

William Carey University

Impact Report of the Quality Enhancement Plan

Mission Possible: Critical Reading for Academic Success

I. Executive Summary

An investigation into ways to enhance undergraduate learning at William Carey University identified concerns that students often fail to read at advanced levels, described as critical reading. This Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) *Mission Possible: Critical Reading for Academic Success* will improve student learning by enhancing undergraduate students' use of critical reading in their programs of study. ***Critical reading is defined as reading that is active, analytical, evaluative, and reflective.***

The primary learning objective for this plan is for students to demonstrate increased ability to use critical reading in their assigned course work. The primary approach for this QEP is to increase the quality of student reading in specific core courses taken by most first-year students. Faculty in the targeted courses will be trained in teaching critical reading and in ways to incorporate critical reading in their courses. Students who acquire enhanced critical reading ability early in their college programs will experience improved learning throughout their degree programs. Students will be challenged and equipped to make critical reading a key part of their academic experience. The plan also provides an environment that supports student learning by fostering a culture of critical reading beyond the classroom.

The *Mission Possible* plan will be implemented in four phases. In the pre-assessment phase, baseline measures regarding critical reading will be established through measurement of student ability. The second phase will focus on increasing faculty capacity to use critical reading in instruction. In the third phase, critical reading will be applied to instruction, through reading assignments embedded in coursework and the provision of critical reading learning resources. In the fourth phase, a culture of critical reading will be fostered beyond the classroom by enriching reading experiences of students across campus and beyond.

The principal assessment instrument will be the Proficiency Profile published by Educational Testing Service (ETS). Surveys of faculty and students will elicit opinion and self-reports about the use of reading, and regular reports will be used to monitor the plan.

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II. Initial Goals and Intended Outcomes of the Quality Enhancement Plan

This Quality Enhancement Plan will help the university to achieve its mission, particularly with regard to increasing the quality of educational programs and helping students to develop their potential in scholarship. The focal topic for this QEP is *critical reading* and the intent is to enhance reading practices on the part of undergraduate students in university core courses in order to improve student learning. Student learning for this QEP is defined as the growth of students' knowledge as required by the core curriculum of their chosen degree programs.

This plan does not target basic levels of reading comprehension, nor does it aim at increasing student reading for pleasure. The University already has a program to assist students who need help with remedial reading, and this QEP does not intend to duplicate or interfere with existing efforts to help students read well. Instead, the goal is to increase students' effective use of the higher levels of reading referred to as *critical reading*.

Definition of Critical Reading

For the purposes of this QEP, *critical reading is defined as reading that is active, analytical, evaluative, and reflective.*

- Active -- Whereas passive reading may result in a superficial understanding of textual material, critical reading involves a more active engagement with, and a deeper understanding of, the text.
- Analytical -- Critical reading requires an analysis of the text including the author's intentions, biases, sources, and arguments. A critical reader differentiates facts from interpretations.
- Evaluative -- The critical reader evaluates the worthiness and usefulness of the text in the context of the larger conversation of which it is a part.
- Reflective -- The critical reader reflects upon and applies the meaning of a text in light of the current program of learning and his or her needs as a learner.

The focus of this QEP is to encourage and support students in reading textbooks, research articles, and any other information that will enrich their learning in a critical and meaningful way both while they are attending William Carey University and afterwards as life-long learners. Student learning for this QEP is defined as the growth of students' knowledge as required by the programs of study which they pursue.

Three student learning outcomes were identified for this QEP, but only the first one was designated for assessment. Outcomes two and three are considered secondary and tertiary outcomes and were not to be assessed.

1. *Students will demonstrate increased ability to use critical reading in their assigned course work.*

This learning outcome will be achieved by providing students in university core courses with instruction and support for using critical reading in their assigned work.

2. *Students will demonstrate greater content mastery in their coursework as a result of higher quality reading of their assigned text materials.*

The primary outcome focused on increasing student ability to use critical reading in coursework, but this secondary outcome (non-assessed) was that students would achieve greater content mastery of coursework due to the focus on critical reading. However, since demonstrating the influence of a single variable on a complex outcome such as content mastery is very difficult, no attempt was to be made to assess the impact of critical reading on mastery of coursework.

3. *Students will demonstrate more involvement in reading in general as they increase their capacity for critical reading.*

A tertiary outcome for this project was for students to grow in their appreciation of reading as a way of enhancing their lives and careers.

