**GEAC 2012-13 Assessment Summit**

**January 2013**

**Critical Thinking**

**Summary and Recommendations**

Critical thinking is not explicitly stated as one of ODU’s goals of General Education so it is difficult to determine if and where it is being taught. GEAC asked faculty where CT was being taught and they suggested that upper division writing intensive (“W”) courses as well as capstone courses would be the most likely sources. Thus those were the courses from which written artifacts were sampled for this assessment. Although not explicitly stated, critical thinking is implied and assumed to be part of all or most of the goals of General Education. And, the discussions conducted as part of this assessment led GEAC to the conclusion that critical thinking is important to faculty, especially those teaching upper division major courses.

Because there were no SLO specified, the Critical Thinking VALUE Rubric was adopted along with the AAC&U definition of critical thinking and their SLO (see attached). AAC&U (2010) defined critical thinking as “a habit of mind characterized by the comprehensive exploration of issues, ideas, artifacts, and events before accepting or formulating an opinion or conclusion” (p. 25). The five SLO are “(1) Explanation of Issues; (2) Evidence; (3) Influence of Context and Assumption; (4) Student’s Position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis); and (5) Conclusions and Related Outcomes (implications and consequences)” (AAC&U, 2010, p. 25). Based on this definition and the SLOs, the assessment suggests that there are some areas of strength and some areas of weakness that need to be addressed.

The results of the ratings suggest that two areas of strength include explanation of issues, i.e., the ability to state and describe a position so that it is understood by the reader (SLO 1), and student’s position, i.e., the ability to state their own position while considering the positions of others (SLO 4). Two areas of moderate strength include conclusions and related outcomes, i.e., the ability to draw conclusions while considering opposing points of view (SLO 5), and evidence, i.e., the ability to analyze and synthesize information and question the value of that information (SLO 2). The area of greatest concern is the influence of context and assumptions, i.e., the ability to identify their own assumptions along with others assumptions based on an understanding of the different contexts in which they were developed (SLO 3).

In general, the debriefing discussion with the readers supported the ratings. As noted above, the areas that most need improvement related to the critical thinking SLOs were:

* Explaining and using opposing/differing points of view.
* Clearly marking out a position apart from arguing for a particular point of view: Identifying the purpose, the “So What” question.
* Questioning their own assumptions or the assumptions of experts.

In addition to those recommendations specifically addressing the SLOs, several other recommendations that should be considered first are:

* Determine whether or not faculty think critical thinking is an important skill
* Determine if it is being taught and if so, in what courses
* Determine whether or not the “W” courses and capstone courses are the best place to gather artifacts for assessment

**Questions or More Information**

Dr. J. Worth Pickering

Assistant Vice President

Office of Assessment

2201 Spong Hall

757-683-3158

[jpickeri@odu.edu](mailto:jpickeri@odu.edu)