

The PRISM Experience—The QEP for Meredith College

Each institution undergoing SACS accreditation must plan and implement a Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) as a *major core component* of the reaccreditation process. The QEP should focus on enhancing student learning and establish specific student learning outcomes. In a campus-wide process that began in Fall 2007, the Meredith College Community's QEP evolved into a focus on improving critical thinking on our campus. Below is our Executive Summary of the QEP from our report to SACS:

1 — Executive Summary

“Purposeful Reasoning, Inquiry, and Scholarship at Meredith”

The mission of the Meredith College Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) is to equip students with the intellectual skills and traits that encourage critical thinking and active engagement in the learning process. It will integrate critical thinking through a variety of courses and will enable students to excel in life-long learning careers, leadership roles, and service.

Building on its strong tradition and mission of equipping women to excel, Meredith's Quality Enhancement Plan is named the *PRISM Experience*, an acronym for the type of critical thinking this plan seeks to strengthen—*Purposeful Reasoning, Inquiry, and Scholarship at Meredith*.

After gathering input from students, faculty, and staff, the QEP Steering Committee sought consensus through written and oral feedback on both the QEP topic and possible initiatives to strengthen critical thinking in our students. Grounded in current research and crafted with the unique strengths and potentials of our student body in mind, we formulated a definition of critical thinking for our campus:

We define critical thinking as a purposeful, self-directed process in which we take charge of knowledge, use reason to propel our scholarship and solve problems, and integrate these essential skills in intellectual endeavors and actions.

To address critical thinking in this vein, we will undertake three campus-wide initiatives:

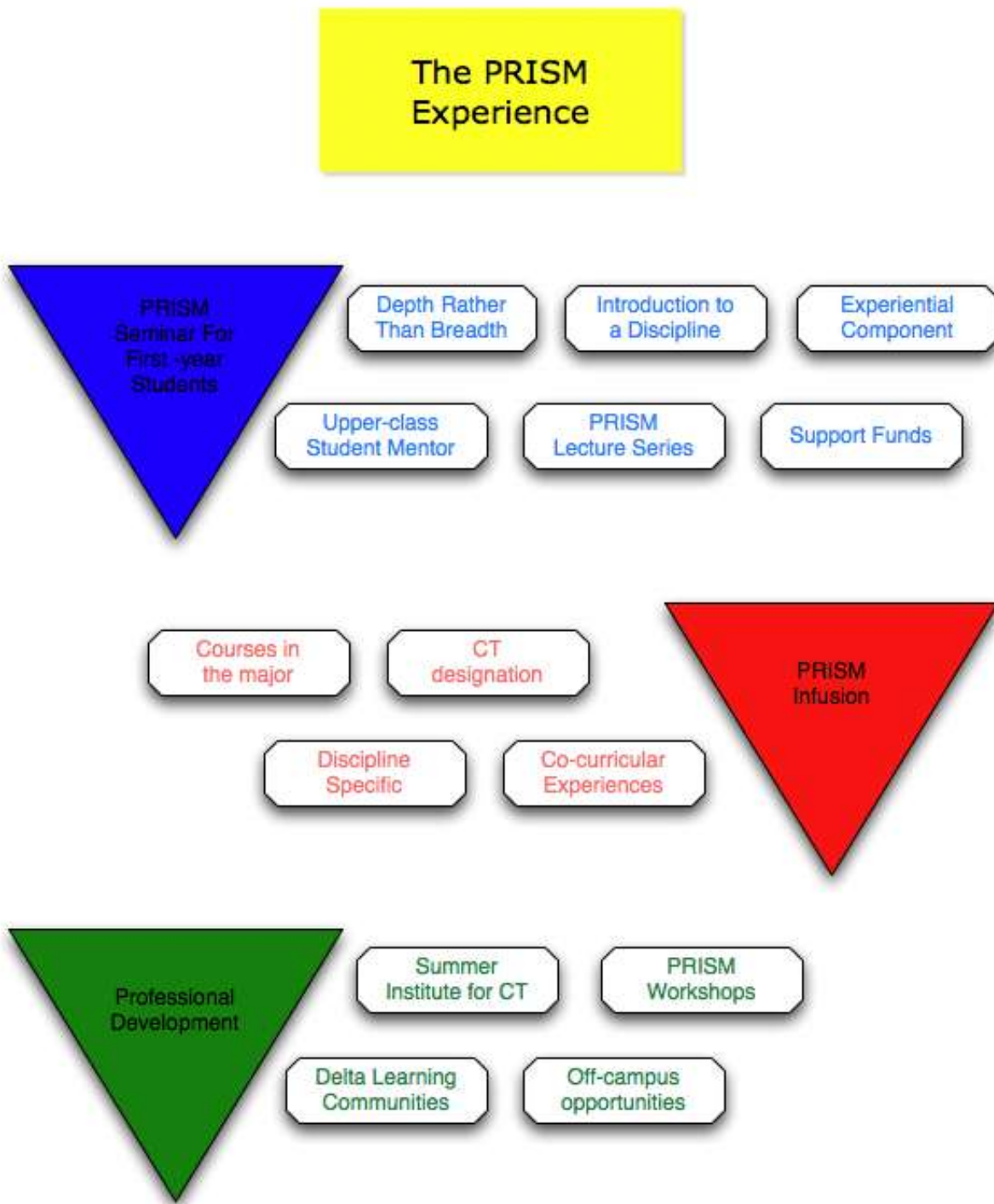
Initiative 1: To implement a first-year, discipline-based PRISM seminar designed to promote critical thinking by introducing strategies and encouraging practice.

