



ASSESSMENT UPDATE

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Assessment website:
www.eiu.edu/~assess

Important Dates

- January 31, "Fostering and Assessing Students' Cognitive Skills," MLK Union, University Ballroom, 9:00 a.m.-noon.
- April 13-16, North Central Association's annual conference, Chicago

TASKS

CRITICAL THINKING DATA RESULTS

In 2001-2002 AY, senior seminar faculty administered the *TASKS in Critical Thinking Exam* to over 800 students to assess their critical thinking skills. This short-answer/essay test was scored by ETS-trained and selected readers. Three different TASKS exams were given: "Myth" (humanities); "Conland and Teresa" (social science); and "UFOs" (natural science). Approximately 270 students completed each exam.

The quantitative and qualitative data indicate that Eastern's students' critical thinking skills could be significantly improved. The quantitative data is based

on a 6-point Likert scale (see table).

This scale was applied to three larger categories of critical thinking skills: inquiry, analysis, and communication. Eastern's students scored better overall in communication skills than in the other categories. The table below gives the percentage of students who scored at each level on each skill.

The few students who received scores of 5 and 6 could think through the problem and come up with a solution. These students could also enlighten a third party about an issue. Four is the core

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Proficiency Level	Inquiry	Analysis	Communication
6 Superior	0%	1%	0%
5 Exceeds	3%	5%	4%
4 Fully Proficient	34%	26%	42%
3 Some Proficiency	29%	32%	30%
2 Limited Proficiency	20%	22%	14%
1 Not Proficient	9%	10%	3%
Omit/Off Topic	4%	4%	6%

CRITICAL THINKING WORKSHOP

CASL has invited Dr. Ruth L. Green to lead a workshop in assessing critical thinking. "Fostering and Assessing Students' Cognitive Skills" will be given on **Friday, January 31 from 9:00 a.m. -noon** in the University Ballroom of the MLK Union.

Dr. Green is currently working as a Research Fellow with the Center of

Excellence in Leadership of Learning (CELL) at the University of Indianapolis. She earned both her master's and doctoral degrees in community psychology from North Carolina State University.

Dr. Green has previously worked as the coordinator/director of assessment at

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CRITICAL THINKING CONT.

score, which is the target for the exam. A 4 indicates that students understood the questions and their responses were correct and complete. Students who scored a 2 or 3 could not think through a problem; they tended to become lost in information and trying to understand it and did not know what to do to accomplish a task. Students who scored a 1 did not understand the problem or issues; they went off on tangents.

In addition to the ETS-prepared information given in the table, CASL also gathered qualitative information concerning students' exam performance from the ETS readers. Readers reported that many Eastern students did not answer the questions correctly or did not provide the information that the questions

required. This suggests a problem with following directions. Students also tended to go off on tangents involving personal, religious or political agendas and had difficulty supporting decisions or conclusions with evidence. Some respondents failed to use the data/evidence provided and instead created their own examples or data.

A number of problems with interpreting tables and graphs were evident in student responses. Many students appeared unaccustomed to the skills evaluated on the exam. For example, making relationships, drawing conclusions, and identifying whether or not evidence was credible were skills that proved difficult for the majority of examinees. Some exam questions asked students to organize

what they discovered and bring together information to draw a conclusion, but many students just repeated previous information rather than adding to it as the TASKS went on. Some answers that depended on understanding vocabulary and terms that related to math operations were difficult for students.

The readers speculated that some students did not take the exam seriously, so the results did not show their best efforts at critical thinking. However, the results do indicate that Eastern has work to do in the area of critical thinking. As a first step, CASL has invited Dr. Ruth Green to give a critical thinking workshop. (See the story beginning on page one.)

SPRING FORUM CONT.

North Carolina State University and George Mason University (assistant director).

She has taught in higher education, conducted research and written on topics related to the design and effectiveness of educational programs, directed campus-wide faculty development efforts and worked as a consultant on a variety of educational programs.

This workshop will actively engage participants in a series of activities that focus on better understanding goals, models, and barriers related to students' development of critical thinking skills. Classroom and curricula learning experiences, structures, and applications associated with students' development of critical thinking skills will be addressed. Participants will all identify "next

steps" at the classroom, curricular, and institutional levels related to EIU students' attainment of desired cognitive skills and assessing those skills.

Objectives for the workshop include:

- To review EIU's definition of critical thinking and to consider major findings from relevant assessments of critical thinking;
- To identify barriers to students' attaining the desired levels of critical thinking;
- To explore theoretical models to aid in promoting cognitive development;

- To identify effective learning activities to foster critical thinking skills;
- To identify curricula activities and structures that contribute to students' cognitive development;
- To discuss "next steps" for attaining and assessing learning outcomes related to critical thinking at Eastern.

Workshop participants will engage in small group work as well as large group discussion of issues related to critical thinking.

For additional information and a schedule of the workshop, go to www.eiu.edu/~assess.