

# Setting a Foundation for Critical Thinking in the First Year of College

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2016 AAC&U Annual Meeting  
Washington, DC



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@NRCFYESIT



# INTRODUCTION

“The human foot was not built for ballet. Only with discipline, training, and pain can it endure the strain and produce beauty. The human mind was not built for independent thinking. Only with discipline, training, and pain can it endure the strain and produce knowledge.”

*(Daly, 2015)*



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### Definition

inquiry requires habits of inquiry and analysis that share common attributes. These habits in various and changing situations encountered in all walks of life are not an exhaustive list of possibilities. Critical thinking can be demonstrated in assignments that are not an exhaustive list of possibilities. Critical thinking can be demonstrated in assignments that are not an exhaustive list of possibilities. Critical thinking can be demonstrated in assignments that are not an exhaustive list of possibilities.

Framir

Critical thinking is a habit of mind characterized by the comprehensive

This rubric is designed to be transdisciplinary, reflecting the recognition that successful critical thinkers from all disciplines increasingly need to be able to suggest and evaluate arguments that cut across disciplinary boundaries. This rubric is designed for use with many different types of assignments and suggests that students to complete analyses of text, data, or issues. Assignments that cut across disciplinary boundaries were evaluated regardless of whether they were

The definitions that follow were derived from the data and are intended to be interpreted in more than one way (implicit or unstated) that are "tailored" to the specific context of the study.

The definitions that follow were derived in more than one way.

Information that may be interpreted in more than one way, or conditions, or beliefs (often implicit or unstated) that may influence the interpretation of the information.

- Ambiguity: Information that is unclear or has multiple meanings.
- Assumptions: Ideas, conditions, or beliefs that are taken for granted without proof or evidence. [www.dictionary.reference.com/browse/assumptions/](http://www.dictionary.reference.com/browse/assumptions/)
- Context: The historical, ethical, political, cultural, environmental, or social circumstances that surround an event or a statement.
- Literal meaning: Interpretation of information exactly as stated. For example, "The sky is blue" means the color of the sky is blue.
- Metaphor: Information that is intended to be interpreted in a non-literal way.



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**CRITICAL THINKING VALUE RUBRIC**

For more information, please contact [val@ctsa.org](mailto:val@ctsa.org)

Critical thinking is a habit of mind characterized by the comprehensive exploration of issues, ideas, artifacts, and events before accepting or formulating an opinion or conclusion.

Evaluators are encouraged to assign a zero to any work sample or collection of work that does not meet benchmark 1.

Definition	Capstone
1. Identifies the issue, problem, or question to be addressed.	1. Identifies the issue, problem, or question to be addressed.
2. Identifies the relevant facts, data, and information.	2. Identifies the relevant facts, data, and information.
3. Identifies the relevant concepts, theories, and principles.	3. Identifies the relevant concepts, theories, and principles.
4. Identifies the relevant stakeholders and their interests.	4. Identifies the relevant stakeholders and their interests.
5. Identifies the relevant values and ethical principles.	5. Identifies the relevant values and ethical principles.
6. Identifies the relevant assumptions and biases.	6. Identifies the relevant assumptions and biases.
7. Identifies the relevant questions and issues for further exploration.	7. Identifies the relevant questions and issues for further exploration.
8. Identifies the relevant sources and methods of information.	8. Identifies the relevant sources and methods of information.
9. Identifies the relevant evidence and arguments.	9. Identifies the relevant evidence and arguments.
10. Identifies the relevant conclusions and recommendations.	10. Identifies the relevant conclusions and recommendations.

### Definition

Definition	
Evaluators are encouraged to assign a zero to any work sample or collection of work that does not meet benchmark (fall on) level performance	
Capstone	Milestone
4	
problem-solving	

Definition				
Evaluators are encouraged to assign a grade to any work sample on reflection of work that does not meet benchmarks (and may) level performance.				
Explanation of issues	Capsione	Milestones		Benchmark
	4	3	2	1
Evidence	Issue/ problem to be considered critically is stated clearly and described comprehensively, delivering all relevant information necessary for full understanding.	Issue/ problem to be considered critically is stated, described, and clarified so that understanding is not seriously impeded by omissions.	Issue/ problem to be considered critically is stated but designation leaves some terms undefined, ambiguous, or explored, boundaries undetermined, and/or background unknown.	Issue/ problem to be considered critically is stated without clarification or description.
Influence of context and assumptions	Information is taken from source(s) with enough interpretation/ evaluation to develop a comprehensive analysis or synthesis. Viewpoints of experts are questioned thoroughly.	Information is taken from source(s) with enough interpretation/ evaluation to develop a coherent analysis or synthesis. Viewpoints of experts are subject to questioning.	Information is taken from source(s) with some interpretation/ evaluation, but not enough to develop a coherent analysis or synthesis. Viewpoints of experts are taken as mostly fact, with little questioning.	Information is taken from source(s) without any interpretation/ evaluation. Viewpoints of experts are taken as fact, without question.
Student's position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis)	Thoroughly (systematically and methodically) analyzes own and others' assumptions and carefully evaluates the relevance of contexts when presenting a position.	Identifies own and others' assumptions and position.	Questions some assumptions. Identifies several relevant contexts when presenting a position. May be more aware of others' assumptions than ones own (or vice versa).	Shows an emerging awareness of present assumptions (sometimes labels assertions as assumptions). Begins to identify some contexts when presenting a position.
Reasons and related outcomes (rationes and consequences)	Specific position (perspective, thesis/ hypothesis) is imaginative, taking into account the complexities of an issue. Limits of position (perspective, thesis/ hypothesis) are acknowledged. Other points of view are synthesized within position (perspective, thesis/ hypothesis).	Specific position (perspective, thesis/ hypothesis) takes into account the complexities of an issue. Other points of view are acknowledged within position (perspective, thesis/ hypothesis).	Specific position (perspective, thesis/ hypothesis) acknowledges different sides of an issue.	Specific position (perspective, thesis/ hypothesis) is stated, but is simplistic and obvious.
	Conclusions and related outcomes (consequences and implications) are logical and reflect student's informed evaluation perspectives discussed in priority order.	Conclusion is logically tried to a range of information, including opposing viewpoints. Related outcomes (consequences and implications) are identified clearly.	Conclusion is logically tried to information (because information is chosen to fit the desired conclusion). Some related outcomes (consequences and implications) are identified clearly.	Conclusion is inconsistently tried to some of the information discussed; related outcomes (consequences and implications) are oversimplified.

