Draft Student Learning Outcomes for Critical Thinking

We propose to assess the success of our GE program in teaching students to think critically. While definitions of "critical thinking" are many, our concept is circumscribed by two documents, EM 99-05 and EO 595, which govern our program. As implied in these documents, "critical thinking" refers to skills applicable to texts in which an issue or problem is addressed. It does not straightforwardly apply, for example, to artistic or expressive discourse. We therefore do not assume that the following learning outcomes are appropriate for every GE course. Nor do we assume the list is a comprehensive definition of "critical thinking."

The critical thinking skills we wish to assess fall into two categories, <u>comprehension skills</u> and <u>reasoning skills</u>. We have added text in *italics* that elaborates on each SLO.

<u>Comprehension</u>: In texts and other forms of discourse, students:

SLO 1. Can identify issues

Does the text address an issue or problem? If so, what is it?

SLO 2. Can distinguish between clarification, argument, persuasion and other ways of relating to an issue

How does the text address the issue or problem? Does it merely raise it? Does it seek to clarify it? Does it take a position on it? Does it attempt to persuade an audience of that position? Does it support or defend the position? Does it relate to the issue in another manner?

SLO 3. Can recognize the difference between conclusions and the arguments for them

If a conclusion has been reached, what is it? What arguments have been given for that conclusion?

SLO 4. Can distinguish between factual judgments and non-factual judgments

Is the issue a question of objective fact? Is it a normative question—i.e., a question calling for a value judgment? Is it purely subjective?

<u>Reasoning</u>: In texts and other forms of discourse, students:

SLO 5. Can distinguish between inductive reasoning and deductive reasoning

Do given arguments support their conclusion (induction) or do they demonstrate it (deduction)?

SLO 6. Can distinguish between truth and logic

Can students distinguish and assess the truth of a statement from the quality of the reasoning (i.e., logical structure) within which that statement may function? Can they, for example, avoid the errors of thinking that reasoning with one or more false statements entails bad logic? Or that reasoning that consists entirely of true statements entails good logic?

SLO 7. Can determine whether a consideration is relevant

Is the discussion relevant to the issue? Has rhetoric been offered in place of evidence?

SLO 8. Can recognize questionable assumptions and missing information

Have questionable assumptions been made? Is important information missing?

SLO 9. Can evaluate the credibility of statements and sources

Are sources and claims both credible?

SLO 10. Can identify ambiguity, vagueness, and common fallacies in reasoning

Are key passages vague, ambiguous, or otherwise unclear?

Are there mistakes in reasoning?