

Progress Report—Year One
Fostering Critical Thinking and Faculty Practice in a Large, Public University
Washington State University

Washington State University has had a successful start to our Comprehensive grant, “Fostering Critical Thinking and Faculty Practice in a Large, Public University.” We are making significant progress in all of the objectives we set forth in our project proposal.

We have made significant progress in the first objective, creating a “replicable model for assessing the outcomes of broad General Education goals at a large public university.” In early October 2001, we sponsored a retreat at the Sleeping Lady resort with the five other four-year public institutions in the state of Washington. The focus of this retreat was to look at ways in which we could adapt and use the WSU Critical Thinking Rubric as a state-wide outcomes measure. This meeting was attended by 36 faculty and administrators who had previously participated in the state’s initiatives for writing or for information technology literacy. Overall, the participants of this meeting felt that the rubric was useful and readily adaptable enough if the state legislature ever mandated outcomes for critical thinking. Likewise, the participants also felt that the WSU Critical Thinking Rubric had implications for the other concurrent outcomes projects in information literacy and technology, writing, and quantitative symbolic reasoning. They felt that the WSU Critical Thinking Project could help influence the design of the other projects and subsequent rubrics in these areas.

On our own campus, we have started the conversation of defining critical thinking expectations for General Education courses. We have convened an advisory committee comprised of key faculty from the different colleges on our campus to disseminate the project goals to the colleges. In addition, the General Education Program will sponsor a meeting in August 2002, facilitated by the Critical Thinking Project personnel, to articulate outcomes for the World Civilizations program. The Rubric has also been adopted by individual departments, Management Information Systems and Veterinary Medicine, as a tool to shape their curricula and their departmental outcomes. Since Washington State University has been unable to hire a university assessment coordinator for the past three years, we have not been able to launch a comprehensive effort to

integrate the Rubric into all departments' end-of-program assessment methods. It does not look promising that this position will be filled this year as well.

The online learning environments at Washington State University have also heavily adopted the Critical Thinking Rubric. The Bridge, WSU's native Online Learning Environment, uses the Rubric as a centerpiece for the course design process. All faculty who want to integrate the Bridge into their courses—whether on campus or distance offerings—are strongly encouraged to integrate some adaptation of the Rubric. In addition, several personnel from the Center for Teaching, Learning and Technology (CTLT) and the Distance Degree Program (DDP) have adapted the WSU Critical Thinking Rubric into a version to evaluate threaded discussions in online forums. This adaptation is currently being validated by several faculty, and will be used as an additional tool for the development and evaluation of interactions in online environments.

The course design process, offered through our campus's CTLT, aids faculty who are designing courses, whether on campus or at a distance, integrate pedagogical methods with technology. In the past year, 42 courses were developed or revised for WSU's Distance Degree Program. During the course design process, all of the faculty were exposed to, and heavily encouraged to use some adaptation of the Critical Thinking Rubric in their courses. Several of these courses were involved in our project this year—most notably Human Development 410, Public Policy Issues Impacting Families and Individuals, and Crop 360, World Agricultural Systems. Eighteen of the twenty-five newly developed courses (72%) adopted the Critical Thinking Rubric to their practices, and 15 of the 17 revised courses adopted it (88%).

We also have made significant strides in meeting our second objective, distributing a set of courses throughout our General Education curriculum promoting the development of a shared definition of critical thinking skills. As we involve faculty in our project, we collect sample syllabi, course assignments, evaluation criteria and anything else from General Education courses and non-Gen Ed courses. A collection of these materials are posted on our web site, <http://wsuctproject.wsu.edu>. Likewise, these materials are shared and distributed through monthly faculty-led meetings regarding different uses of the Critical Thinking Rubric. This year we plan to highlight the more successful practices on our web site by showcasing different individual faculty efforts every month.

Our recruiting efforts initially invited the faculty who teach the capstone courses in the General Education Program; the second semester, we invited the faculty who teach the second tier of General Education courses, courses which intend to introduce students to the demands of their major fields of study. In addition, faculty who go through the course design process through CTLT also use the Rubric, and are compensated through institutional funding. All of the faculty who attend the Critical Thinking workshop intend to adapt the Rubric to their evaluative and teaching methodologies for at least two semesters. The two-day workshop introduces them to the Rubric and important considerations when revising their pedagogical methods. Likewise, the course design process instructs faculty in the use of meaningful pedagogical methodologies.

Currently, twenty courses with General Education designations have used the Rubric, and eight of them have submitted papers to our project including Architecture 428, Architecture and Culture in the Islamic World; Communication/CAC 470, Mass Communications Theories and Theory Construction; Communication/CAC 471 Stereotypes and the Media; Educational Leadership and Counseling Psychology 457, Chicano/Latino Psychology; Environmental Science and Regional Planning 150, Natural Science in the Environment. Thirty-two courses that are non-General Education courses, have implemented the Rubric into their courses including Electrical Engineering and Computer Science 455, Introduction to Computer Networks ; Food Science and Human Nutrition 435, Medical Nutrition Therapy; Psychology 230, Human Sexuality; and Honors 440, Domain of the Arts.

