> “Critical Thinking Means Business: Learn to Apply and Develop the NEW #1 Workplace Skill” [www.talentlens.com](http://www.talentlens.com)

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**A few other resources:**

**Organizations:**

The Foundation for Critical Thinking,  
Association of American Colleges and Universities,  
American Council of Learned Societies  
Commission on Colleges - Southern Association of Colleges and Schools

**Website:**

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Critical\\_thinking](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Critical_thinking)

**Written Work:**

Barnes, Cynthia, editor. Critical Thinking: Educational Imperative.  
Josey-Bass Publishers, 1992

Braffman, Ori, and Rom Braffman. Sway: The Irresistible Pull of Irrational Behavior.  
Random House, 2008

Chambers, Bob. Thinking Critically and Making Rational Judgments

Fine, Cordelia. A Mind of its Own: How Your Brain Distorts and Deceives. New York:  
W.W.Norton & Co., 2006.

Gazzaniga, Michael S. Human: the Science Behind What Makes Us Unique;  
Ecco/Harper Collins, 2008.

Kurfiss, Joanne G. Critical Thinking: Theory, Research, Practice and Possibilities.  
ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report No. 2 1988

Thaler, Richard H., and Cass R. Sunstein. Nudge: Improving Decisions About Health,  
Wealth and Happiness. New Haven: Yale UP, 2008.