



University of the Cumberland

Critical Thinking Across the Curriculum

CTAC - A Student's Guide



Why "Critical Thinking Across the Curriculum?"

Our accrediting agency, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, now requires all institutions undergoing reaccreditation to develop a Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP). After almost two years of research, brain-storming, and critical thinking, the faculty of University of the Cumberland has developed Critical Thinking Across the Curriculum as our QEP.

Why Do We Need to Be Accredited?

Have you benefitted from federal and/or state grants, loans, or aid? Would you like to go to a graduate school? Would you like to have a diploma from a recognized and respected institution? If you answered "Yes!" to any of those questions, then you understand how important our reaccreditation is. As if those reasons are not enough, our faculty and administration know accreditation establishes the integrity and prestige of University of the Cumberland and provides the opportunity to improve further the educational program at the University.

Okay, So What Is CTAC?

CTAC emphasizes enhancing students' critical thinking, specifically in the areas of clarity, discernment, and integration.

What Does CTAC Mean By Clarity, Discernment, and Integration?

Clarity is the ability to identify information specifically and accurately. Clarity involves asking questions like the following:

- ★ What is the author's or speaker's main point and subordinate points?
- ★ How does the author or speaker present the argument or information?
- ★ Can I write and clearly communicate a proposition and argument?

Discernment is the ability to analyze information with insight and judgment. Discernment involves asking questions like the following:

- ★ What assumptions are made by the author or speaker?
- ★ How reliable is the information and how sound is the logic employed by the author or speaker?
- ★ Can I find reliable information and employ it in a logical manner to support a proposition or argument?

Integration is the ability to evaluate and synthesize information efficiently and effectively. Integration involves asking questions like the following:

- ★ How do the techniques employed in different disciplines compare and contrast?
- ★ How can I apply techniques from one discipline to address problems in another discipline?
- ★ How can I incorporate what I have learned in many courses and disciplines to develop my own ideas and ethical beliefs?

What Will We Do With Clarity, Discernment, and Integration?

Faculty will assist students in enhancing clarity, discernment, and integration in four performance areas:

- ★ *Reading comprehension* - understanding the text; evaluating the sources, evidence, and argument; and determining how information in one discipline can contribute to understanding other disciplines
- ★ *Written communication* - writing clearly with good grammar, finding and using appropriate and reliable sources and evidence to create a logically valid argument, and using techniques and information from various disciplines to develop and present ideas
- ★ *Oral communication* - speaking clearly and effectively; employing reliable sources and evidence to create a logical, honest, and convincing presentation; using techniques and information from other disciplines to develop and present ideas
- ★ *Information literacy* - learning how to find reliable resources, developing the ability to evaluate the perspectives and integrity of resources, and applying research skills across diverse disciplines

How Will This Work in the Classroom?

Each year University of the Cumberland will involve approximately eight faculty in professional development activities designed to help develop new methods of teaching critical thinking within their discipline and deploy new methods of assessment. The faculty will learn, discuss, and create during the spring and summer and then implement their ideas and techniques into their general education courses in the fall. As time passes and faculty grow more comfortable with the new ideas and techniques, they will introduce CTAC strategies into their upper-level courses as well. By the end of five years, almost half of our faculty will be actively involved in CTAC. Within a few more years, all faculty will be involved.

Who Are the First Faculty to be Involved?

Our first cadre of faculty are Prof. Anita Bowman, Dr. Oline Carmical, Dr. Kirby Clark, Prof. Kathy Fish, Dr. Joan Hembree, Dr. Jean Hunt, Dr. Chris Leskiw, Dr. Eric Stephens, and Dr. Todd Yetter. Dr. Bill Garris is serving as CTAC Director.

Will CTAC Classes Be More Difficult?

The purpose of CTAC is not to add extra assignments to any class just for the fun of it or to burden students. Students probably will find some assignments more challenging, but also more engaging. Class presentations will feature more active learning rather than only listening to lectures. In addition, enhanced critical thinking skills shown through reading comprehension, written communication, oral communication, and information literacy should make students more prepared for the challenges of career and life and for responsible service and leadership.

Anything Else?

Yes! From Tuesday, April 4, 2006 through Thursday, April 6, 2006, University of the Cumberland will host a review committee from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. They will meet with faculty, administrators, and students asking questions about our QEP, Critical Thinking Across the Curriculum. Be ready to wow them with your knowledge of CTAC! Thanks!

CTAC - Enhancing Clarity, Discernment, and Integration at University of the Cumberland