III. Changes Made to the QEP and the Reasons for Making those Changes

No substantial changes were made to the QEP. A change was encountered in that the primary assessment instrument was renamed by Educational Testing Service, from *Measurement of Academic Proficiency and Progress (MAPP)* to *Proficiency Profile*, but that change did not impact the implementation of the plan.

IV. The QEP's Impact on Student Learning

1. Achievement of Identified Goals and Outcomes

Of the three learning outcomes for this QEP, only the first was targeted for assessment: *Students will demonstrate increased ability to use critical reading in their assigned course work.* The assessment plan included use of a standardized test from the Educational Testing Service

(ETS®) called the *Measurement of Academic Proficiency and Progress (MAPP)*. The *MAPP* score reports included a proficiency score combining reading and critical thinking, which provided an approximation of critical reading as defined in this QEP and was therefore selected as an assessment tool. The critical thinking/reading proficiency score was used as a measure of critical reading ability. The *MAPP* test was renamed ETS® *Proficiency Profile* during the time between proposing the QEP and its implementation.

The test is available in a standard form, which is a two-hour test, and an abbreviated form, which is a 40-minute test. Both forms provide a group report of the skills and proficiencies, but only the standard form provides individual scores. Because of the greater difficulty of scheduling the longer test, the abbreviated form was chosen for use and group scores were used for this assessment.

The assessment plan was for successive cohorts of students to be tested using the *Proficiency Profile* in a pre-test/post-test design in two-year intervals. The first cohort of full-time, first-time freshmen was tested at the beginning of the fall 2011 trimester. Students from the same cohort were retested during their junior year (2012-2013) to provide a post-test measurement. A second cohort of students was tested in fall 2012 for a pretest measure, to be followed by a post-test in 2014-2015, and so on throughout the active life of the critical reading project. The pre-test/post-test assessment design was intended to capture gains from the critical reading emphasis in the core courses, which form the bulk of most students' studies during the first two years.

In practice, some challenges emerged with the assessment plan. One was that although administering the Time One test to freshman students was accomplished fairly easily, assembling the cohort of students for the Time Two testing proved to be more difficult. As a result, only one complete cycle of testing has been accomplished, the results of which inform this report on outcomes achieved to date. A second challenge is that the choice of the abbreviated form of the test instrument limits the availability of score reports from ETS. Nevertheless, a comparison of students' scores was possible and will be reflected in this report.

The Time One test of Cohort One resulted in scores for 112 First-Time Freshman students. The Time Two test of the same cohort, who were tested between two and three years following the Time One test administration, yielded scores for 47 students. The table below shows a comparison of the scores.

Table 1. Proficiency Scores in Advanced Reading and Critical Thinking

Measures	Not Proficient		Marginally Proficient		Proficient	
	Time One	Time Two	Time One	Time Two	Time One	Time Two
Advanced Reading	60%	34%	19%	21%	21%	45%
Critical Thinking	92%	79%	8%	19%	0%	2%

Contributing to the results depicted on the Proficiency Profile were the plan's strategies to provide training to faculty who would then emphasize critical reading in their classes. On November 18, 2011, the university provided a training event in critical reading. The guest trainer was Dr. Gretchen Starks-Martin, faculty emerita from St. Cloud State University in Minnesota, an expert in critical reading and co-author of ***Critical Reading, Critical Thinking*** published by Pearson Education. Dr. Martin presented training for the whole faculty followed by a training session with faculty who teach the general education courses that are specifically targeted by the emphasis on critical reading. Faculty considered her impact to be very positive and were able to receive new ideas for implementing critical reading instruction in their courses.

Faculty who teach general education courses were challenged to include specific student learning outcomes on the course syllabi (see example in Appendix A) that would emphasize critical reading and also to incorporate learning activities to engage students in higher order reading. Feedback from faculty indicates that many were effective in infusing critical reading into their courses. Among the most active faculty in this regard were those in the Department of Language and Literature, but faculty in other departments also participated including Chemistry, Religion, and Psychology.

Faculty members involved in the project have reported outcomes or observations of results from the emphasis on critical reading. As could be expected, faculty were best able to note improvements in critical reading ability through the students' verbal and written interactions with the texts they were assigned to read. Several faculty made comments about how the emphasis on critical reading resulted in a higher quality of classroom discussions, more in-depth written reflections on texts read, and even improved scores on exams and quizzes. Samples of faculty observations are included in Appendix B.

