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1. **“Writing into Thinking: Developing Web-Based Resources to Support Both Teachers and Students with Their Struggles in Writing-Intensive (1C) Courses”**
2. **Purpose of the Project:** Our project is to develop a website providing continuing support for teachers who are designing, teaching, and assessing writing-intensive (1C) courses. Valley Writing Project (VWP) participants have frequently voiced a need for such materials. The last assessment report for 1C courses (2002) concluded that a sizeable minority of students fell short of acceptable college writing, and “strongly urge[d] the university community to foster discussion of our common objectives and the challenges we face in enhancing the writing skills and critical thinking of our students” (p. 9). Our ultimate goal is to create an umbrella of support, an interactive resource for current and prospective teachers to facilitate the teaching of 1C courses by, for example, posting “best practices” of MSU instructors who could be contacted for further advice and by ensuring that the difficulties of teaching “writing-intensively” can be seen (literally) as a collaborative endeavor shared by all.

The 2006-07 MSU Undergraduate Bulletin defines critical thinking as “(a) gather[ing] and analyz[ing] information in ways useful for solving problems; (b) weigh[ing] evidence for and against hypotheses; (c) recogniz[ing], construct[ing], and evaluat[ing] arguments; (d) apply[ing] appropriate critical and evaluative principles to texts, documents, or works—one’s own or others’—in oral, visual, or written mediums.” These skills are directly targeted in 1C courses where students are “to use writing to explore ...the questions, values and analytical or critical thinking methods used in the discipline.” We propose to significantly improve support for teachers as they develop writing assignments that will effectively develop and strengthen their students’ critical thinking skills.

3. **Description of Project:** The applicants will hire a person with the technological skills to build the new website to support teachers and students involved in 1C courses. This website manager and the grant applicants will interact to develop a design and methodology for organizing materials. Those materials will be funneled to specific categories, not restricted to: (1) types of writing assignments for stretching students’ abilities at critical thinking; (2) methods of assessing student writing; (3) strategies for assisting student research; (4) strategies for assisting students in re-writing and editing; (5) access to established websites supporting writing and critical thinking; (6) access to established websites delineating discipline-specific writing and critical thinking strategies; (7) methods for engaging students in peer review of drafts; (8) rubrics for evaluating student writing; (9) examples of assignments developed by MSU 1C instructors in specific courses, complete with outcomes and objectives, “tool boxes” of supportive materials for students, and assessment mechanisms. The web site will provide an interactive feature to facilitate communication with 1C instructors, seek input concerning their needs, and request them to submit materials from their

classes that would be useful to other 1C instructors. The website will be supplemented with materials implemented in the grant applicants' courses to be taught during spring semester 2007, through materials developed by the presenters of the Valley Writing Workshop team for the December 2007 "Writing Intensively" workshop, and through the posting of faculty projects from that workshop. Thus, the website will represent a continually-updated and growing resource.

4. **Assessment of Project:** This semester, the project will use assessment to establish a base line and to help develop website materials: (1) a survey of December's VWP participants regarding critical thinking skills needed within their disciplines, common student difficulties, and their uses of writing to improve critical thinking; (2) a pre- and post-survey of students in several 1C classes during spring semester asking them to identify critical thinking skills related to the course's discipline; (3) a questionnaire to participants in three previous "Writing Intensive" VWP workshops to determine the usefulness of VWP materials in their courses; and (4) formal assessments, during spring semester, of three courses— Humanities 282W; English 328; and an upper-level "Victimology" courses. In the longer term, we will use (5) a counter and sign-in feature on the website to determine frequency of use; (6) periodic focus groups, and (7) continued gathering and comparison of information to base line surveys.
5. **Project dissemination:** Results from the project will be disseminated through: (1) the website we create; (2) continued "Writing Intensively" workshops staged by the Valley Writing Project (the next one to occur in December 2007); (3) a university-wide colloquium or development day workshop in January 2008 with the participation of instructors from 1C courses taught during spring semester 2007; (4) a presentation at a professional writing or writing-across-the-curriculum conference during the 2007-08 academic year.
6. **Support of Department/University Goals:** By providing support for improved teaching of critical thinking through writing, this project speaks directly to the University goals of investing "in the professional development of all members of the University Community" and of preparing "students for careers and life-long learning by providing clearly defined general education" and undergraduate programs.