

7 — Action Plan & Timeline: Part C—The PRISM Infusion

The PRISM Infusion

The first-year PRISM Seminar is designed as a program strategy to lay a common foundation for critical thinking. Over time, with successful implementation, students will complete their first year of college with a common framework for critical thinking—using common language about components of critical thinking and intellectual traits—and will possess a common set of developing critical thinking skills. They will have had an opportunity to experience first hand how critical thinking can be applied in the context of a discipline—promoting inquiry, scholarship, and creative thought. It is the desire of the PRISM Experience that students complete the PRISM Seminar with a different set of expectations about learning and engagement, and will take those expectations with them into their upper level major programs as well into the fabric of their total college experience.

The PRISM Seminar is only the first step in a comprehensive strategy to infuse critical thinking into the culture of the college; but, if implemented successfully, the Seminar has the potential for students to become *catalysts for change* in more pervasive ways. Students will expect that curriculum will challenge them and that classrooms will be centers of active, engaged learning. They will expect that their major program of study will involve asking questions, identifying assumptions, evaluating information, exercising creative thought, applying skills of reason, and reflecting on decisions made. In turn, the campus will model that these same critical thinking skills and dispositions are applicable in co-curricular and non-curricular activities across campus. *Slowly, with intentionality, with professional development for all faculty and staff, and with communication across units, critical thinking will become infused into the Meredith way of doing and being.*

Towards those ends, the PRISM Experience will establish specific strategies to promote the continued development of critical thinking throughout the curriculum, into the upper level course work and major degree programs, and into the co-curricular activities of our college. These strategies will all involve professional development for both faculty and staff, support of appropriate resources, and opportunities to support each other's efforts in professional learning communities.

Critical Thinking in the Disciplines

The First Year Seminar will provide an introduction to critical thinking for Meredith students, but critical thinking is a complex skill and research shows that the acquisition of complex skills requires extensive practice (Ericsson, K.A., and N. Charness. 1994.). As a result, a key part of the **PRISM Experience** at Meredith will be to promote the teaching of critical thinking in courses in the disciplines. These courses will complement and continue the critical thinking instruction begun in the PRISM Seminar. They will provide an opportunity for students to practice and develop the critical thinking skills they acquired in the PRISM Seminar and, in many cases, they will focus on the particular critical thinking strategies which are most appropriate to the student's major.

The student learning outcomes of CT courses will be the same as those of the overall QEP.

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.

The CT designation for courses will provide formal certification and recognition of the efforts of both the faculty who offer extensive critical thinking instruction and of the students who take those courses. This recognition will encourage faculty to increase the level of instruction they provide in critical thinking and it will encourage students to take courses that provide such instruction. While the First Year Seminar is the most prominent part of the QEP, CT courses are likely to be the most significant over the long run. Students will take only one First Year Seminar, but they will have the opportunity to take many CT courses, they will take those courses when they have achieved greater cognitive maturity, and they will take CT courses in their major field of study.

We will use three primary mechanisms to encourage faculty to offer CT courses: (1) We will provide training for faculty so that they can more effectively incorporate instruction in critical thinking into their courses and (2) we will seek approval for a Critical Thinking (CT) designation for courses which promote the critical thinking goals of the PRISM program. This designation will become part of the course description in the catalogue and will also be included on the student's academic transcript. (3) We will require that faculty who teach first year seminars will also be required to submit one of their other courses for CT designation.

Designating courses as CT and recording that designation on the transcript will require approval from the Academic Council. The PRISM Advisory Committee will seek that initial approval during the Spring 2010 semester, and will begin working with departments and faculty in the 2010 – 2011 academic year to identify courses appropriate for such designation. If assessment indicates that CT courses are effective at improving students' critical thinking skills, we plan to propose that a requirement that every student take a number of CT courses be added to the list of General Education requirements.

In order to receive CT designation for a course, an instructor would have to submit an application for approval to the Curriculum Team of the PRISM Advisory Committee. The instructor would need to show evidence of training in CT instruction. Requests for funding of further, discipline-focused training would also be part of the application.

The core of the application for CT course designation is an explanation of the instructional strategies that will be used to promote the learning outcomes of the PRISM program and the methods for assessing their effectiveness. An individual CT course is not required or expected to promote all of those learning outcomes, but it is expected to

promote more than one such outcome. At least 25% of the course, including both in-class and out-of-class time, should be spent in activities that promote critical thinking.

We know that many Meredith faculty members already make concerted and effective efforts to teach critical thinking. This type of program will identify and recognize the efforts those who are critical thinking leaders on campus. In many cases, minor changes in existing courses will be required. Our goal is to have 15% of the courses at Meredith receive CT certification by the end of the 5 year QEP cycle, including at least one required course in every discipline.

Providing faculty with professional development in effective methods for teaching critical thinking will obviously be crucial to the success of the PRISM Experience. Many instructors already recognize the importance of critical thinking and devote considerable time and effort to teaching it. Specific professional development will provide these instructors with common frameworks and language upon which to develop those skills further in their students. This will lead to becoming more effective teachers of critical thinking and will introduce faculty to the most effective ways to assess the impact of their efforts. These types of professional development will be open to the entire faculty and will also serve to promote the teaching of critical thinking by instructors who do not currently devote much effort to it, introducing them to both the concepts and skills of critical thinking as well as best instructional practices for doing so.

