

## AGENDA

### Cal Poly Critical Thinking Advisory Group

May 27, 2016

9:10 – 10:00 pm; Bldg 1-301

#### Membership

Mary Pedersen, Bruno Giberti, Katie Tool (Academic Programs and Planning), Melinda Rojo (ITS), Amy Wiley (CLA), Robin Aimee-Mauray Parent (CTLT), Kaila Bussert (Library), Brenda Helmbrecht (GE), Katherine O'Clair (Library), Neal MacDougall (CAFES), Dawn Janke (Writing Rhetoric Center), Anya Goodman (CSM), Russell Alan White (Library), Rebekah Oulton (CENG), Debra Valencia-Laver (CLA), Adriana Popescu (Library), Tim Archie (Student Affairs), Patrick O'Sullivan (CTLT), Greg Starzyk (CAED), Linda Vanasupa (CENG), Jack Phelan (Assessment); Matt Luskey (CTLT)

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#### AGENDA

1. Approve [meeting notes from 5/6/16 \(PDF\)](#)
  2. Discussion: Critical Thinking Leadership
    - a. Seeking a co-chair
    - b. Formation of sub-committees around critical thinking goals (below)
  3. Discussion: Looking Ahead
    - a. What do we hope to accomplish next year?
      - i. The new assessment cycle begins Fall 2016
    - b. Setting the Agenda for Fall
      - i. Formation of a new learning community
      - ii. Addressing the critical thinking rubric
      - iii. Goals for developing (and assessing) critical thinking in 2016-17
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#### Meetings for 2016

Friday, Jan 29, 2015 — 10:00am to 11:00 am (Kennedy 505b)  
Friday, Feb 26, 2015 — 10:00am to 11:00 am (33 fisherscience)  
Friday May 6, 2016 — 9:00am to 10:00am (1-301)  
Friday May 27, 2016 — 9:00am to 10:00am (1-301)

# Critical Thinking Advisory Group

## GOALS:

### Campus Culture

- To develop a campus culture that embeds critical thinking into its very fibers and uses language that reflects critical thinking at every turn.
- To develop a more discipline-based, discipline-rich discussion and understanding of critical thinking on campus.
- To develop a more interdisciplinary, culturally inclusive critical thinking model. To retain its audience and to increase its credibility and educational efficacy, (Cal Poly) needs to validate, publicly and often, that critical thinking can be practiced and assessed across all disciplines.
- To re-evaluate how to assess students' critical thinking skills holistically.
- \*\*\*To focus on existing success stories of departments achieving coherent critical thinking for their students.
  1. Changing culture about assessment – more meaningful, holistic
    1. Change “assessment” to “appreciation” or “celebration”
    2. Exemplars from many disciplines (built into program review?) – self reflective component – asking depts. To add success stories. Identify where the competencies exist? How difficult was it to find them?
    3. We need to ask and collect these examples (samples with variety – written, tactile, informative, etc).

### Teaching and Faculty Development

- To develop a deeper faculty connection to critical thinking assignment design that leverages student understanding and transferability of CT skills across disciplines and between classes.
- To develop highly user-friendly, simple language regarding CT skills for faculty in general to use across disciplines and to encourage them to use that language within their own classes, with reference to their own projects and pedagogy.
- To develop guidelines for fostering (enhanced) critical thinking effectiveness among teaching faculty by developing institutional procedures that support such effectiveness. Consider such effectiveness as it connects to course load, distribution, and frequency as well as to service, engagement with the Cal Poly community, and professional development opportunities.
- To develop a program to foster interdisciplinary and team-teaching approaches to both CT and writing instruction. A pilot program that pairs interested faculty teaching upper-division and senior project seminars with interested, vetted CT instructors could help to complete the circle of research, writing, and CT begun in their A3 courses at a point where their ability to communicate discipline-specific content effectively becomes most critical to them and to future employers.
- Create a WAC program (as recommended by Dan Meltzer’s research)--a potential hub for

disseminating critical thinking competencies to both faculty and students as well as a potential means of fostering increased community, professional currency, and collegial respect across disciplines and faculty ranks.

- Provide direct support and encouragement for those who are incorporating and/or experimenting with CT in their curricula (mentorship).
- Distribute CT courses among all faculty more regularly; create a minimum standard frequency for teaching lower-division CT-focused courses for all faculty in order to aid in closing the circle at the upper levels of student coursework.
- Focus on how departments build their curriculum on the GE A3 classes in an explicit way
- Find ways to include lecturers in more service-oriented projects and lessen their active teaching load to strengthen community relationships, increase overall teaching effectiveness, and provide a more humane, respectful teaching environment for working and teaching for all faculty.
- Shift the focus of improvement to a department-level which treats the major curriculum as a whole (versus looking at individual courses in a vacuum)
- Establish guidelines for increasing lecturer-tenured faculty interactions with respect to curricular issues, especially those connected to foundation courses and CT.

