

Annual Assessment Report

Academic Year: 2016-17

Department: Gallatin College

Program(s): Associate of Arts/Science

1. What Was Done

Based on our assessment plan, we assessed learning outcome 2 this year.

2. Critical Thinking: The ability to effectively evaluate, synthesize, and apply information and ideas from diverse sources.

Since almost all Associate of Arts/Science students take COLS 101US First Year Seminar, we utilized that course as the source of data. Critical thinking is one of the learning outcomes for that course specifically.

2. What Data Were Collected

In the fall 2016 semester there were 66 students enrolled in COLS 101US First Year Seminar. During the semester, each instructor made preliminary copies of a common writing assignment titled Comparative Essay. We removed identifying student information, pooled the essays, and had two instructors assess each of 10 essays based on a critical thinking rubric. The 10 randomly selected essays equated to a 15% sample size.

Course Enrollment: 66

Number of Course Sections: 4

Number of Assignments Assessed: 10

Assessment Team: Jeffrey Hostetler, Instructor: Janet Heiss Arms, General Education Director and Instructor

3. What Was Learned

Based on these results, nearly 1/5 of our students are performing below expectations regarding critical thinking. Although we were encouraged by the 68% average in the Meets Expectations category, we want to improve the thinking process and abilities in the other students.

Results:

Criteria	Above Expectations	Meets Expectations	Below Expectations
Explanation of issues	30%	50%	20%
Evidence	20%	60%	20%
Influence of context assumptions	10%	80%	10%
Student position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis)	0%	80%	20%
Conclusion and related outcomes	20%	70%	10%
Overall	16%	68%	16%

Both of the instructors commented that we are not explicit with students about the critical thinking expectations that were identified in the campus-wide critical thinking rubric we utilized. We agreed that we need to be more explicit in our assignment guidelines with regard to critical thinking expectations, particularly with asking students to identify their own assumptions and influences.

The rubric we utilized called on students to state their own perspective or thesis for the work assessed. Since the assignment we utilized required students to write in third person, each student's position was not stated. Students were asked, however, to make a clear thesis statement, which many students did. We defined this as "meets expectations" since it fit the guidelines for the assignment we utilized.

4. How We Responded

We will add more explicit assignment guidelines for Fall 2017 regarding critical thinking expectations.

For future we would like to also assess work from a higher level course (perhaps a sophomore-level Research Core course) that includes a critical thinking component to one of its major assignments. We would like to assess longitudinal gains to critical thinking from an introductory course (COLS 101US First Year Seminar) to a sophomore course (e.g., AMST 202RA The Arts in America).