# Building Blocks of Critical Thinking

- Knowledge base
- Information literacy
- Academic/study skills
- Research skills
- Writing and oral communication skills
- Self-efficacy
- Desire, drive, and motivation
- Challenging learning tasks and opportunities
- Learning and thinking strategies and support

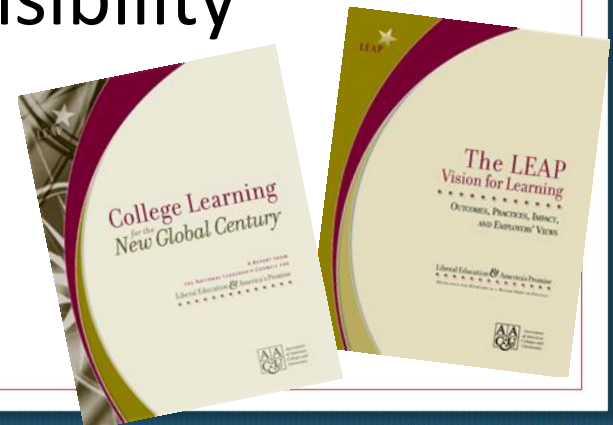


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# 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Outcomes

- Knowledge of human cultures and the physical and natural world
- Intellectual and practical skills
- Personal and social responsibility
- Integrative learning



# 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Outcomes

- Intellectual and practical skills
  - Inquiry and analysis
  - Critical and creative thinking
  - Written and oral communication
  - Quantitative literacy
  - Information literacy
  - Teamwork and problem solving



# Employability Metacompetencies

- Build & sustain working professional relationships
- Analyze, evaluate, & interpret data from various sources
- Engage in continuous learning
- Oral communication and persuasion
- Project planning and management
- Ability to create new knowledge
- Understand the impact of company practices in a global setting
- Build a successful team
- Coach, mentor, & develop others
- Initiative

*(P. Gardner, 2009, 2010)*



# Learning & Critical Thinking

**“NCLB [*Common Core*] went into effect for the 2002-03 academic year, which means that America’s public schools have been operating under the pressures and constrictions imposed by that law for a decade. Since the testing requirements were imposed beginning in third grade, the students arriving in your institution have been subject to the full extent of the law’s requirements.” (Bernstein, 2013)**



# HS Learning & Critical Thinking

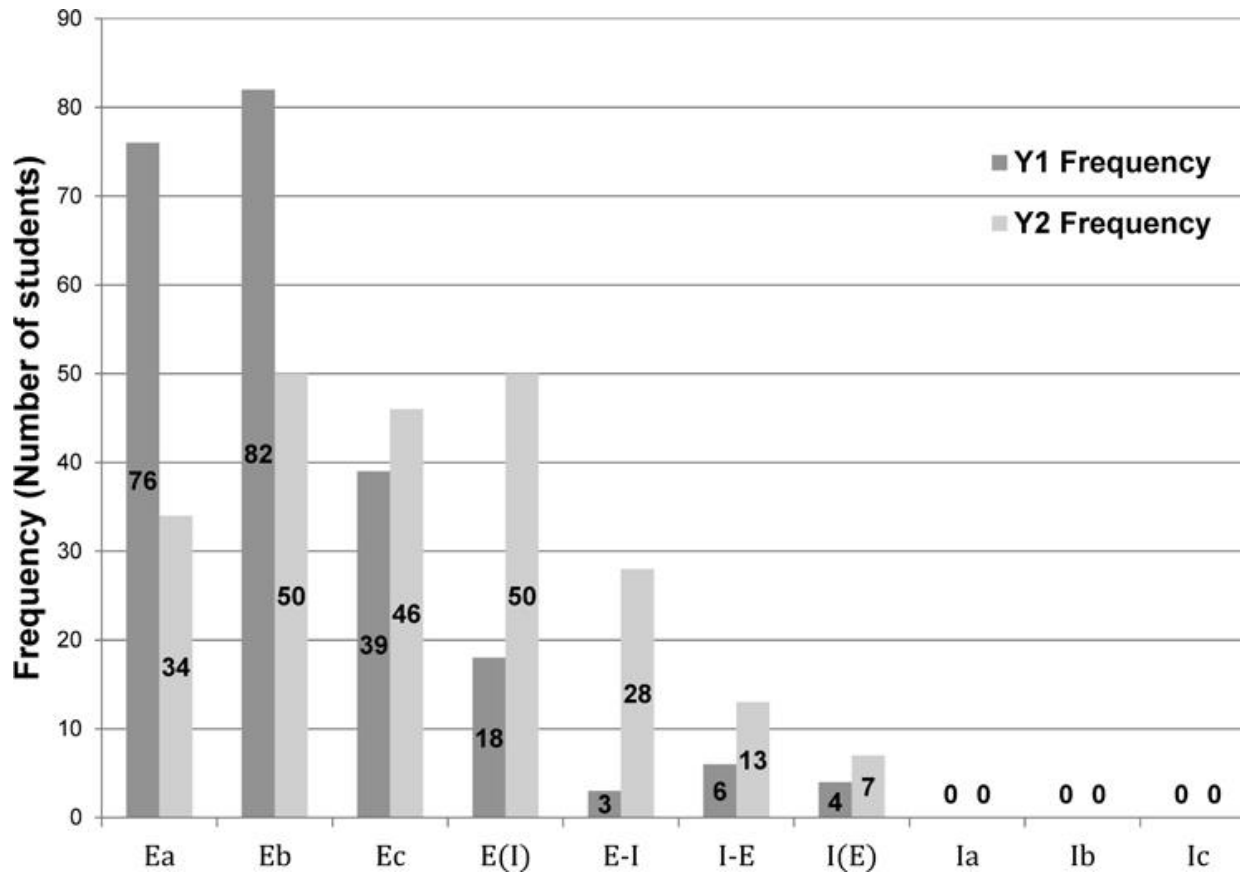
- Students arrive to HS with **little instruction in subjects** that aren't tested
- “Most tests being used consist primarily or solely of **multiple choice** items.” Thus students arriving in HS **lack “experience and knowledge about how to do the kinds of writing** that are expected at higher levels of education.”
- Grading rubrics are often concerned with **content and not argument**, which “works against development of the kinds of writing that would be expected in a true college-level course.”