V. Reflection on What the Institution Learned as a Result of the QEP

As a result of the Quality Enhancement Plan Mission Possible: Critical Reading for Academic Success, William Carey University has greater confidence in being able to add value to students' experiences as learners by challenging them to a greater depth of involvement with learning resources (texts) and by providing them with instruction in critical reading embedded in general education courses. The university's experience is consistent with the view that focusing on critical reading is a productive way to help increase college students' academic success. The QEP plan involved a limited set of students (mostly first- and second-year students) in a limited range of courses (general education); however, the lessons learned in the project can be applied to more students and programs to benefit student learning more widely. A key lesson is the centrality of faculty in successfully enhancing student learning. Those faculty members who were the most thoroughly engaged in training in critical reading instruction, infusing critical reading into their course syllabi, and designing instructional elements and assignments for their courses tended to have the best results from students' enhanced critical reading ability.

ENGLISH 212, WORLD LITERATURE
2012 Winter Trimester
Tuesday and Thursday, 10:15 to 12:15
Lawrence 101

INSTRUCTOR: Dr. Rebecca Jordan

OFFICE LOCATION: Tatum Court, Third Floor and a Half

OFFICE NUMBER: 601.318.6150

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ACADEMIC HONESTY: William Carey University seeks to create an environment that encourages continued growth of moral and ethical values, which include personal honesty and mutual trust. The University places the highest value on academic integrity and regards any act of academic dishonesty as a serious offense. Academic dishonesty is considered unethical and in violation of William Carey University's academic standards and Christian commitment. If such an incident occurs, students, faculty, and/or staff are obligated to initiate appropriate action. Depending upon the seriousness of the offense, sanctions could include failure of the assignment, failure of the course, and could lead to suspension or dismissal from the University. A full explanation of the procedures for responding to instances of academic dishonesty is contained in the student handbook, *The Red Book*.

STUDENT WITH DISABILITIES: Students with disabilities who are protected by the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 and who require special accommodation should contact Ms. Brenda Waldrup at 601-318-6188. Ms. Waldrup's office is located in Student Services in Lawrence Hall.

INCOMPLETES: All of the following criteria must be met in order for a student to receive an incomplete:

- class (and university) attendance requirements must have been met;
- 80% of the required work for the class must have been done;
- the student must be passing the class at the time the incomplete is granted;
- the student must request the incomplete on the WCU incomplete request form prior to the time at which faculty must submit grades;
- the student must have provided appropriate documentation regarding the reason for requesting the incomplete (e. g., accident reports, medical records, etc.)
- the Dean of Arts and Letters must have determined that unavoidable circumstances have prevented the student from completing the course on schedule.

If any one of the above conditions is not met, a student cannot receive an incomplete for the course.

DISASTER PLAN STATEMENT: In the event of closure or cancellations due to natural disaster or other emergency causes, general information will be forwarded to local media, posted on the WCU website <http://wmcarey.edu> and sent via automated process to your WCU student e-mail address. Specific information regarding the continuation of coursework will be posted on the university's course management system at <https://elearning.wmcarey.edu>. For up-to-the-minute alerts regarding emergency situations, sign up to receive notifications through *Sader Watch*, the WCU emergency text message service. Sign up instructions can be found at <http://wmcarey.edu/saderwatch>.

TOBACCO FREE CAMPUS: "William Carey University is a tobacco-free campus. All WCU students are asked to respect this policy by refraining from smoking or other tobacco use while on campus."

ATTENDANCE:

- Successful completion of this course requires regular and prompt attendance. The catalog states students must attend 75% of the class meetings in order to receive credit for the course.
- Attendance will be taken at the beginning of class.
- All absences are counted the same. All absences are unexcused including those classes missed for adding the course late and classes missed due to college-related trips.
- Tardies are harmful to the final grade. (Excessive tardies can result in a reduction of the final grade.)

CLASS DEMEANOR: Disruption of other students' academic progress will not be tolerated.

