

**Critical Thinking Across the Curriculum
EPR Workshop, 8 August 2006**

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What do Evergreen faculty understand by critical thinking?

We observed that, unsurprisingly, faculty differ in their understanding of what constitutes “critical thinking.” Most respondents called it a major emphasis; far fewer called it a minor emphasis; and only two said that they placed no emphasis upon it in their programs (both surprisingly so). Many claimed that critical thinking was required for all program activities, while others tried to explain in more specific terms which components required it. Very few faculty described texts and activities by which they taught critical thinking deliberately and consciously as a skill, while most expected students to bring it to bear in the context of their program’s work.

We did note several common characterizations of this elusive phenomenon; most thought it involved one or more of the following: synthesis or integration of knowledge or ideas; analysis and interpretation of text, image, or data; composition of persuasive arguments; ability to investigate an issue from multiple perspectives; ability to evaluate claims for their validity; and/or ability to solve practical problems, whether political, scientific, or artistic.

Many faculty responded in a way that left their specific understanding of the term ambiguous (“etc.” in the table below), e.g. a desire “to challenge [students], make them think, rather than simply memorize or accept ‘facts’” or the frequent “everything we did involved critical thinking skills.” Notably, almost no faculty mentioned activities or components that might not include critical thinking (e.g. a very few responses contrasted analysis [i.e. critical thinking] with description or rote memorization). The elasticity of this phrase raises the question: If critical thinking means everything in a program, does it mean nothing?

We also discovered a correlation between faculty members’ planning unit affiliation and the way that they characterized critical thinking, as the table below makes evident.

Planning Unit	Synthesis/ Integration	Analysis / Interpretation (includes close reading)	Making an Argument	Multiple Perspectives	Evaluate Claims	Problem-Solving (Workshops/ Real-World)	Etc
Core	3	8	2	1	3	1	9
CTL	1	18	4	6	2	3	35
EA		2	0	1	1	1	19*
EWS	10	21	1	10	11	4	14
ES	7	4	0	0	1	5	15#
IA	2	7	6	3	1	2	22
NAWIPS		1					
SI	2	0	0	3	1	5	18
SPBC	1	10	1	6	4	6	14
TAC						1	
TRI		2				1	2
	26	71	14	30	24	29	158

*Includes 4 responses that described students making artistic choices, e.g. character development or theatrical staging and lighting.

Includes 6 responses that described designing and conducting an independent research project in the lab or field.

Here are some examples of the above categories:

Synthesis/Integration: “Exams were essay-type, requiring broad integration of material...” (Energy: Working Towards a Sustainable Future, 02/03)

Analysis/Interpretation: “...analyzing legal cases to understand the relevant facts, the legal issue that they presented, the court’s ruling on the legal issue, and the court’s rationale for its decision.” (Democracy and Equality, 05/06)

Making an Argument: “Paper assignment focused on developing a good argument in support of a clear thesis...” (Weird and Wondrous, 02/03)

Multiple Perspectives: “Students were encouraged to learn across different points of view and negotiate meaning without disregarding the perspectives of their peers.” (Africa and the Black Atlantic World, 03/04)

Evaluating Claims: “Workshops, critique sessions, and seminars all challenged students to evaluate their work, ideas, and those of others.” (Imagining Books, 03/04)

Problem Solving: “The class examined real-world problems, the ways they have historically been resolved and considered alternatives.” (Water: The Universal Solvent, 04/05)

Also, here are some examples of contextualized as well as “stand-alone” instruction of critical thinking:

Contextualized: “Students were required to compare and contrast assumptions, arguments, and conclusions of several different social scientists, then figure out how each would apply their theories to specific case studies.” (Growing Up Global, 05/06)

“Stand-Alone”: “First quarter, there was a class on it every week and we used the Critical Reasoning book by Browne and Keeley.” (Managing a Maritime Business, 05/06)