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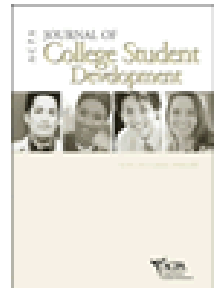
# First-Year to Sophomore: Developmental Milestone



## Source of identity and meaning-making:

- Ea-External voice-unquestioning
- Eb-External voice-low tension
- Ec-External voice-high tension
- E(I)-External with awareness of internal
- E-I or I-E: Balanced
- I(E)-Internal with acknowledgement of external
- I(a-c): External

Baxter-Magolda, M.B., King, P.M., Taylor, K.B., & Wakefield, K.M. (2012). Decreasing authority dependence during the first year of college. *Journal of College Student Development*, 53(3), 481-435.



# High-Impact Educational Practices



## First-Year Seminars and Experiences

Many schools now build into the curriculum first-year seminars or other programs that bring small groups of students together with faculty or staff on a regular basis. The highest-quality first-year experiences place a strong emphasis on critical inquiry, frequent writing, information literacy, collaborative learning, and other skills that develop students' intellectual and practical competencies. First-year seminars can also involve students with cutting-edge questions in scholarship and with faculty members' own research.

## Common Intellectual Experiences

The older idea of a "core" curriculum has evolved into a variety of modern forms, such as a set of required common courses or a vertically organized general education program that includes advanced integrative studies and/or required participation in a learning community (see below). These programs often combine broad themes—e.g., technology and society, global interdependence—with a variety of curricular and cocurricular options for students.

## Learning Communities

The key goals for learning communities are to encourage integration of learning across courses and to involve students with "big questions" that matter beyond the classroom. Students take two or more linked courses as a group and work closely with one another and with their professors. Many learning communities explore a common topic and/or common readings through the lenses of different disciplines. Some deliberately link "liberal arts" and "professional courses"; others feature service learning.

## Writing-Intensive Courses

These courses emphasize writing at all levels of instruction and across the curriculum, including final-year projects. Students are encouraged to produce and revise various forms of writing for different audiences in different disciplines. The effectiveness of this repeated practice "across the curriculum" has led to parallel efforts in such areas as quantitative reasoning, oral communication, information literacy, and, on some campuses, ethical inquiry.

## Collaborative Assignments and Projects

Collaborative learning combines two key goals: learning to work and solve problems in the company of others, and sharpening one's own understanding by listening seriously to the insights of others, especially those with different backgrounds and life experiences. Approaches range from study groups within a course, to team-based assignments and writing, to cooperative projects and research.

## Undergraduate Research

Many colleges and universities are now providing research experiences for students in all disciplines. Undergraduate research, however, has been most prominently used in science disciplines. With strong support from the National Science Foundation and the research community, scientists are reshaping their courses to connect key concepts and questions with students' early and active involvement in systematic investigation and research. The goal is to involve students with actively contested questions, empirical observation, cutting-edge technologies, and the sense of excitement that comes from working to answer important questions.

## Diversity/Global Learning

Many colleges and universities now emphasize courses and programs that help students explore cultures, life experiences, and worldviews different from their own. These studies—which may address U.S. diversity, world cultures, or both—often explore "difficult differences" such as racial, ethnic, and gender inequality, or continuing struggles around the globe for human rights, freedom, and power. Frequently, intercultural studies are augmented by experiential learning in the community and/or by study abroad.

## Service Learning, Community-Based Learning

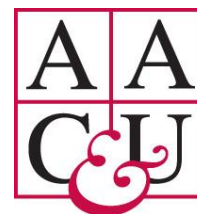
In these programs, field-based "experiential learning" with community partners is an instructional strategy—and often a required part of the course. The idea is to give students direct experience with issues they are studying in the curriculum and with ongoing efforts to analyze and solve problems in the community. A key element in these programs is the opportunity students have to both *apply* what they are learning in real-world settings and *reflect* in a classroom setting on their service experiences. These programs model the idea that giving something back to the community is an important college outcome, and that working with community partners is good preparation for citizenship, work, and life.

## Internships

Internships are another increasingly common form of experiential learning. The idea is to provide students with direct experience in a work setting—usually related to their career interests—and to give them the benefit of supervision and coaching from professionals in the field. If the internship is taken for course credit, students complete a project or paper that is approved by a faculty member.

## Capstone Courses and Projects

Whether they're called "senior capstones" or some other name, these culminating experiences require students nearing the end of their college years to create a project of some sort that integrates and applies what they've learned. The project might be a research paper, a performance, a portfolio of "best work," or an exhibit of artwork. Capstones are offered both in departmental programs and, increasingly, in general education as well.