Initiative 2: To infuse the teaching of critical thinking throughout a student's undergraduate career through Critical Thinking (CT)-designated courses, through co-curricular activities, and through departmental initiatives to promote deeper levels of critical thinking in existing coursework and capstone experiences.

Initiative 3: To scaffold student growth in critical thinking abilities by providing faculty and staff professional development in critical thinking research and best practice.

To support these initiatives, we will work closely with the Office of Research, Planning and Assessment to engage in continuous assessment of PRISM learning outcomes and of the process itself. This assessment will guide professional development and course and program improvements throughout the implementation process and beyond. Through this process, we will seek intentional and effective avenues to create a campus culture committed to improving critical thinking skills in the most transformative of ways.

The visual organizer below describes each of the initiatives of PRISM and more details follow on the next page. For even greater detail, please see Section VII of the QEP Report.



Components of the PRISM Experience

The PRISM Freshman Seminar—

Features: A topic-driven, discipline-based seminar that focuses on depth rather than breadth; introduces students to a framework and common language of critical thinking; encourages making experiential connections to learning; and introduces students to types and ways of thinking within the various disciplines; goal of at least 15 sections with max enrollment of 20 students each

Budgetary Impact: Approximately 40% of the total budget is associated with the seminar, including aspects of professional development that overlap—development stipends for instructors, book resources for instructors, experiential component fund, Delta (Δ) Learning Community support

Cost: Roughly \$254,750 over 6 years

The PRISM Infusion—

Critical Thinking in the Disciplines—Infusion in the courses and programs of the individual disciplines at the mid- and upper-levels; CT-designated courses in the discipline that deepen explicitly some aspect of critical thinking in that discipline; ways to assess students' progress in critical thinking; goal of 15% of courses with CT designation over 5 years

Co-Curricular Experiences and Critical Thinking—Infusion in the strategies and activities of our college programs; empowering our students to connect their learning and apply critical thinking in all college activities; giving students opportunities to assess their own growth in critical thinking

Budgetary Impact: Approximately 6.5% of the total budget is associated with direct costs, yet professional development overlaps with the PRISM Infusion greatly; course enhancement stipends, book and media resource funds, PRISM Infusion competitive funds for creative ideas, Delta (Δ) Professional Learning Community support

Cost: Direct costs of \$42,500 over 6 years

PRISM Professional Development—

Features: Support for all faculty who create and teach seminars; competitive support for faculty to enhance current courses to achieve CT designation; Delta (Δ) Professional Learning Communities to share and support each other in teaching and learning in new ways; professional development seminars and stipend support to learn about critical thinking and strategies to implement CT on campus; limited travel funds for faculty to seek more extensive or more targeted professional development opportunities appropriate to their discipline

Budgetary Impact: Approximately 21% between professional development support of stipends, Professional development programming, Delta (Δ) Learning Communities, and faculty-staff travel support for professional development at conferences and workshops

Cost: Professional Development and Travel: \$125,200 over 6 years including overlapping funds included above; direct costs of \$115,500 or 18% of total budget

PRISM Assessment—

Features: Strategies to address both student learning outcomes and effectiveness of the program itself; Stipends to train and compensate faculty for using rubrics to assess samples of student work that demonstrate critical thinking; participation in assessment instruments that provide formative feedback as well as institutional feedback

Budgetary Implications: Approximately 3.8% of total budget is direct costs incurred by the project and associated with the assessment; PRISM will contribute to campus-wide programs cost-sharing the use of assessment tools on campus

Cost: Direct costs of \$25,000 over 6 years; NOTE: There are cost-sharing aspects of assessment instruments that are in place and used for multiple assessment efforts on campus

Administrative Costs—

Features: Two course releases per year for the PRISM director; half-time administrative assistant support that has potential to evolve into a position of administrative support for other special academic programs; office supplies, materials, printing, copying, and programming; minimal funds to support technology hardware and software for piloting purposes

Budgetary Impact: Approximately 29.6% of the total budget goes to administrative costs for the Director, Administrative Assistant, Office Supplies, Materials, Printing, Copying, Programming, and Technology Hardware & Software; Base figures for these budget categories determined by assessing the average of existing academic programs on campus

Cost: \$191, 280 over 6 years

Marketing Costs—

Features: Strategies and materials to market the new initiative across campus to faculty, staff and students in the current year and into the first year; printing executive summaries and program brochures for alumnae, community, and external sponsors; brochures for advertising and describing freshman seminars to prospective students; marketing items to spread PRISM information across campus in view of the upcoming SACS visit

Budgetary Implications: Approximately 3% of the total budget as described above; after Years 1 and 2, most marketing costs are eliminated with the exception of the seminar description brochure

Cost: \$20,000 over 6 years

Total Budget for PRISM over 6 years: \$649,430**Additional Features and Budgetary Items:**

While the PRISM committee has reduced significantly the scope, pace, and costly features of the PRISM QEP project, the remaining components and the associated budget support the seminar for student learning, and professional development/faculty support.

The PRISM Advisory Committee and the PRISM Director will work with the College to identify possible funding sources to supplement the budget, specifically targeting some of the features that the committee believe will greatly enhance the program's effectiveness and support faculty in enacting classroom change in teaching and learning. However, for SACS purposes, we can only report the amount in the budget of which we are confident in the college's budgetary support.

The PRISM Committee has demonstrated responsible stewardship in trying to make comparable budgetary reductions that we are all facing, while maintaining the core elements that protect the integrity of the QEP in meeting its goal of enhancing student learning in critical thinking. Faculty and staff development is a lynchpin in enacting change and efforts were made to protect these budgetary items as much as possible.