

QEP Proposal for MGCCC:

QUESTION AUTHORITY: Critical Thinking Improvement for Mississippi

Gulf Coast Community College Incoming Freshmen Students

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Rationale for the Topic, Problem Statement, and Opportunity for Growth

In this era of information, it is often difficult to decipher between factual information versus fiction, lies, or “fake news.” We propose that because of this problem, all incoming freshmen students begin to learn how to “question authority” in order to avoid falling victim to falsehoods. When we say “question authority” we are referring to learning to question all types of authority figures, but mainly we are talking about informational sources such as the internet, television, books, and newspapers. Students now have access to any information they desire through a simple Google search. It is crucial that our students have the ability to evaluate all of the information that is available to them.

Additionally, it is imperative that students understand how to conduct research. There is a real danger that students will accept, without question, the information that is located in research material. They need to realize that just because a source is cited numerous times does not mean that it is above reproach. Whether a student is writing a paper or conducting experimental research, the ability to question what he or she uncovers and to challenge the status quo is how future research and knowledge will be achieved. If students understand that no one is above questioning, they will learn to think critically about the research that they read or hear. This will result in students who demand that academic research maintain a strong level of objectivity.

College students must learn how to think critically in order to succeed in a college environment. Ideally, the curriculum of a college education is rigorous and demands more than the memorization of facts. It is especially important that students retain the information that they

learn if it pertains to their major. Critical thinking encourages long-term learning and a deeper grasp of concepts and ideas. The outcome of these skills will show in our students' success throughout their college education and will benefit them in their future careers.

Employers often site critical thinking as one of the most sought after skills when hiring new employees. Employers want employees who can evaluate situations, think for themselves, solve problems, and show initiative. These are all demonstrations of critical thinking skills. By encouraging these skills, we will enhance the employability of our graduates. Whether a student plans to become a nurse, an engineer, or a teacher, the ability to think and solve problems is an important skill to possess.

With college students reaping the benefits of critical thinking, the institution will reap the benefits as well. The overall goal of this institution is education. Students learning to perform well academically reflects the quality of the institution. As a result of the improvement of thinking at a higher level, there is also a strong possibility that our students will have a higher level of success as demonstrated by an increased number of associate degree graduates, matriculation to universities, higher education graduates, and professional successes. Research linking these skills to success can be found here:

[http://cae.org/images/uploads/pdf/The Case for Critical Thinking Skills.pdf](http://cae.org/images/uploads/pdf/The_Case_for_Critical_Thinking_Skills.pdf)

here : <http://pareonline.net/getvn.asp?v=20&n=5>

and here: <http://www.thinkwatson.com/resources/critical-thinking-studies>

Small things, such as asking students “why” when they answer a question in class, can encourage the students to reflect on their answers. Encouraging students to defend their answers will help to improve their reasoning and critical thinking skills. Asking students to differentiate

between their sources of resource information can help them determine which sources are accurate, valid, and reliable as opposed to information that is invalid, biased, or fake.

Feasibility

The challenge that MGCCC has to overcome is how to achieve the goal of critical thinking instruction. Because of cuts to academic spending, it is difficult to defend the need for a “soft skills” class that would include critical thinking as one of its prime objectives. This means that we need to add this component to all of the existing academic courses that are taught to incoming freshmen. In order to do this, faculty will need to be trained in instructional strategies that will target this skill.

One of the best and most affordable formats to “teach the teachers” is our Employee Development Program. There are several faculty members at MGCCC who have doctorates in Instructional Design. I feel sure that these faculty would enjoy the opportunity to offer EDP courses to our fellow faculty about the best practices for encouraging critical thinking skills. The instruction will not cost MGCCC additional funds because faculty must take at least 15 EDP hours each year. If all faculty who teach incoming freshmen classes were required to attend these sessions, this program could be up and running by Spring Semester 2019. I would be happy to offer instruction within EDP and to develop an online EDP class on this topic as well.

Strategies/Actions to Be Implemented

Measurement/Assessment

Pre-tests will be given to all incoming freshmen to determine their critical thinking skills. After their second semester at MGCCC, a posttest will be given to these freshmen to assess whether improvement of critical thinking skills has been made. Test questions and evaluations criteria will be as follows:

*Essay questions enabling students to not only answer questions, but to justify their answers as well

*Website evaluations: the students will determine which websites are valid, reliable and objective based upon criteria such as author(s), funding, dates, publisher, and other factors that can affect the accuracy of a website

*Questions that will ask students to decipher between fact and fictional information

Additional Classroom Assessment Tools

In addition to the pre and posttests, students can be assessed and evaluated in-class and online using criteria such as:

*Performance of research evaluations based upon specific criteria, such as sample size, experimental methodology, funding, and personal bias

*Hold in-class debates of topics: demand facts to back up opinions

*Perform scientific research in the classroom: control versus experimental groups, random assignment. Discuss how co-relation does not equal causation

*Hold classroom discussions about the difference between opinions and facts.

*Give test questions to assess whether students can decipher between opinion and fact-based information

*Discussions online and in the classroom about websites to determine the authenticity of these websites

Expected Outcomes/Impact

Faculty

Faculty will be able to:

*Demonstrate how and when to question authority

- *Add critical thinking opportunities to most of their lessons
- *Demonstrate how to determine whether websites, news stories, and other online sources are reliable, objective, and valid.
- *Give students the opportunity to use critical thinking skills in class
- *Give students the opportunity to use critical thinking skills as part of their homework assignments and exams

Student Learning

Students will be able:

- *To demonstrate critical thinking skills in class and on assignments
- *Express independent thinking
- *Demonstrate autonomous learning
- *Communicate by asking valid questions and answering questions
- *Discover and determine legitimate sources in books, lectures, and in technology
- *Decipher between relevant and irrelevant information
- *Evaluate media, like news from different sources, about the same issue
- *Show improvement on posttest from pretest scores on critical thinking exam

Conclusion

Of all of the skills that a student learns throughout his or her time in college, critical thinking skills is one of the most important. The ability to evaluate, deliberate, and assess information is key to academic and professional success. It is imperative and crucial that we teach our students the skills needed to wade through all of the information that they are exposed to daily so that they are able to not only succeed in life, but also to make a positive impact on the world around them.