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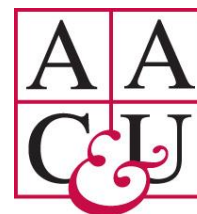
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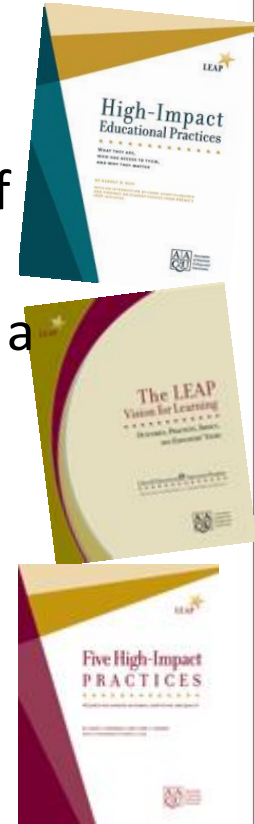
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# FYS as High-Impact Practice

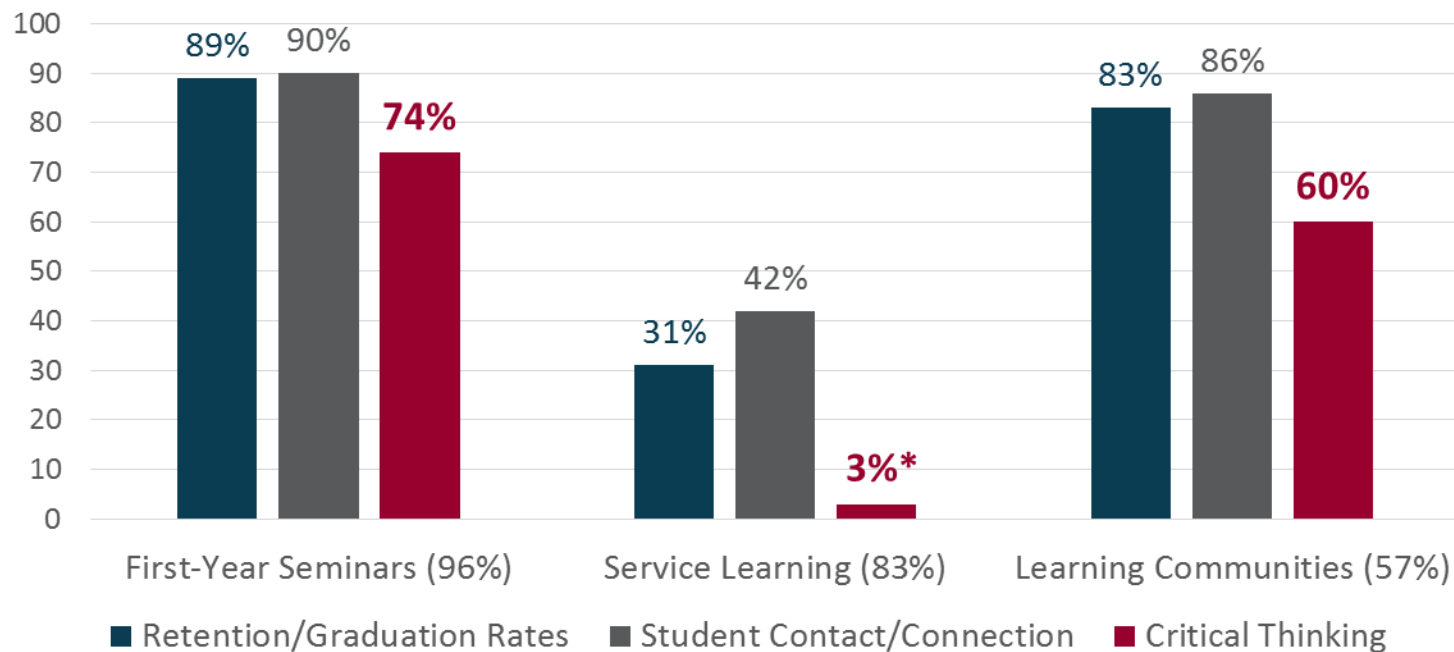
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# Critical Thinking as a Goal

