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About Meredith College

Meredith College is located in Raleigh, NC in the Research Triangle. We are down the street from NC State and about 30 minutes away from Duke University and UNC Chapel Hill. Meredith College is an independent women's college with no religious affiliation. We are a liberal arts college with 32 undergraduate majors and co-educational graduate programs in nutrition, education and business. There are approximately 2,000 students at Meredith and approximately 130 faculty.

From QEP to PRISM

The critical thinking initiative at Meredith began as a QEP in 2010. It was part of our SACS reaccreditation process. The topic, critical thinking, was approved by the Meredith faculty. Of the 44 institutions in the 2010 QEP "class", 11 of the 44 (25%) had a critical thinking focus or first year seminar focus (critical thinking was just as popular in the 2011 and 2012 QEP classes).

PRISM stands for **P**urposeful, **R**eason, **I**nquiry and **S**cholarship at **M**eredith. PRISM assumed the goals and objectives of the QEP: to equip students with the intellectual skills and traits that encourage critical thinking and active engagement in the learning process. The goal was to enhance student critical thinking skills so that they could be life-long learners, create faculty development opportunities so as to enhance student learning and to highlight critical thinking in a variety of college programs and student activities. The PRISM experience had 4 components:

1. **The PRISM Freshmen seminar:** topic driven, discipline based seminars that would introduce students to a common language and framework of critical thinking as well as types and ways of thinking within a discipline
2. **PRISM Infusion:** infusion of critical thinking framework, vocabulary and activities in mid and upper level courses
3. **Co-Curricular PRISM Infusion:** infusion of critical thinking framework and vocabulary in college programs
4. **PRISM Professional Development:** provide support for faculty who teach Freshman seminars or seek CT designation, learning communities to help support faculty and staff interested in critical thinking, professional development seminars and stipend support to learn about critical thinking and implement it on campus, limited travel funds for faculty to seek more extensive or targeted professional development opportunities.

Freshmen Seminars

The PRISM Freshman seminars are popular amongst parents and students. The courses come from a variety of disciplines: Communication, Food and Nutrition, Foreign Language, Biology, Religious and Ethical Studies, Political Science, Theatre, and Education. In Fall 2010 3 seminars were piloted and one was repeated in Spring 2011. Seven seminars were offered in Fall 2011, one in Spring 2012. Four seminars in Fall 2012; none in Spring 2013. Four seminars will be offered in Fall 2013; two seminars will be offered in Spring 2014 (including my own).

The seminars fill up during summer registration, no doubt helped by direct advertising by faculty advisors who are helping incoming students pick their courses. It has been very difficult to fill the courses in the Spring semester even though the courses satisfy different requirements in General Education. One funding concern is that departments and programs are given money for an adjunct the first time a PRISM freshman seminar is taught. There is no funding support each subsequent time the course is offered and this has raised questions about how to support PRISM and offer courses for majors. Another challenge is to make sure that faculty feel included in PRISM: do we repeat courses that have been successful? Are new faculty given a chance? What is the criteria by which we say yes to some classes and no to others?

PRISM Infusion

CT designation of upper level courses was part of the original commitment made in the report to SACS and was the second initiative of the QEP/PRISM program. The goal was to continue critical thinking habits developed in the Freshman seminars and to utilize professional development efforts by seeing those ideas reflected in the teaching of upper level courses. By the end of year 5 of the QEP cycle 15% of all courses would be designated as CT with at least one CT course being required in every discipline.

The plan for CT infusion was met with concern by faculty for a variety of reasons. Some thought that the designation was too complex: would the designation go with the course or with the instructor? What would happen with multi-section courses? Would our student information software be able to add designations? The discussion about CT infusion occurred not too long after a revision of the General Education curriculum. There was a concern that this would add yet another thread and would eventually become another requirement. The faculty voiced concern about designating some courses as “thinking” courses. The feeling was that we already do -- or should -- teach thinking and that courses without the designation would look less rigorous. To date, only one course has applied for CT designation. The English department has been contemplating making English 200 (required, multi-section composition/literature class) CT designated.

