

## ***7 — Action Plan & Timeline: Part B—The PRISM Seminar***

### **The PRISM Seminar for Freshmen**

***The college will develop and implement a discipline-based, topic-driven seminar course for first-year freshmen, named the PRISM Seminar, which will focus on the introduction and development of critical thinking concepts and skills situated in the context of an issue or problem.***

Based on review of the literature about critical thinking (See Section V), we believe that the development of critical thinking skills at the college level must begin early in a student's career. Successful freshmen-level seminars are rigorously academic in nature and are situated in the context of a specific discipline or topic. Such seminars provide explicit opportunities to learn critical thinking concepts and skills, promote active learning, and incorporate experiential components. Our seminar will help create a community of scholars at Meredith College, modeling for our students the expectations for engaged learning and scholarship we desire to create throughout one's college experience. [\(See link to list or Spreadsheet of First Year Seminars at Other IHE's\).](#)

Sections of the PRISM Seminar will be developed and offered as an elective for first-year freshmen in the fall and spring semesters each academic year. Course sections will be identified both by their home discipline and by their connection to the PRISM Experience (e.g., BIO-PRISM 965), using a common numbering system. Seminars will be offered for 3 credit hours and the enrollment would have a maximum of 20 students per section.

While PRISM Seminars will carry elective credit, individual departments may choose to develop seminars that also meet General Education requirements and will be encouraged and supported in doing so.

The PRISM Seminar will meet student-learning program outcomes at an introductory level. While having a disciplinary focus, PRISM Seminars will incorporate a set of common strategies that will help ensure a focus on introductory critical thinking concepts and skills. The following strategies will be common across all sections of the PRISM Seminar.



## Features of the PRISM Seminar

PRISM Seminars will bear certain unique features that will render them both appealing and academically rewarding for students and faculty.

- **Depth rather than breadth**—Many first-year collegiate courses are survey courses or courses that lay a pre-requisite foundation for subsequent coursework. *PRISM Seminars will offer both the faculty and the students the opportunity to study a topic or issue in depth, focusing on the development of critical thinking skills such as asking and exploring questions, identifying assumptions, analyzing arguments, and devising solution paths to complex problems.*
- **Introduction to a discipline**—*Students will have the opportunity to be introduced to the ways of thinking that are indicative of an individual discipline. Even in seminars with a more interdisciplinary topic, the course will offer the students a perspective of scholarship that is of interest to the faculty member.*
- **Experiential component**—*All sections will include some form of experiential learning; this component could include service learning, class project, class trip, connection to larger freshman service project, simulations in class, case studies, connection with a local organization or other such experiences. From the beginning of the student's college career, we want to establish the climate that critical thinking is a skill that guides meaningful decision-making.*
- **Support funds for experiential component**—*Each PRISM Seminar section will have a designated amount of funds to support and carry out the experiential component of the course. In addition, there will be an additional pool of funds to which a section may choose to apply (e.g., if the experiential component of the course involved a more involved component—such as an off-campus trip to complete lab work in a specific geographic field site—that section could apply for additional funds).*
- **Upper-class student mentor**—*Faculty will have the option of inviting an upper division student to serve as a course assistant—a student mentor. The student mentor will help plan and carry out the experiential component of the course, and provide support to first-year students acclimating to the academic life of the college.*
- **PRISM Lecture Series**—*Students in the PRISM Seminar will attend campus-wide lectures during the semester presented by major campus guest speakers or distinguished faculty. PRISM Seminar students will have opportunities for a more focused reception with speaker and other faculty before or after the main lecture, where they may interact more personally, ask additional individual questions, and have a more focused conversation about the lecture topic. Annually, the college hosts the Blue Cross Blue Shield Presidential Lecture Series, inviting an array of campus speakers nationally and internationally that address the campus-wide theme for the academic year. (The 2010 – 2011 college theme will be *Critical Thinking for Critical Times* and the current 2009 – 2010 academic year's theme is *Catalysts for Change*.) In addition, distinguished faculty members across campus will offer talks that again give students a glimpse into the modes of thinking, inquiry and scholarship within various disciplines.*

### Action Plan for the PRISM Seminar

The opportunity to study in a discipline-based, topical seminar will help students establish an academic climate early in their college careers, emphasizing what the college values. After examining **models of first-year seminars at other institutions**, the QEP committee made the decision to offer the PRISM Seminar initially as an elective course. This approach affords us the opportunity to pilot the seminar first, gather data about its effectiveness, and make recommendations based on evidence about wider-scale implementation. The college will phase the seminar into the curriculum, offering 3 sections during the pilot year of the project, 2010 – 2011. The initial plan is to offer 3 sections in the fall semester. Each subsequent year, there will be staggered increases of sections until Year 5:

- 2010-2011 3 sections
- 2011-2012 5 sections
- 2012-2013 10 sections
- 2013-2014 12 sections
- 2014-2015 15 sections

During the first two years of the project, the college will collect assessment data and track students' development of critical thinking skills. After the first two years of the program, the PRISM Advisory Committee will look at the assessment measures and make a recommendation to the college about a wider-scale implementation of the seminar. That recommendation would go through the normal academic governance channels of Faculty Council, the Academic Council and a campus-wide approval of the faculty.

With a phased implementation of a seminar that is elective in credit initially, the college, under the leadership of the PRISM Advisory Committee, will recruit faculty with records of outstanding teaching for the initial offerings. Faculty will be recruited from across the five schools of the college and across disciplines to develop a wide variety of topics and interests. Intentional efforts will be made to recruit qualified faculty and staff with strong teaching records in the initial years of the seminar. In order to support PRISM Seminar faculty in meeting the common critical thinking learning outcomes of the course and to imbed those outcomes in the context of their seminar topic, faculty will participate in targeted professional development workshops addressing critical thinking, instructional strategies, and active learning.

In the summer prior to offering a PRISM Seminar the first time, faculty will receive a stipend to support the development of the seminar course and its experiential component. Books and other media resources will be available for instructors as they develop those courses. During the academic year, PRISM Seminar instructors will participate in a DELTA ( $\Delta$ ) professional learning community, designed to provide collegial support in achieving the goals of the course.

Below is a timeline mapping the implementation of the PRISM Seminar. Following the timeline, we include a program mapping worksheet for the PRISM Seminar that indicates where instructional strategies will address the program-wide critical thinking learning outcomes (at an introductory level) in the seminar.

### Timeline - PRISM Seminar

Year 0 2009-2010	Year 1 2010-2011	Year 2 2011-2012	Year 3 2012-2013	Year 4 2013-2014	Year 5 2014-2015
Recruit faculty to teach seminar	Continue recruitment and pilot 3 sections	Continue recruitment and offer 5 sections	Continue recruitment and offer 10 sections	Continue recruitment and offer 12 sections	Continue recruitment and offer 15 sections
Begin Delta LCs	Continue Delta LCs	Continue Delta LCs	Continue Delta LCs	Continue Delta LCs	Continue Delta LCs
Create marketing brochure	Create marketing brochure	Create marketing brochure	Create marketing brochure	Create marketing brochure	Create marketing brochure
Set seminar proposal format	Assess program	Assess program	Examine data and make adjustment	Assess program	Address future expansion with AC and FC
Provide PD for instructors	Provide PD for instructors	Provide PD for instructors	Provide PD for instructors	Provide PD for instructors	Provide PD for instructors

**NOTE:** We are still making modifications to this timeline—a replaced timeline will be substituted this week

**Program Mapping Worksheet for the QEP: PRISM Seminar**

<b>Outcome Statements:</b> What students will be able to do or know as a result of the QEP	<b>Planning:</b> Instructional Strategies/Programming					
	<b>Strategy 1:</b> Employ pedagogies that are active and engaging in nature	<b>Strategy 2:</b> Integral role of reading, writing, and speaking	<b>Strategy 3:</b> Apply experiential component that integrates course content with experience	<b>Strategy 4:</b> Discuss and debate issues, examining multiple points of view using a variety of credible sources	<b>Strategy 5:</b> Provide opportunities to identify and assess the characteristics of the students' own reasoning processes as well as those of others	<b>Strategy 6:</b> Explore important questions and analyze complex problems
<b>Outcome 1:</b> Apply skills of reason, critique and creative thought by communicating through reading, writing, and speaking	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>			<b>X</b>	
<b>Outcome 2:</b> Integrate and evaluate knowledge from a variety of sources and disciplines				<b>X</b>		
<b>Outcome 3:</b> Raise important questions and formulate solutions to complex problems	<b>X</b>		<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>		<b>X</b>
<b>Outcome 4:</b> Develop intellectual curiosity by thinking independently and being active in the learning process	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>		<b>X</b>
<b>Outcome 5:</b> Analyze, assess, and reconstruct their ways of thinking				<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	
<b>Outcome 6:</b> Exercise open-mindedness to new ideas or ways of thinking	<b>X</b>		<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>