## Goals for HIPs



A National Study

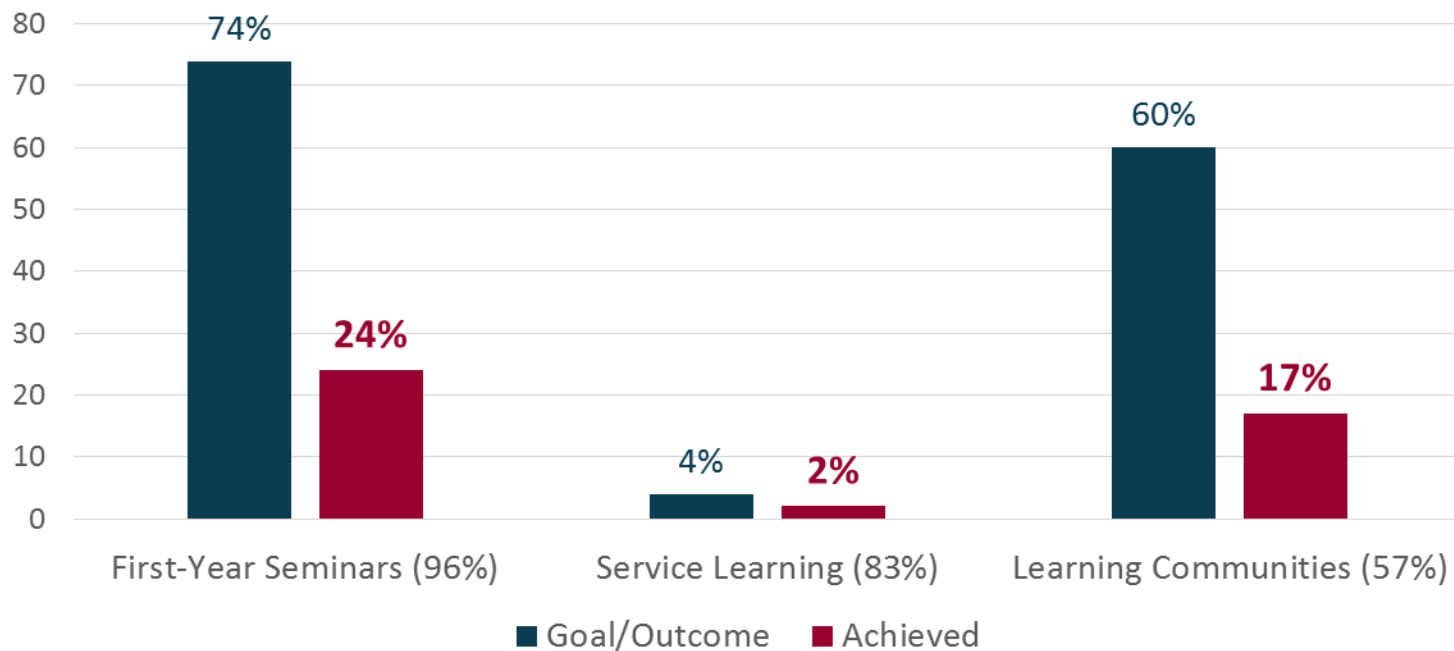
Enhancing Student Success and Retention

Throughout Undergraduate Education



# Critical Thinking as an Outcome

Outcomes of HIPs



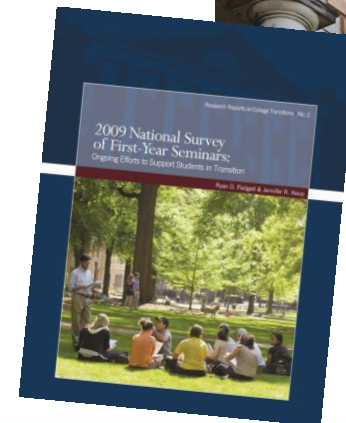
A National Study

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# NATIONAL SURVEY OF FIRST-YEAR SEMINARS



# 2012-2013 National Survey of First-Year Seminars

- Ninth triennial administration of the NSFYS
- Online instrument
  - Types of first-year seminars (FYS)
  - Seminar features
  - Student characteristics
  - Instructional characteristics
  - Administration
  - Assessment
  - Module on HIPs

# 2012-2013 National Survey of First-Year Seminars

- 3,753 **institutions** were invited to participate
  - 4 waves: CAO, CEO, CSAO, 2009 participants
  - Administered from Nov., 2012-Jan., 2013
- 896 campuses responded (23.9% response rate)
- **804** (89.7% of sample) indicated that they had one or more FYS

# Defining First-Year Seminars

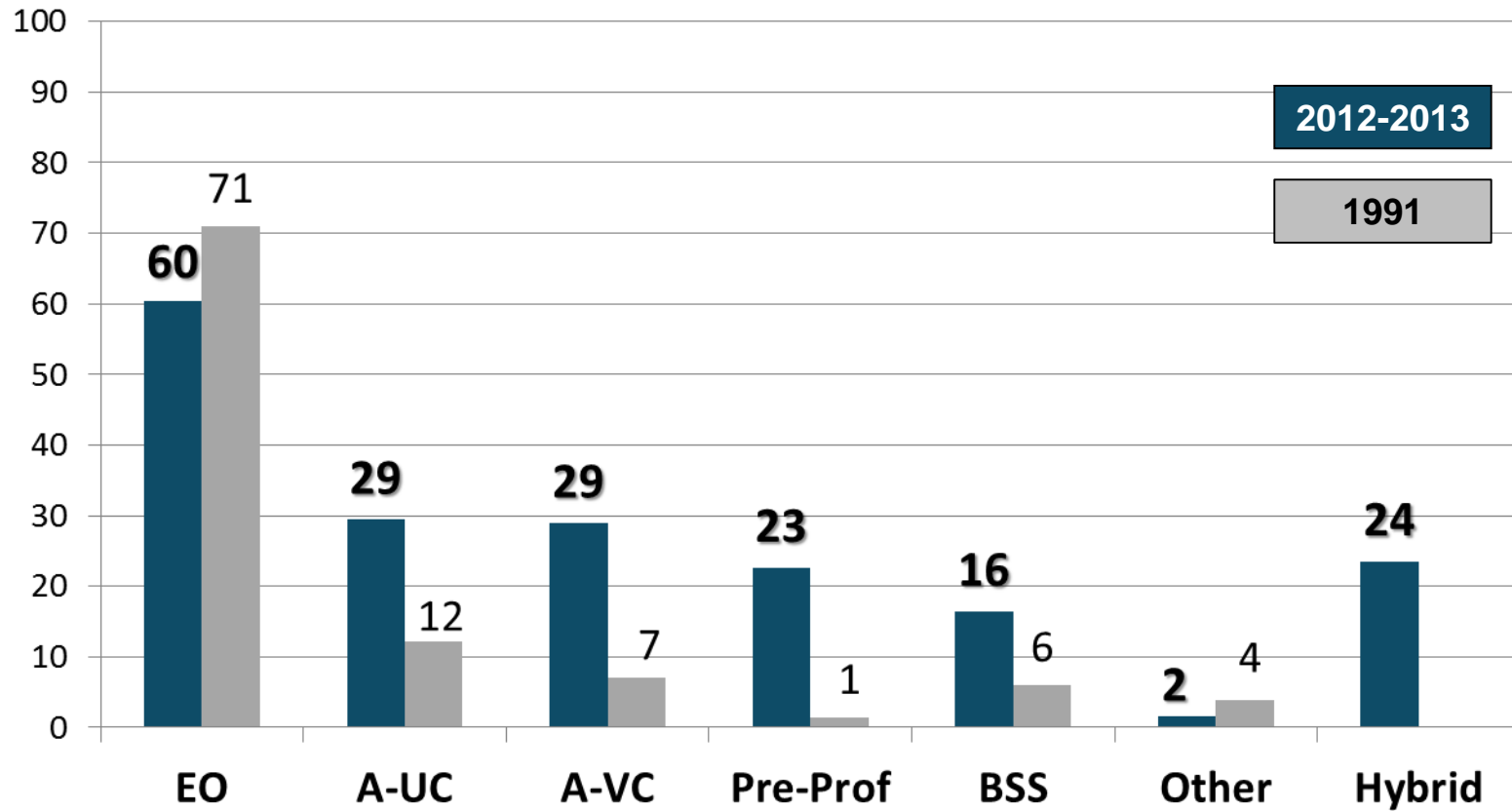
A course designed to “assist students in their **academic and social development** and in their **transition to college**. A seminar, by definition, is a **small discussion-based** course in which **students and their instructors** exchange ideas and information. In most cases, there is a **strong emphasis on creating community** in the classroom.”