Disruptions include any of the following:

- Arriving late to class
- Leaving class early without prior notice
- Taking unauthorized breaks during class
- Operating, ringing, or texting of cellular phones during class (leave the phone in a purse or pocket)
- Leaving class to answer a cell phone
- Using a lap top during class without permission
- Using any ear plug devices during class
- Reading or studying anything in class other than ENG 212
- Speaking to students or faculty in a disrespectful or intimidating manner
- Conducting private conversations during class.
- Bringing children to class (Children are NOT PERMITTED to attend class with their parents. Children are NOT PERMITTED to remain outside the classroom either supervised or unsupervised while the parent attends class. Parents are responsible for making child care arrangements for their children. (The Red Book, page 7)
- Other behavior judged by the professor as disruptive to the learning process

The professor reserves the privilege of excusing disruptive students from class and/or reducing a student's final average in the course for any of the reasons listed above.

CLASS PARTICIPATION:

ENG 212 is an interactive class; therefore, you have a responsibility not only to yourself, but also to the class members to be at all class meetings on time and prepared for the class. Your presence, punctuality, preparation, and participation are crucial to success in this class. Be prepared to discuss the assignments on the day they are due. Good participation--pertinent questions, constructive comments, observations, and contributions--enhances your grade.

TEXT:

Bierhorst, John, ed. The Norton Anthology of World Literature, Volume 2. New York: Norton, 2009.

CATALOG DESCRIPTION: A survey of major works of the literature beginning with the Age of Enlightenment and ending with the Modern Age. **Prerequisite; Eng 101 OR 101.8 AND Eng 102 or 102.8.**

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES: Through critical readings, reading IDs, expressive writing (writing to learn), focused class discussion, expository writing, creative expression, students will be able to:

- apply strategies of close reading,
- connect literary techniques to interpretation,
- evaluate themes, issues, and theories,
- assess relevance of specific texts to contemporary life,
- explain historical and cultural contexts for particular works,
- recognize characteristics of particular literary periods—for example, Neoclassicism, Romanticism,
- Understand various critical perspective,
- use expressive writing to learn course material,
- use creative expression to reflect understanding of different texts,
- develop analytical essays based on literature through a process approach of writing.

EVALUATION:

Final Grading Scale

93-100 = A

83-92 = B

73-82 = C

63-72 = D

Class Requirements:

80 pts. Literature panel participation

40 pts. Four prewrite-ups

40 pts. Two post write-ups (literary analysis)

20 pts. Reading IDs

Appendix B

Outcomes or Observations from the Emphasis on Critical Reading Reported by Faculty

1. Increased depth in focused class discussions
2. Improved grades on expository writing
3. As a result of using literature panels where members come prepared with [a] prewrite-up, class discussion has greater depth, and the literary analysis essays reflect depth of thought.
4. Most students showed an ability to interact with written texts by first understanding them, and then responding to the ideas in texts in their own writing. As students approached the research essay assignment, they exhibited a higher degree of proficiency in reading, analyzing, and responding to texts.
5. Weekly responses to literature result in a closer and more critical reading of texts. Essays show that students can read and understand complex academic critical analyses of literature and integrate them into their essays.
6. Students read models of the essays they're writing. These models help students to understand the genre and write their own essays. Students evaluate effective and ineffective aspects of each model so as to learn what to strive for (and, more importantly audit) in their own writing.
7. Students demonstrate a more thorough understanding of biochemical concepts.
8. Students exhibit strengthened abilities in use of and explanations of biochemical functions.
9. Students participated more in the class discussions on the readings.
10. The best outcome for me is when we quickly move past summarizing the text to analyzing the text and applying the text to situations/circumstances today.
11. They actually read the chapters more and do better on tests. What is really helpful is that they connect what they have learned in high school to what they are learning now. Thus, they see and are able to verbalize what areas we are building upon in class.
12. I am able to note some development of critical reading ability in certain students through the assignments [article review and issue review, both of which focus on critical review of academic works].
13. At the beginning of the trimester, students have difficulty understanding and interpreting the peer reviewed scientific journal articles and the scores on quizzes 1-2, typically, reflect this lack of comprehension. By the end of the trimester, students are much more proficient at reading, analyzing, and discussion articles and tend to show improvement in their quiz scores.
14. The professor evaluates students' proper inclusion, use, and correct documentation of pertinent primary (biblical and non-biblical) and scholarly secondary sources (contemporary, peer-reviewed secondary literature). Students achieve this critical reading learning outcome only through the ability to read analytically and recognize distinctions within varied sources.
15. To date, I believe this assignment [writing a critical assessment of two articles] has successfully introduced students to an effective means of processing and critically evaluating current studies published in academic journals on topics related to psychology.