

Dear GE Faculty Colleague:

How well do our students reason? Critically evaluate information? Assess arguments on important issues? How does our GE curriculum help our students hone these abilities? A group of your colleagues wants to answer these questions. Interested? Read on.

As you probably know, last year the university began a process of *GE Program* assessment (as opposed to our routine course-level assessment). A series of task forces worked with faculty to assess writing, oral communications and quantitative reasoning in GE. A report on this effort is available at: http://www.csuchico.edu/vpaa/ued/GE_Assess_Report_finaldraft.pdf. The work accomplished last year depended entirely on the voluntary participation of faculty teaching GE to provide access to their students' work for assessment purposes.

Writing, oral communications and quantitative reasoning represent three of the four domains of our GE Core, Area A. The fourth domain of the Core is **Critical Thinking** (CT). As with these other domains of the Core, *our goal is to assess how well our students are performing on tasks associated with CT by examining examples of student work throughout the GE curriculum*. In assessing CT in GE, we are following closely the procedure we used last year. We have convened a CT Task Force composed of representatives of GEAC, AURA, the Provost's office and subject matter experts to guide our efforts. We have examined relevant documents outlining our GE program such as Executive Order 595, "General Education Breadth Requirements," <http://www.calstate.edu/EO/EO-595.pdf>, EM 99-05, "General Education," [Executive Memorandum 99-05](http://www.csuchico.edu/vpaa/manual/AdminGEPolicy%20050901.htm) and "Administration of General Education," <http://www.csuchico.edu/vpaa/manual/AdminGEPolicy%20050901.htm>. These are the documents that have guided the creation of our GE program and against which student performance should be measured. For example, EM 99-05, General Education Program, describes Critical Thinking as follows:

Critical Thinking (Sub-Area A3)

Students enrolled in courses meeting the critical thinking requirement must demonstrate

1. ability to distinguish between fact and judgment and between belief and knowledge;
2. ability to distinguish between correct and incorrect reasoning, including an understanding of the formal and informal fallacies in language and thought;
3. knowledge of and skill in using elementary methods and patterns of reasoning, including induction and deduction; and
4. ability to criticize, analyze, and advocate ideas with logical force within human discourse, both oral and written.

From these documents, the Task Force has derived a set of CT Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs). They are attached to this letter for your examination and feedback. If you have

suggestions on how these CT SLOs might be improved, please contact me or any member of the CT Task Force.

The most important step in this process is to recruit faculty interested in assessing CT in their GE classes. Last year's assessment varied from using existing assignments (Writing, Oral Communications) to embedding agreed upon questions in final exams (Quantitative Reasoning). In all cases, the tasks students were asked to perform were an integral part of the course, counted toward their grade and required little extra work on the part of the faculty teaching the course. In other words, we are trying to make the assessment process as unobtrusive as possible for both students and faculty.

We invite you to look over the CT SLOs and think about assignments in *your* GE course where these outcomes might be assessed. Does your course have critical reading and writing assignments where students practice these skills? Or perhaps you have assignments that, with a little "tweaking" might be made amenable to CT assessment? Are you interested and curious about how well our students do on the types of CT skills called for in these SLOs? If so, we would LOVE to hear from you *as soon as possible*.

If you are interested in having your course be a site for CT Assessment in GE in Spring 07, **please contact any member of the CT Task Force**. We can discuss the type of assignment you have in mind and explain in more detail how the assessment process will work. Last year's work produced some interesting and exciting results that are guiding ongoing discussions of GE. General Education is the *heart* of our students' common academic experience. We need to know how well we are succeeding in providing our students with the high-level cognitive skills needed to be effective, thoughtful decision-makers. Your participation in this effort will help us better understand the state of critical thinking among our students and guide campus GE reform efforts in the future.

Sincerely,

William M. Loker
Dean of Undergraduate Studies

For the Critical Thinking in GE Assessment Task Force:
Brooke Moore, Philosophy
Margaret Owens, College of Natural Sciences, AURA
Gwen Sheldon, Sociology, GEAC
Greg Tropea, Philosophy