To date, we have collected over 1100 samples of student work from 13 different courses in which the instructors are earning stipends for their participation in the project. Based on comparisons with a control group, all of these courses demonstrated higher critical thinking abilities, and all but one were at a statistically significant level. In addition, we trained a group of 26 faculty from across the curriculum to serve as a set of independent raters who use the Critical Thinking Rubric.

We've had a strong start to meeting our third goal, to serve as an objective means for faculty self-assessment of their teaching effectiveness based on their students' progress in reaching learning goals. We involved over 150 faculty on our campus in this project's efforts. In fall semester 2001, only two faculty used the rubric because our semester

began in August, and it was too late to train a group of faculty. We trained twenty-three faculty in December 2001 to implement the rubric in their Spring 2002 courses, and we trained twenty-eight faculty in May 2002 to pilot their use of the rubric in the Fall 2002 courses. In addition, we had one faculty member from Hong Kong Polytechnic attend our training session. Fifty-one faculty have attended our Critical Thinking workshop which orients them to using the Rubric in their classes, and are engaged in the project which would compensate them with the honorarium financed by the FIPSE grant. In addition, the Distance Degree Program has involved fifty-seven faculty in the course design process which integrates the Critical Thinking Rubric into distance course offerings. These faculty adopt the Rubric through the practices of the Distance Degree Program, and are compensated through this program. Likewise, many faculty have attended the monthly faculty-led discussion groups and many more have attended invited presentations regarding the Critical Thinking Project.

We have created surveys to give to faculty entering the project, and then to administer follow-up surveys given after faculty have used the Critical Thinking Rubric. Our intent is to follow the changes faculty make to their practices as they revise their practice based on their experiences with the Critical Thinking Project. Currently, this data has been collected, but is under the process of analysis. As a result of this study, we are conducting a longitudinal study of faculty practice to look at ways in which different factors might influence the ways in which faculty either adopt new practices or revert back to old methodologies.

We have started significant progress toward collaboration with our two- and four-year partner institutions in the state of Washington. In October 2001, we met with 36 faculty and assessment directors from the five other four-year public institutions in the state of Washington. We met to discuss the applicability of using the WSU Critical Thinking Rubric as a potential state-wide outcomes measure in the event that the Washington State Legislature would mandate such an outcome.

In addition, we met in early October with state Community College leaders to discuss the best way to collaborate with them on this project. Rather than holding the four regional retreats in the “train the trainer” model, as originally discussed in our proposal, we collectively decided it would be better to hold retreats focused on critical thinking

expectations that allowed the two- and four-year faculty from the public institutions to meet. The groupings were made by the geographical division of the Cascade Mountains.

The first faculty retreat was held at the Sleeping Lady Resort in Leavenworth, Washington, a meeting facility in the Cascade Mountain range. Sixty faculty from fourteen different institutions attended. WSU project personnel and other faculty from two- and four-year institutions from around the state led the sessions for the retreat. Overall, the participants were very satisfied with the retreat. We will hold a similar retreat for faculty from the east side of the state in September 2002, and so far we will have the same number of faculty expected to attend. In addition, we have had requests from faculty to attend this retreat from the University of South Africa and the University of Nevada Reno.

We have conducted workshops on site at several community colleges. One result was a collaboration between faculty at Pierce Community College and WSU. We matched four faculty from Pierce College to work with one of WSU's faculty members who had previously and successfully implemented the Critical Thinking Rubric. This conversation was facilitated via email, and the community college faculty received support and feedback from our faculty member on the design and implementation of adaptations they made to the WSU Critical Thinking Rubric. Overall, it was a successful collaboration, and is one that we will consider making with other community colleges.

This year, the annual Washington Higher Education Assessment conference was cancelled due to state budget restrictions. In its place, a one day assessment fair was held at a community college on the west side of the state. One of our project personnel attended the event, and distributed information about the project. Earlier in the year, two project personnel met with other faculty from around the state at Cascadia Community College for the Writing Pedagogy forum. This group meets to articulate and discuss expectations for writing and other academic skill areas. One of the outcomes of the meeting was to hold discussions regarding ways in which critical thinking and writing initiatives from around the state could be combined to be more effective.

We sent project personnel and faculty representatives to present at the Washington Center for the Improvement of Undergraduate Education's February Conference (attended by faculty from around the state), and have included personnel from the State

Board of Community and Technical College in the program for our faculty retreats on critical thinking. Likewise, the SBCTC publishes an online assessment newsletter, and plans to include a write-up of this project for a future issue of the publication. State budget cuts have limited the amount of collaboration that we have been able to do with these two organizations.

