**State Council for Higher Education for Virginia**

**Assessment of Competencies**

**CRITICAL THINKING**

**UNIVERSITY OF MARY WASHINGTON  
June 30, 2019**

**Definition.** The ability to subject one’s own and others’ ideas, arguments, assumptions, and evidence to careful and logical scrutiny in order to make an informed judgment, draw a sound conclusion, or solve a problem.

**Learning Outcomes**. Critical thinking proficiency was evaluated by measuring students’ abilities across five criteria as expressed in a speech delivered in a First-Year Seminar (FSEM).

**Accuracy:** The speaker presented the issue in a manner that demonstrated clarity, precision, and consistency of thought.

**Perspective:** student can examine topic in balanced and comprehensive manner representing different points of view and convey the complexities and nuances of issues related to it.

**Logic:** Student can present arguments in a logical fashion showing how one point led to another until a reasonable conclusion could be reached

**Fairness:** student can exhibit a healthy skepticism of any assertion or claim until evidence sufficient to support the validity of said assertion or claim could be advanced.

**Strategy:** The speaker crafted a conclusion appropriate for the purpose of the speech.

**Standard(s) for Proficiency.** Of three rating categories (i.e., *not proficient, proficient, strong*), at least 70% of students will receive an overall rating of *proficient* or *strong*. The overall rating is determined in the critical thinking assessment by receiving a rating of *proficient* or *strong* in at least four categories. The assessment provides a point of comparison to gauge the proficiencies of our first-year students in critical thinking.

**Description of Methodology Used to Gather Evidence of Proficiency.** Speeches given by students in various sections of the FSEM in Fall 2018 were video recorded and then viewed by faculty evaluators to assess proficiency in the categories listed above. Evaluated presentations were individual speeches. A total of 47 speeches were evaluated. Speeches were viewed online by 6 faculty evaluators from the University of Mary Washington. Each speech was evaluated by at least 2 faculty members. Individual faculty evaluations were compared with each other and, in cases where faculty team members did not agree on an overall rating, the speech was evaluated by additional faculty until agreement was reached on the overall rating. It is important to note that faculty evaluators were not apprised of the 70% proficiency target that had been set for our students, nor were they apprised of whether the speech being evaluated was part of the pre- or post-test; thus, their sole concern was to rate each speech on its individual merits.

**Critical Thinking Assessment Methodology.** The evaluation categories are the same as those used in the University assessments of critical thinking. The critical thinking criteria utilized herein were derived from those that typically appear in the critical thinking research literature. No attempt was made to utilize an exhaustive set of criteria; rather, a delimited set was developed for specific use in this proficiency assessment. A speech rated as *not proficient* on two or more criteria was deemed *not proficient* overall. If a speech was rated as *strong* in at least four criteria, the speech was deemed *strong* overall. Any rating pattern between these two end points yielded a rating of *proficient*. As some presentations did not provide sufficient opportunity for the student presenters to demonstrate critical thinking proficiency, faculty evaluators were also asked to evaluate whether or not the presentation should be included in the critical thinking assessment. A total of 3 of the student presentations in this assessment were deemed inappropriate for evaluation.

**Critical Thinking Summary.** The success rate of 93.62% meeting the critical thinking standard of *proficient* or *strong* exceeds the target of 70%, but is a bit lower than the post-test of 96.3%.

**Results of Critical Thinking Assessment**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Speeches rated *not proficient* | Speeches rated *proficient* | Speeches rated *strong* | Speeches meeting standard of *proficient* or *strong* |
| Speeches evaluated | 3 | 44 | 0 | 44 |
| Percent of total | 6.38% | 93.62% | 0% | 93.62% |

The “results by category” table looks at the number of *not proficient*, *proficient*, and *strong* ratings given in each of the 117 individual faculty ratings from presentations deemed appropriate for inclusion in the critical thinking assessment. While the overall ratings found that our students performed well, with more than 93% meeting the target, a closer look at the separate categories demonstrates that a higher percentage of students are not meeting proficiency expectations in individual categories. Our students performed best in the “Accuracy” and “Perspective” categories, with a *proficient* or *strong* rating of more than 95%. Our students did not perform as well in the “Logic,” “Fairness,” or “Strategy” categories, with *not proficient* scores between 5.98-8.55%.

**Results of Critical Thinking Assessment by Category (from 117 total faculty evaluations)**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Accuracy | Perspective | Logic | Fairness | Strategy |
| Not Proficient | 2.56% (3) | 4.27% (5) | 5.98% (7) | 5.98% (7) | 8.55% (10) |
| Proficient | 85.47% (100) | 81.2% (95) | 69.23% (81) | 86.32% (101) | 76.07% (89) |
| Strong | 11.97% (14) | 14.53% (17) | 24.79% (29) | 7.698% (9) | 15.38% (18) |

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