

IPESL Final Report

1. Title:

Infusing Critical Thinking Throughout SPEE 100: Fundamentals of Speech Communication

Participants:

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2. Purpose (1-2 sentences):

The purpose of our project is to incorporate critical thinking concepts and strategies throughout the SPEE 100 curriculum during the entire semester. We are exploiting the intrinsic link between communication and critical thinking.

3. Results:

We determined early on that our best option would be to work towards a full integration of critical thinking concepts and tools rather than hoping to have a positive impact through incremental change. During the Spring 2007 term, we did include a unit on critical thinking into the course. The assessment we conducted, although limited, confirmed that piecemeal approaches would be unlikely to accomplish our goals relative to the development of critical thinking.

Throughout the remainder of Spring 2007, we implemented an approach to teaching SPEE 100 which we believe will fully exploit the intrinsic link between communication and critical thinking:

- We updated and revised course materials (readings, activities, lectures, quizzes and exams, etc.) to more closely connect the concepts and tools essential for effective communication with those required for critical thinking.
- We developed a Guide to Rating Critical Thinking with which we plan to assess the critical thinking of our students. We adapted the “Universal Intellectual Standards” articulated by Richard Paul and Linda Elders in *The Miniature Guide to Critical Thinking and Concepts Tools* and the matrix format developed by Washington State University’s “Guide to Rating Critical & Integrative Thinking.” Our guide has been adapted to assess both oral and written communication and will be used in grading assignments in SPEE 100 and made available for use in assessing critical thinking in both writing and speaking throughout the department.
- We developed a Training Program for Graduate Teaching Assistants who will instruct students in SPEE 100. We believe that in order to fully exploit the intrinsic link between communication and critical thinking we need to “teach the teachers” to not only think critically themselves but to how to put critical thinking at the forefront of their teaching.

4. Issues/Challenges:

The challenges we faced in the project centered around two themes. The first challenge is the number of students we are trying to reach. SPEE 100: Fundamentals of speech communication is a General Education, Category 1C requirement at Minnesota State University Mankato. Therefore, we serve approximately 750 students a semester in a lecture/recitation format. While most instructors may have 25-35 students in their classroom, we have worked to find ways to reach all 750 students. In order to do so, our project involves lectures, quizzes with essay format, and specific assignments students must complete during the semester. Our goal is to weave critical thinking throughout the course in order to make it become an almost invisible force in the classroom.

The second challenge involves the number of instructors who serve this particular course. The students have two teachers—a full-time faculty member in the department of speech communication and a graduate teaching assistant in the Department. Furthermore, the course is served by a basic course director. The Basic Course Director is in charge of the training and development of the teaching assistants, creating course assignments, creating a common syllabus/course calendar and insuring consistency throughout the 25 sections of the course. Therefore, although we have created mandatory lectures and assignments engaging critical thinking exercises, we have to have some “blind faith” in our GTAs in terms of how the message is reinforced during the recitation courses. A workshop has been designed to help GTAs understand the importance of weaving critical thinking into their courses as well as to introduce them to the concept itself. GTAs have also been given training during GTA summer orientation that included how to present each assignment to the students as well as how critical thinking is infused in the assignments they will be grading during the SPEE 100 course.

5. Dissemination:

- A report on the project has been accepted for presentation at the Communication and Theatre Association of Minnesota (CTAM) conference in September 2007. The CTAM membership is composed of communication instructors from secondary and post-secondary institutions in Minnesota.
- We are preparing a manuscript for submission to the *CTAM Journal*. The journal has a section dedicated to instructional practices and is an appropriate publication outlet.
- We are preparing a submission on the project to the Basic Communication Course conference. The BCC is composed of basic course directors from across the country.