Finally, we have trained enough faculty to use the rubric, and have had enough faculty use the rubric to put out a call for papers for the book project. We will put out a call for articles to our colleagues on our campus, and will begin looking for a book contract this fall. Likewise, we have had several online journals solicit articles from our project for publication. We hope to encourage many faculty participants to take advantage of this opportunity as well.

We have two main changes in the structure of our project. First, we have altered the structure of the regional retreats. Originally, we intended to hold these retreats as “train the trainer” meetings for faculty from the community colleges. When we met with them at the beginning of our project, they indicated that they would rather collaborate with the rest of the four year institutions in the state, and talk more broadly about critical thinking expectations. We bring together faculty in these retreats, and include presentations that range from issues of implementing the Critical Thinking Rubric into specific classroom practices to ways in which to reform curricular goals on their campuses and around the state. This means that we are having fewer regional meetings than we expected, but we are bringing together many faculty with wider experiences to discuss these issues.

Secondly, we changed the way in which we set up our independent evaluator meetings. We met with our outside evaluators, Richard Haswell and Marilyn Sternglass, at the beginning of our project, and they returned again in April 2002. We felt that they could provide us better guidance if they conducted two earlier visits; the first to help inform the set up of our project, and the second to monitor our progress and provide feedback to change it in time. Their report is included in Appendix A.

Our project is one of the centerpieces in improving teaching and learning at our institution. We are affecting change by working with individual faculty members, and by having individual colleges and departments invite us in to help them look at ways in which to promote higher order thinking in their students. We have given numerous

presentations on our campus ranging from faculty-led discussion groups to formal presentations in a presidential retreat for chairs and directors, chair and directors for the college of Liberal Arts, and chairs and directors for the college of Agriculture and Home Economics. Likewise, project personnel and faculty participants led a workshop for the new faculty orientation last fall, and will do so again this fall. Over 100 faculty have integrated the Critical Thinking Rubric in to their courses, and many more have either attended workshops or discussion groups. Likewise, many have served as paid evaluators of papers submitted for the project. We have been pleasantly surprised by the reception of this project on our campus. Many faculty have heard about it from other faculty members, and are very interested in becoming involved.

Our project is also making an impact on educational practices at other institutions. In addition to the structured retreats for the two- and four-year institutions in our state, we have given numerous presentations around the state and around the country regarding our project. We have had national and international colleagues attend (or sign up to attend) our critical thinking workshop or retreat. At the PacPAIR conference in Honolulu, Hawaii, our presentation was so well received that the conference organizers asked us to give our presentation again. Likewise, at the recent AAHE Assessment Conference, many of our workshop participants indicated that they would return to their campuses to speak with their Provosts or Vice Presidents to include the WSU Critical Thinking Rubric in their curricular reform or other assessment initiatives on their campuses. Largely, much of our information has been disseminated at regional and national conferences. We also have developed a web site, <http://wsuctproject.wsu.edu>, that contains information regarding our project. (Incidentally, this site has received over 2500 hits since its development in December 2001).

Our evaluation is proceeding in a timely and efficient manner. We continue to collect information regarding student performance, and conduct rating sessions immediately following the end of the semester. To date, we have collected over 1100 samples of student work. Likewise, we are collecting information on faculty practice through gathering their course materials and surveying them on their experiences. This occurs at the end of each semester.

Currently, we are not experiencing any difficulties in collecting data. The only change in our evaluation plan is that we revised the schedule of the visits by our outside evaluators (as indicated above). They will make a final visit at the end of our project.

Our institution is very supportive of the Critical Thinking Project. The project has been central to many of the initiatives on our campus. We give presentations to the incoming faculty, and the DDP program has made the Rubric a central part of the design process of all courses developed for their program. Likewise, the Writing Programs has been integrating these expectations into our tutorials, faculty development workshops, and assessment practices. Several individual departments on campus have begun to look at their curricular expectations through the lens of critical thinking, and have made revisions based on this project. We are encouraging these various parties to write up their experiences and to disseminate this information as widely as possible.

Our project has yielded the following products and resources: guides, printed course materials/modules, web course materials/modules, other project materials on the Internet, conference proceedings and syllabi. As a group, we have made ten local presentations; nine regional presentations around Washington State; nine presentations at national conferences, and four international presentations.

As a result of our project, we were invited to give a presentation at the Good Better Best Practice presentation and an invitation to lead the transformative assessment project for NLII (National Learning Infrastructure Initiative). In addition, the Provost's Office of our institution has asked us to make several presentations about our project to state of Washington officials, chairs and directors of Washington State University, and to incoming faculty.