Teaching Critical Thinking: A Review Sheet
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There's nothing mysterious about teaching critical thinking: scholars have identified what constitute best practices in critical thinking instruction.
- If you try a new instructional method and it doesn't work, don't give up.
- It's common for faculty to think they're teaching critical thinking when they really aren't. (Recall start of 2008 Faculty Workshop presentation.)

Critical thinking is a skill, not a subject matter.
- Students develop critical thinking skills only when they practice them.
  - Modelling critical thinking skills for students isn't sufficient to get students to develop those skills.
  - Faculty need to encourage metacognition (students thinking about how they think).
- Critical thinking is not embedded in the subject matter of any course.
- Critical thinking can't be taught by telling students about it or having them memorize theories of critical thinking or skills development.

What a critical thinking course looks like:
- Students need to do the intellectual heavy-lifting themselves.
- Students need the opportunity to write, talk, and debate.
  - Faculty need to present students with questions for which there is not one right answer, and let them argue for a position.
- Courses should be problem- and assignment-centered.
  - Subjects of assignments should engage student interests.
- Courses should not be faculty-centered.

The role of scaffolding:
- Recall the various ways of operationalizing the notion of critical thinking.
- Complex skills sometimes need to be broken into pieces for students: when faced with too many complex tasks, students will revert to old coping mechanisms or simply freeze.
  - Focus assignments, your comments, and grades on one or a few subskills at a time.
- But avoid micro-managing students' thinking: students need to develop their own ways to solve problems.

A QEP Checksheet for Faculty

The following is for your own use, not to be turned into anyone else. You think you've takent the QEP seriously and now you're teaching to help students improve their critical thinking skills. But how do you know? Honestly answer these questions:

1) List the changes you've made to your course.
- How much have you reduced lecturing in your course?
- How much have you increased the heavy-lifting done by your students?
  o Small-group work
  o Writing (formal and informal, graded and ungraded)
  o Debates, student-led discussions, case studies
- Are you talking too much during "discussions"?

2) Do you assign papers (preferably on short, focused topics), and/or essay and short answer questions on exams?
- How much support are you giving students on writing assignments?
  o Using a grading rubric and providing it to students ahead of time
  o Scaffolding assignments as necessary
- Does your feedback correspond to your goals?
- Are you providing or requiring opportunities for revision?

3) Have you identified the learning goal for each assignment and exercise?
- Can you identify which assignments target skills development?
  o Can your students?
- Do your grading standards reflect the nature of the assignment?
- Can you say what aspects (subskills) of critical thinking are important in your course/discipline?

4) Resources
- Have you visited the QEP area in the library? Checked any books out?
- Have you (re)read handouts from the CT workshops?
- Have you stopped by my office to run ideas by me?
- Have you thought about developing a Faculty Grant proposal? Have you submitted it?