*Hunter & Linder, 2005*

# Types of First-Year Seminars

- Extended orientation seminars
- Academic seminars with generally uniform content
- Academic seminars on various topics
- Professional or discipline-based seminars
- Basic study skills seminars
- Hybrid seminars

# All Types of FYS Offered



# Most Important Objectives

Objective	Percentage
Develop a connection with the institution	44.9
Provide orientation to campus resources & services	37.8
Develop academic skills	36.3
<b>Develop critical thinking skills</b>	<b>23.3</b>
Create common first-year experience	21.6
Develop study skills	20.0
Self-exploration or personal development	17.0
Develop support network or friendships	14.5
Improve second-year return rates	14.5
Increase student-faculty interaction	12.4
Develop writing skills	11.6

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Create common first-year experience	21.6
Develop study skills	20.0
Self-exploration or personal growth	19.1
Develop support network	18.8
Improve second-year retention	18.7
Increase student-faculty interaction	18.6
Develop writing skills	11.6

**Critical thinking is reported as a course objective more frequently among:**

- **Four-Year Institutions**
- **Private Institutions**
- **Academic (VC) FYS**

# First-Year Seminar Instruction

Most Important Course Topics	%
Campus resources	35.7
Academic planning/advising	34.7
<b>Critical thinking</b>	<b>32.6</b>
Study skills	39.8
Campus engagement	27.7
Time management	22.6
Writing skills	17.3
Career exploration/preparation	17.1
Specific disciplinary topic	13.1
College policies and procedures	12.4
Information literacy	10.1

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Information literacy	10.1

Critical thinking is reported as a course topic more frequently among:

- Four-Year Institutions
- Private Institutions
- Academic-VC, Academic-UC, & Hybrid FYS

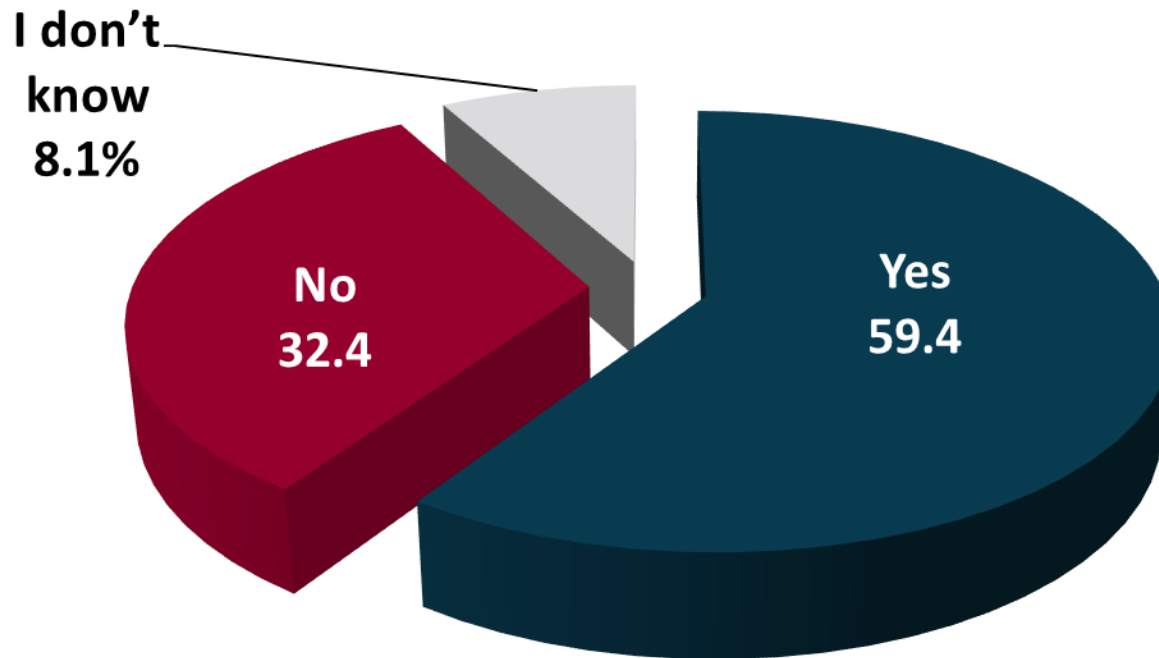
# First-Year Seminar Instruction

Most Important Course Topics	%
Campus resources	35.7
Academic planning/advising	34.7
Critical thinking	32.6
Study skills	28.8
Campus safety	27.7
Time management	23.6
Writing skills	17.3
Career exploration/preparation	17.1
Specific disciplinary topics	13.1
College policies and procedures	12.4
Information literacy	10.1