Co-Curricular Efforts

Co-curricular efforts includes college programs (Academic and Career Services, student development, residence life, student life, health and disability services, and technology services). This has been one of the most successful components of the program. Staff actively contribute to and participate in professional development (they attend workshops and participate in CAT scoring). The First Year Experience program has included critical thinking training for faculty/staff instructors. Finally, staff has embraced the idea of the PRISM Collaborative, an active learning community with lunch-and-learns, professional development, and a support network for implementation of critical thinking. They were integral in the development of a rubric for assessing critical thinking in college programs. This led to a second rubric being developed by our Assessment coordinator and Dean of Students that was based on Paul and Elder’s ‘Elements of Thought’. For example, Academic and Career Planning is using the CT goals to help assess students’ ability to conduct an effective job search (do students apply skills of reason, critique and creative thought

when searching for jobs?).

Assessment

Assessment of efforts are multifaceted and ongoing. Questions about assessment range from:

- Which assessment test is the right test to measure student learning?
- Which rubric or learning outcomes articulate what ought to be measured?
- How do we measure critical thinking in upper level courses?
- How do we assess critical thinking in co-curricular programs and campus activities?

Assessment was an emphasis from the beginning. The original assessment plan called for multiple measures: indirect measures of assessment (surveys, focus groups) versus direct measures (tests and rubrics). The Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Test was initially proposed by was thought too expensive per student to be administered practically. The decision was made to switch to the California Critical Thinking Test. Neither test is a good match for the learning outcomes and philosophy of learning critical thinking skills in our program.

The initial assessment results (California Critical Thinking Test) showed that students in PRISM seminars did increase their critical thinking skills. Students in the Freshmen seminars did well compared to seniors, too. Use of the AAC&U Value rubric showed that most students scored in “developing” level for categories related to critical thinking (issues, evidence, assumptions, perspectives, and conclusions). No student scored a ‘4’.

Our current efforts are focused on the use of the Critical Thinking Assessment Test (CAT). There is hope that the CAT test is the appropriate test for measuring faculty effectiveness at teaching critical thinking and student ability to master critical thinking skills. It was administered to all Freshmen in August and then administered to a large sample of students who took a PRISM Freshmen seminar. Three scoring sessions have been conducted by faculty and staff. This included a “lunch and learn” training session for faculty and staff. This lunch-and-learn introduced the CAT test to faculty and staff so that they would be ready to score tests. Six faculty have attended the training workshop to help score the CAT test. At the end of the Spring 2013 semester there was a faculty development event that focused on developing assignments and pedagogical strategies that were analogous to the type of thinking done on the CAT.

The scored tests have been shipped to CAT headquarters at Tennessee Tech and we are awaiting results. We hope that it will provide a baseline of our 2012-2013 Freshman class and the impact of PRISM seminars.

Student work will be scored with the AAC&U Value Rubrics and the critical thinking rubrics developed at Meredith College. Focus groups will be interviewed to assess student perception of critical thinking growth, especially those in PRISM seminars. There will be interviews of faculty participants to gauge their interest in, and understanding of, critical thinking at Meredith.

Assessment in departments and programs is ongoing. Perhaps in response to issues brought to light during conversations about CT infusion, each department and program was asked to identify a PRISM learning outcome that intersected with one major learning outcome. Departments and programs were tasked with including at least one PRISM learning outcome in their continuous improvement plan and are collecting data to include in their annual report. In order to assist faculty with assessment of PRISM learning outcomes members of the PRISM team have offered multiple faculty and staff development sessions on how to assess and use rubrics -- though these have not been well attended. We will have a better

understanding of critical thinking in mid and upper-level courses when annual reports are gathered.

Next Steps:

- PRISM Seminars—how to continue to support the funding of these seminars
 - Benefits are tangible and potential is great but there is a staffing issue for the various schools (e.g., Arts and Humanities) and departments
 - Identifying and recruiting seminars in less-represented disciplines
 - Continue and expand the offerings of PRISM seminars and be intentional about measuring the impact of these courses in learning foundational critical thinking skills
- Measuring the effects of the CIP approach to identifying critical thinking outcomes at the major level:
 - Supporting departments and programs to implement strategies and assessment measures to achieve the outcomes identified above
 - Measure outcomes and identify where in the curriculum students have the opportunities to develop those skills in the disciplinary context
- Support the continued efforts of the Collaborative in co-curricular efforts
- Encourage faculty and staff to become engaged in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning around critical thinking outcomes
 - Encourage faculty and staff to share experiences and results of PRISM efforts in state, regional, and national forums
- Prepare the 5-year report of the impact of PRISM