### **Pedagogy and Practice**

- Create and disseminate standards for some consistent CT terminology applicable across courses, levels, and disciplines: this is key to helping students continue to recognize and develop those skills themselves, as they need explicit, recognizable terminology as well as modeling of the skills to which that terminology refers.
- Provide an easy, visual reference guide with examples of those principles across disciplines (an infographic, perhaps); ideal would be something for faculty (and students?) to pin up by their computers or even outside their doors, on their bulletin boards--and attractive enough that they would want to do so.
- To develop a set of reference points, faculty's own explicit conversancy with critical thinking models both within and beyond the writing context.
- To continue to support faculty to develop assignments that intentionally draw on students' critical thinking skills. We spent much of the last AY working on that question, but not sure we are continuing our focus there, even though assignment design was a factor in scoring student work. Badly framed and worded assignments can set students up to perform poorly.

### **Critical Thinking Resources**

- To build a campus archive/ clearinghouse for strong critical thinking assignments, tasks, and activities.
- To create rich, annotated exemplars of critical thinking assignments, tasks, and activities

- To foster more faculty collaboration and sharing of practices and ideas surrounding CT.
- Develop "bite-sized" strategies that are easy for faculty to implement in the classroom in order to gain a wider reach and more traction with CT across campus.

## Assessment

- To develop a well-defined plan and set of goals for the next review cycle built upon a solid understanding of the past cycle.
- To achieve buy-in at the department/program level of a campus-wide commitment to and assessment of critical thinking in every course
- Develop an approach to assessing implicit, material or performative products of critical thinking assignments as distinct from explicit, narrative products.
- Move away from crude college- or university-level measures -- they don't mean anything and can't be used in any practical way
- Share the results of the CT Assessment more widely with campus and determine ways to apply what we have learned from the assessment across campus.
- To reexamine recent critical thinking assessment components (the definition, rubric, assignments, methods, analysis, and conclusions) to determine what worked and what we might do differently.
- To create curricular maps for each College illustrating where students develop their critical thinking abilities (I, D, M); where are skills, disposition and application being explicitly taught?
- To locate where critical thinking is being explicitly or most effectively taught on campus and reach out to those instructors to share their pedagogy.

## QUESTIONS:

- How can the university build on the A3 coursework better to develop critical thinking?
- How does reflection increase one's critical thinking skills and how can we incorporate reflection into our curriculum more purposefully/meaningfully?
- How can we more clearly connect critical thinking to our Learn by Doing signature pedagogy?
- What are three tenets of critical thinking that can guide the university at all levels?
- What is the role of holistic neurological intelligence in informing our ability to "think" critically? The basis for this question is that there is research coming out of the neuroscience field that is pointing to the fact that we make decisions at unconscious levels prior to becoming aware of our "decision". We then "rationalize" the decision that we have made unconsciously. I'm wondering about how this neurological activity is informing what occurs to us as problematic behavior/decisions of our system.

- How can we foster a culture of sharing and exchange on campus that will produce more visible exemplars of critical thinking assignments, tasks, and activities?
- Which higher education institutions might serve as models for developing critical thinking assignments, tasks, and activities across the curriculum?
- Beyond writing, in what forms can critical thinking be identified and assessed?
- What outcomes does the CT leadership hope to achieve, and to what lengths are they willing to go to achieve them in terms of time, financial support, and outreach efforts?
- How and to what extent does the manner in which the university organizes, assigns, and schedules its 1) courses and 2) teaching force support the goals of critical thinking or demonstrate that the university has thought critically about not only efficiency but efficacy regarding those goals?
- How and to what extent do current guidelines and goals for critical thinking consider the fundamental role of emotion as both a predictor of bias in critical thinking effectiveness and assessment (inhibiting reasoning, critical thinking, and the objectivity required) and, at the same time, the role of emotion as a necessary and useful skill in considering audience, purpose, and end-user experience?
- How does our polytechnic identity impact our students' abilities to think critically and how we teach critical thinking in our curriculum?
- Cal Poly students are high achievers academically. Are they better prepared to think critically as a result?
- Critical thinking is not "one size fits all." How can it be applied in different disciplines?
- How can we, as a group, work together to bridge differences in understanding about CT at Cal Poly and then disseminate our findings to the campus?
- In what ways can we leverage the student engagement in CT (co-curricular, free-speech wall, diversity rallies) to help push for change in courses, programs, and campus attitudes?
- How can we assure that students continue to develop as critical thinkers throughout their time at Cal Poly? The data shows that students may be plateauing.
- What does critical thinking look like in different disciplines?
- If practice is the most essential ingredient in developing critical thinking as a "habit of mind", what are the most effective Critical Thinking practice techniques that can be implemented across disciplines campus-wide?
- What strategies can we implement that assures all Cal Poly students graduate with Critical Thinking as a "habit of mind"?

- Can course evaluation questions and exit surveys better capture students' critical thinking exposure, development and experiences?