

6 — Desired Student Learning Outcomes

From the review of the literature on critical thinking and on specific research arenas of import to the program, the QEP Committee worked closely with the campus' Office of Research Planning and Assessment to develop learning outcomes for the PRISM Experience. The QEP presented these outcomes to our faculty in February 2009, and revised these outcomes based on feedback from faculty, staff, and students. These learning outcomes will be used throughout the integration of the PRISM program in the students' undergraduate education at Meredith. Along with their specific objectives within each course, they will be stated on the syllabi for each seminar or CT (Critical Thinking)-Infused course, and learning outcomes will be assessed inside the course/co-curricular infusion as well as on the programmatic level.

PRISM Learning Outcomes

As a result of the QEP, students at Meredith will

- Apply skills of reason, critique, and creative thought
- Utilize and communicate critical thinking skills through reading, writing, and speaking
- Integrate and evaluate knowledge from a variety of sources and disciplines
- Raise important questions and formulate solutions to complex problems
- Develop intellectual curiosity by thinking independently and being active in the learning process
- Practice metacognition by analyzing, assessing, and reconstructing their ways of thinking.
- Exercise open-mindedness to new ideas or ways of thinking.

1. Apply skills of reason, critique, and creative thought.

By studying and practicing models for thinking and problem-solving, students will learn how to think like a disciplinarian in a given field of study. Students will learn how to apply these frames and modes of thinking to new situations and contexts. In this vein, they will practice specific skills of reason, critique, and creative thought such as listening carefully, detecting bias, evaluating generalizations, recognizing contradictions, and assimilating disparate ideas into new forms of expression.

2. Utilize and communicate critical thinking skills through reading, writing, and speaking.

Students will apply and articulate their reasoning skills by reading texts both provided by the instructor and discovered through student inquiry and interest. In ways consistent with best practices in critical reading, they will clarify, critique, and dialogue about those texts. Students will be challenged to speak in both informal discussions and more formal venues regarding the content and ideas of the subjects under study, and they will write extensively in the PRISM courses both to learn and to exhibit learning of new concepts. Writing, reading, and

speaking will be integrated, and students will be encouraged to show such integration in work products, exhibits, and performances.

3. Integrate and evaluate knowledge from a variety of sources and disciplines.

Because we acknowledge that all knowledge is connected and that our students will be increasingly asked to sort through vast amounts of information from both vetted and unvetted sources, PRISM instructors will ask students to gather and evaluate the credibility of multiple sources of information. Students will also be encouraged to seek and explore connections within content, ideas, and disciplines. These skills will reinforce our efforts in information literacy instruction. Students will integrate credible sources in their written and spoken discussions and in their work products, and they will use this integration to recognize the interdependence and complexity of knowledge.

4. Raise important questions and formulate solutions to complex problems.

An important part of critical thinking is the ability to frame situations and ideas and then to articulate the questions that both challenge and strengthen that frame, with an end toward thinking more clearly and questioning more precisely. From such framing, students will have the tools they need to come to well-reasoned conclusions about real world problems, which are often ill-defined. They will be equipped first to recognize the complexity of a scenario or problem and then to test solutions to complex problems against relevant values and standards. They will be encouraged to value both the framing and articulation of questions and the complexity and intrinsic satisfaction of intellectual integrity.

5. Develop intellectual curiosity by thinking independently and being active in the learning process.

The literature on the Millennial student and critical thinking, and on student-centered pedagogy is clear that students must be in the center of classroom discussions, presentations, and research processes. Complex, independent thinking is a skill, and as such it can be nurtured only through practice and focused attention, the type of attention students exhibit when they are active learners. Whether through Socratic discussions, experiential activities, case study analyses, or creative performances, students will work actively to question, clarify, refine, and re-evaluate. In this way, independent thought and active learning will be the hallmark of the PRISM experience.

6. Practice metacognition by analyzing, assessing, and reconstructing their ways of thinking.

Students will practice tools and strategies of critical thinking in order to recognize the weakness of their own conclusions. They will critique, question, and create their own theories and points of view as a result of reading, writing, and speaking about the ideas of a discipline or situation. They will explore the implications and consequences of their past and future actions with the goal of improving their intellectual virtues and skills as they have come to define these virtues and skills for themselves. As a result, students will become aware of their own thinking and the frames they use to create and validate knowledge, and they

will become more reflective on the way their mental processes shape their worldviews and their subsequent actions.

7. Exercise open-mindedness to new ideas or ways of thinking.

As students become more aware of their own metacognitive processes, they will learn to both question and support how knowledge is transmitted, formed, and connected to their actions and attitudes. As a result, they will be encouraged to value new and/or different ideas or ways of thinking. In addition, they will practice framing, defending, and supporting opposing sides of an academic discourse both as an intellectual exercise and as an opportunity to re-examine their own frames and ways of thinking about an issue. In this way, students will open up intellectual space for hesitation and doubt and, more importantly, come to value careful critique and purposeful open-mindedness as a sign of intellectual confidence and maturity.

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