In many cases faculty will also require or benefit from training more specifically focused on their individual discipline. We will encourage all faculty who offer CT courses to pursue professional development opportunities on teaching critical thinking in their disciplines and will provide funding both for attendance at off campus workshops by individual faculty and for on-campus critical thinking workshops sponsored by departments. Faculty who plan to submit applications for CT course designation can request funding for discipline specific training which will prepare them to do so.

To a significant extent, the professional development to prepare faculty to teach critical thinking effectively in upper level courses will overlap the training which prepares instructors to teach the PRISM Seminar and with professional development opportunities which focus primarily on co-curricular activities.

Co-curricular Experiences and Critical Thinking

According to The Association of American Colleges and Universities, beliefs about the role of the co-curricular experience as it relates to student learning have shifted over time. Currently, there is an emphasis on an “all college” or integrative curriculum which marks a recent shift in higher education (Eames, 2006).

This philosophy assumes that general education curriculum, major coursework, and co-curricular experiences are no longer separate entities. Instead, it encourages an “integrated, cumulative, and progressive four-year curriculum in which courses inside and outside the major mutually reinforce each other; lower-level courses provide the foundation for upper-level courses; and co-curricular experiences are recognized as valuable learning opportunities” (Eames, 2006). An integrated curriculum represents the notion that all information, insight, realizations, wisdom and experiences are interconnected. The integrated curriculum also recognizes the charge to develop the complete person rather than a specialist with limited expertise. This is accomplished by providing an array of courses and experiences that synthesize the learning process for

the student, thus supporting a transformative learning experience. As such, co-curricular experiences are essential to the learning process as they afford students the “opportunity to learn through action, contemplation, reflection and emotional management as well as information acquisition” (NASPA, 2004).

Historically, the Meredith College culture has emphasized the connection between academic and co-curricular experiences as a way to encourage student engagement. As stated in Vision 2010, Meredith’s strategic plan for the College, “Meredith College seeks to create academic programs and a campus culture that prepare students for their lives as engaged global citizens and leaders.” This plan is evident in several unique experiences.

- Faculty and staff facilitate reflective and integrated learning through the Summer Reading Program book discussion.
- Recognized leaders are invited to campus through the Wallace Lectures, Blue Cross Blue Shield of North Carolina lecture series to engage students in thoughtful dialogue on a variety of global issues.
- Leadership Circles, a series of leadership discussions that focus on understanding one’s self in relationship to broader leadership opportunities through small group discussions.

As we have conducted research on the use of critical thinking components in co-curricular experiences, we have discovered that faculty and staff foster the basic components in a variety of ways. Several examples are evident: strategies used by career counselors to encourage deliberate and reflective thought with students as they create resumes and letters of application; the intentionality built into the Sophie Lanneau program as students develop a portfolio; group discussions following community volunteer experiences; papers assigned to students who have committed an honor code violation requiring the student to give thoughtful analysis of their behavior; and coaching provided by counselors and advisors that help students gain insight into their communication with faculty and ability to respond in a manner that result in positive academic and interpersonal interactions. Through these experiences and others, Meredith faculty and staff strive to create intentional learners who can adapt to new environments, integrate knowledge from different sources and continue learning through their lives.

Meredith College has a core basis upon which to build and incorporate critical thinking into students’ curricular and co-curricular experiences. The PRISM experience, particularly its emphasis on infusing critical thinking into students’ curricular and co-curricular experiences, will provide scaffolding to facilitate the development of numerous transferrable skills, including critical thinking (Eames 2006). Through the PRISM experience, faculty and staff will benefit from organized and focused professional development, PRISM learning communities, and the creation of student learning outcomes as critical thinking strategies are further incorporated co-curricular programs.

On the next page is a timeline that shows the progressive implementation of PRISM Infusion strategies into the curricular and co-curricular learning experiences for all students.

Timeline - PRISM Infusion

Year 0 2009-2010	Year 1 2010-2011	Year 2 2011-2012	Year 3 2012-2013	Year 4 2013-2014	Year 5 2014-2015
Establish criteria for CT designat	Issue RFP for Course Enhance Stipends	Issue RFP for Course Enhance Stipends	Issue RFP for Course Enhance Stipends	Issue RFP for Course Enhance Stipends	15% of courses receive CT designat
Publicize across campus	Issue RFP for Dept Infusion Funds	Issue RFP for Dept Infusion Funds	Issue RFP for Dept Infusion Funds	Issue RFP for Dept Infusion Funds	Delta PLC form nexus of center to support teaching/ learning
Establish criteria for Infusion Fund	Issue RFP for PRISM Infusion Grant Funds	Issue RFP for PRISM Infusion Grant Funds	Issue RFP for PRISM Infusion Grant Funds	Issue RFP for PRISM Infusion Grant Funds	CT is infused and highlighted in co-curric arenas
Develop student initiatives to roll out PRISM	Continue Delta PLC	Continue Delta PLC	Continue Delta PLC	Continue Delta PLC	Assess of program objectives



NOTE: This timeline is a preliminary one built before budgeting decisions were finalized. It needs to be updated in light of those decisions.