**“The course content in the first-year seminar represented by course objectives and topics are largely aligned.”**

*Young & Hopp, 2014*

# First-Year Seminar Assessment



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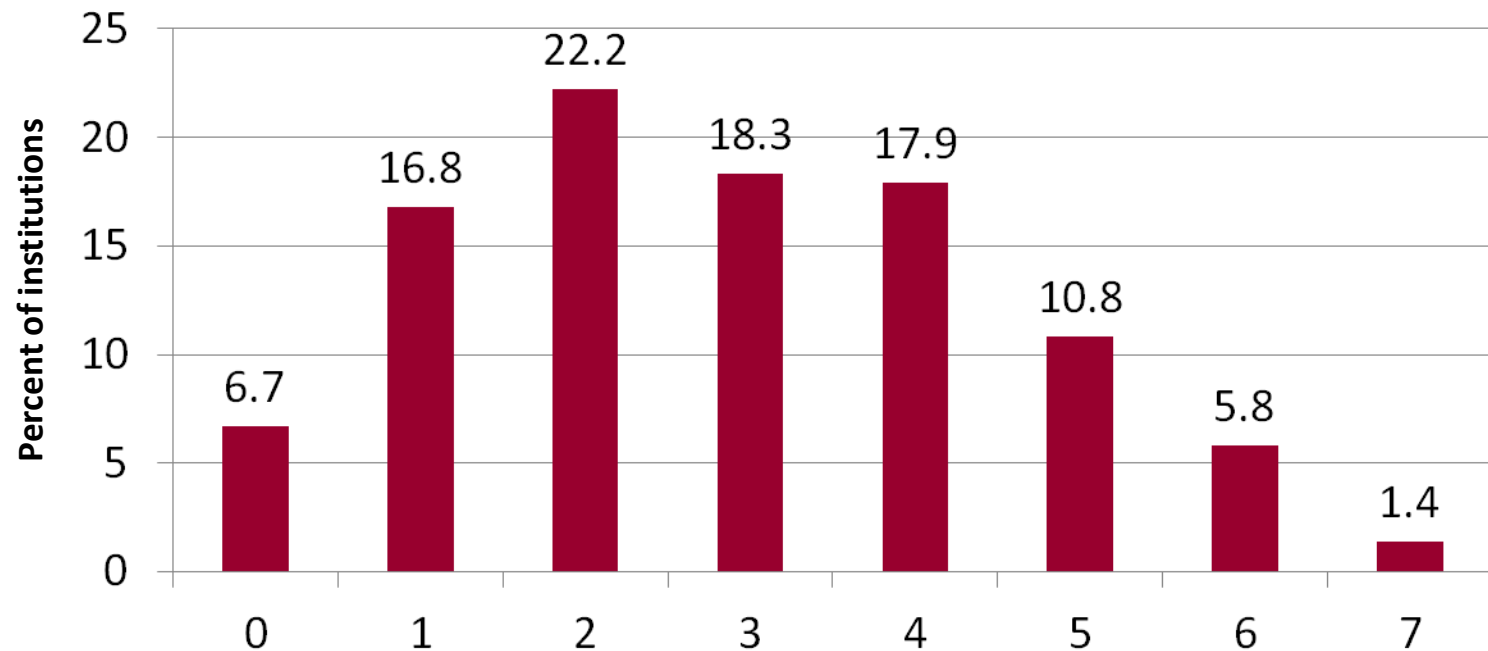
# First-Year Seminar Assessment

Outcome Measured	%
Satisfaction with the seminar	75.9
Achievement of learning/course outcomes	68.9
Persistence to second year	58.4
Satisfaction with faculty	52.7
Student self-reports of course impact	49.3
Grade point average	39.5
<b>Critical thinking</b>	<b>36.6</b>
Connections with peers	36.1
Participation in campus activities	34.8
Satisfaction with the institution	32.7
<i>Information literacy</i>	<i>23.6</i>
<i>Writing ability</i>	<i>23.0</i>

# First-Year Seminar Assessment

Type of Assessment	%
Student course evaluation	86.9
Analysis of institutional data	71.2
Survey instrument	53.4
Direct assessment of student learning outcomes	52.9
Focus groups with instructors	35.4
Program review	33.3
Focus groups with students	30.6
Individual interviews with instructors	20.0
Individual interviews with students	12.4

