

## **PROFICIENCY INFUSION GUIDELINES**

**These are guidelines, not a checklist of required elements. Course proposals should include an explanation of how the course is suitable to the requirement, understanding that the approval committee will consider courses that approach these elements creatively, with disciplinary norms in mind.**

**Not every course is suited to every proficiency; should you choose to infuse a course, you should select the proficiencies that best balance course content and course assignments (i.e. infusion of any proficiency should not infringe or radically change overall course content). Teaching of the proficiency should be in the service of course content. If it alters the content then the course should be redesigned and resubmitted to the college for approval as a new course.**

### **Critical Thinking Proficiency Guidelines**

#### **DEFINITION AND EXPLANATION**

Critical thinking is an integral component of a liberal education. To think critically is to think clearly and rationally about the subject matter under consideration. In addition to learning the material in the courses they take, students need to have the skills to understand and evaluate the material being presented. Courses infused with critical thinking will pay attention to the following sorts of elements:

- Identification of arguments
  - Identifying assumptions
  - Finding conclusions and premises
  - Identifying kinds of reasoning (analogical, statistical, causal, scientific, etc.) •
- Distinguishing good and bad reasoning
- Evaluating evidence
  - Problem solving
  - Analyzing text and information
  - Making connections between ideas or information given
  - Understanding forms of analysis in a discipline and critically evaluating ideas in terms of specific criteria

#### **OBJECTIVES**

A critical thinking course will bring students to a deeper appreciation of the ways in which arguments or analysis occur within the discipline. To accomplish this, critical thinking need not be thought of as being separate from existing course structure. Infusion should involve a process of heightening awareness of and making explicit the ways in which faculty are engaging in efforts to develop their students' abilities to think critically.

In order for a course to be approved it should adhere to the following guidelines. These are guidelines, not a checklist of required elements. Course proposals should include an explanation of how the course is suitable to the requirement, understanding that the core proficiency course

approval committee will consider courses that approach these elements creatively, with disciplinary norms in mind.

### **COURSE READINGS/MATERIALS**

There should be a required reading for the course that discusses critical thinking. This can be anything from a book, article, handout, or other kind of material. This is to affirm the importance of the proficiency and to establish a working vocabulary for assessment.

### **ASSIGNMENTS**

1. Some time in class should be devoted to discussing the nature of critical thinking. This can be in relation to the required reading just mentioned, or in the context of some element of the course material (an essay, an issue, a primary text, film, etc.).
2. At least two formal and one informal class assignments that center on some aspect of the course material and that require students to use the critical thinking skills involved. Written work should be formulated in such a way as to require students to discuss the forms of argument and analysis that undergird the course material; the same goes for examination questions. Research and other assignments will demand an analysis and not mere repetition of facts. It should be clear to the students that course expectations include the ability to make appropriate analysis of the material.

### **TESTS/GRADING**

1. The syllabus should refer to the concept of critical thinking and how it will be understood in the context of the course, and specify how the course will assess abilities in this area. Assessment may be done in several ways: as a separate, stand alone assignment that is a proportion of the overall grade, or a portion of each individual assignment/exercise/activity, etc.
2. Evaluation of student performance should be tied to what is required for the course to be marked as infused. Relevant assignments should address the critical thinking skills in addition to the regular topic content of the course. The idea is to move away from expecting that students are learning the skills implicitly, to an approach that is more explicit.

### **RESOURCES**

There are a few key resources for faculty who are planning to infuse a course with critical thinking listed below. These provide resources that represent models of critical thinking which meet common standards in the discipline. They should be applicable to various fields, and give faculty a sense of the intended focus.

About Critical Thinking

<http://philosophy.hku.hk/think/critical/ct.php>

[Just read first page. Defines what CT involves.]

Critical Thinking: An Introduction

<http://assets.cambridge.org/052100/9847/sample/0521009847ws.pdf>

[Describes basic skills.]

## **PROFICIENCY-SPECIFIC INFORMATION**

Recommended class size should not exceed thirty-five students.

## **GENERAL ASSESSMENT**

Instructors should be aware that the University is charged with assessing the success of infusing courses with proficiencies. The best assessment will be based upon what faculty members believe is happening in their classrooms. The Core has adopted the principle that, on a department-wide basis, instructors teaching infused courses will meet to evaluate the extent to which students are attaining the chosen proficiency. These meetings will be evidence- and criteria-based. That is, evidence from student work and the application of criteria chosen by the instructors should be the basis of discussions at meetings held at the end of each year or semester. Brief reports will summarize the conclusions reached, the basis upon which they were made, one or two suggestions for improving instruction, and possible requests for resources or faculty development to facilitate those improvements.