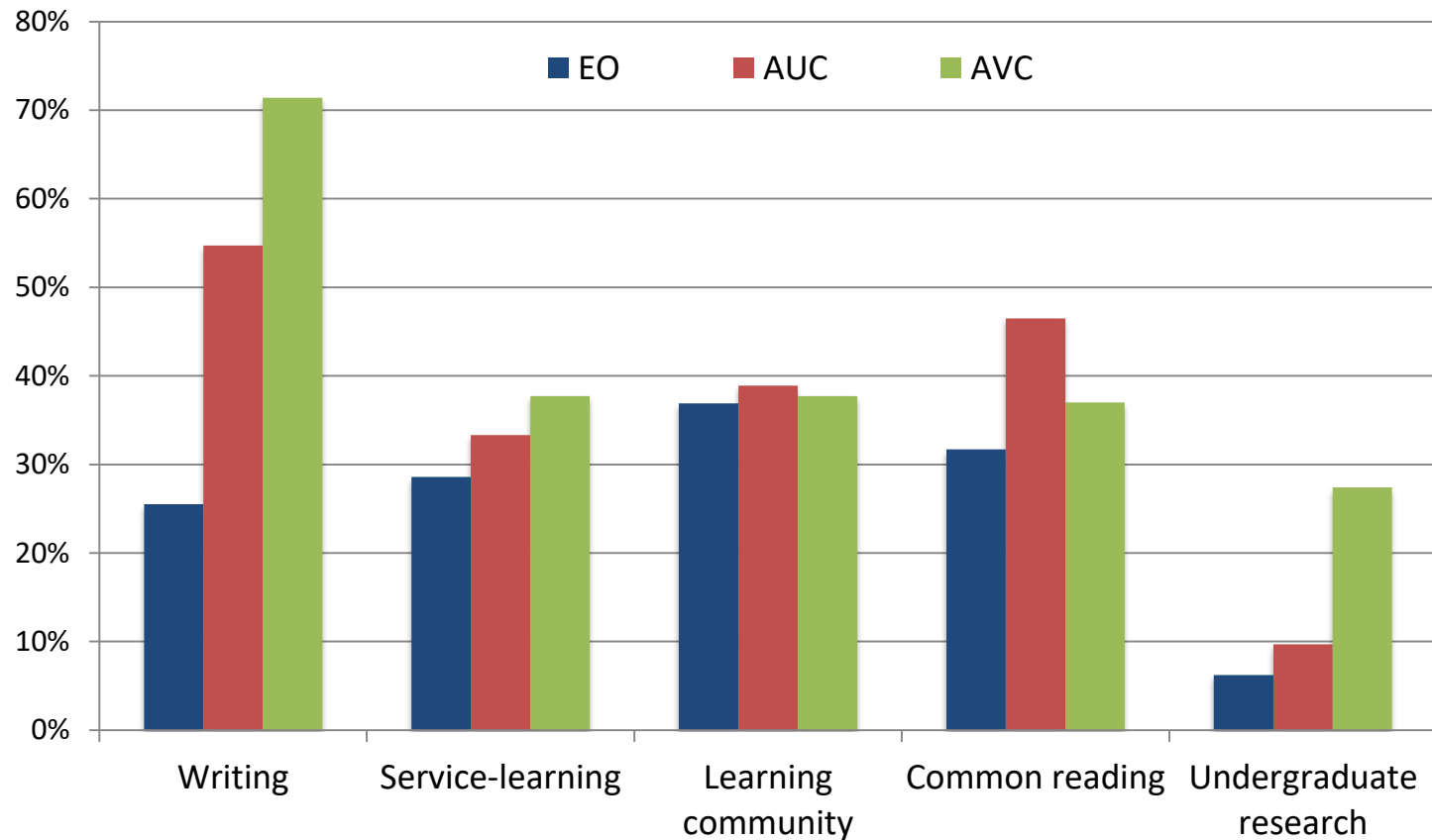
# Number of HIPs Offered in the FYS



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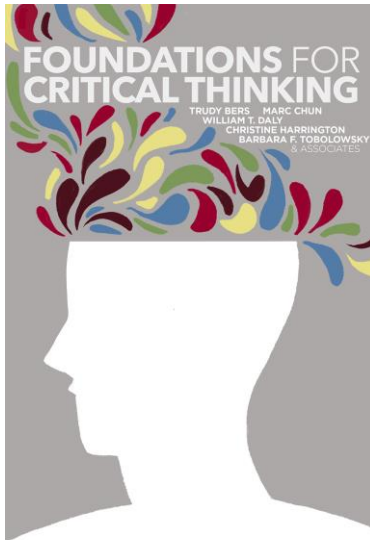
# HIPs by Seminar Type



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# Specific HIPs in the FYS

High-Impact Practice in the FYS	%
Collaborative assignments & projects	67.2
Diversity/Global learning	58.8
Writing-intensive	42.5
Common reading experience	38.1
Learning community	36.8
Service-learning	31.8
Undergraduate research	12.8



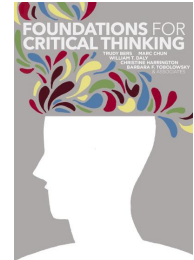
# CASE STUDIES: CRITICAL THINKING IN THE FIRST YEAR



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# Institution

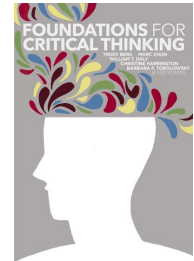


- Public, land-grant, research university in Blacksburg, VA
- Offers 70+ undergraduate degrees & minors, 76 master's degrees, and 62 doctoral & professional degrees
- 5,000 first-year students
- 75% or FY students enter with a declared major
- Have FYE programs (loosely coupled)





# Pathways to Success



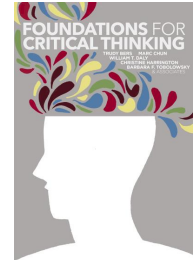
**“To create a more unified FYE that balances the needs of the students with recognized best practices in FY programming & an emphasis on learning outcomes that promote critical thinking and life long learning, the University created the Pathways to Success program.”**



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# Pathways to Success



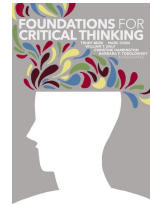
- 8 different programs represent first-year seminars embedded in the academic units
- More than 2/3 of FY students participate
- All focus on 3 “antecedent skills” to CT (AAC&U)
  - Inquiry (Information literacy)\*
  - Problem solving
  - Integration
- Collaboration between faculty & librarians
- Research project



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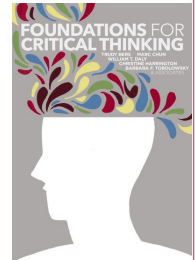
# Pathways Assessment



- “Assessment for improvement”
- Mixed-methods approach
  - Quantitative
    - Pre/post information literacy test
    - Results: increase in ILT scores within and between cohorts
  - Qualitative
    - Team-based evaluation of students’ reflective writing as “novice,” “practitioner,” and “expert”
    - Results: Generally at the “practitioner” level
- Student assessments yielded “significant actionable data for the Pathways Program”



# Institution

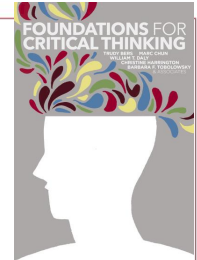


- Public, four-year, regional, comprehensive university; system campus in USC system
- Offers 47 baccalaureate and master's degrees
- 625 first-year students
- 27% students are first-generation
- High of students who enter needing dev ed/SI work in English, math, and writing
- Have a strong FYE program





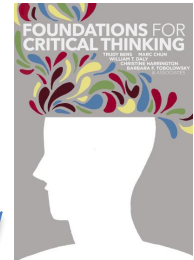
# AFCI 101: Think DEEP



- Required, 1-credit, critical-inquiry FY seminar
- “Cornerstone” of USCA QEP for SACS
- Each section is taught by a FT faculty member
- No discipline/major specific sections
- First-year common read is a text for all sections
- Faculty members are expected to integrate active learning and pedagogy that advances CT
- Faculty development workshop



# AFCI 101: Think DEEP



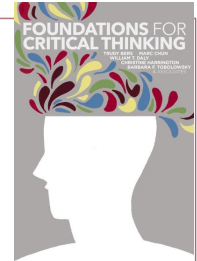
**“In addition...all sections include the following shared course requirements: (a) a common critical-inquiry process or framework; (b) information literacy delivered through a common instructional session and assignment; and (c) multiple opportunities for personal reflection...to promote deeper, more integrative thinking and learning.”**



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# AFCI 101 Assessment



- Focused on student learning outcomes
- ETS Proficiency Profile
- Critical-inquiry portfolio
  - Provides evidence or artifacts from a course project
  - Information from the common info lit assignment
  - Reflective essay
- Assessment metrics showed reasonable gains for FY students
- Used to inform faculty development initiatives



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[www.sc.edu/fye](http://www.sc.edu/fye)

# Key Takeaways

- FYE and FYS can provide meaningful scaffolding for critical thinking development
- Knowledge, information literacy, written/oral communication, research skills are building blocks of critical thinking
- Course content must align with CT outcomes & assessment activities
- Effective assessment of FY CT is complex but KEY
- There is room for institution-specific methods
- CT Definition

# Questions? Comments?

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