



## A STUDY IN CRITICAL THINKING - COURSES FOR FACULTY



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When critical thinking is discussed, faculty members agree that it is essential in every discipline and most wish that their students were better at it. Sometimes we wonder why they are not. Perhaps, we have taken the concept of critical thinking or critical reasoning for granted and have assumed that our students would just “get it.” Maybe we have not emphasized critical reasoning as frequently as we could in our classes, or maybe we have lost track of the elements that constitute critical thinking. In any case, as a learning-centered college, priding ourselves on the quality of education that we deliver, we are faced with the task of improving our students’ critical thinking ability.

To emphasize the importance of critical thinking, academic year 2004-2005 has been named “The Year of Critical Thinking.” During the year, we will have many professional development opportunities in a variety of venues to examine our own grounding in critical thinking and determine more effective ways to embed it in courses. To provide a common understanding of critical reasoning concepts and classroom applications, two self-paced online courses are being offered to faculty and administrators, for the first time. Dr. Alicia Juarrero will be the facilitator for both courses: “A Study in Critical Thinking-Part 1” during fall semester 2004, and “A Study in Critical Thinking-Part 2” during spring 2005. The courses are offered as pass/fail, and Alicia has promised to be flexible and accommodating. Additionally, Dr. Zdravkovich has offered to pay for half of the price of the book for faculty who sign up for the courses. These courses will provide a significant contribution to professional development for tenure and promotion, as well as personal enrichment.

A Study in Critical Thinking-Part 1 emphasizes the role of logical arguments in daily life and conversation and across various disciplines. This online course will begin with an introduction to basic concepts including critical reasoning as deduction and induction, validity, soundness, strength and cogency of arguments, and techniques to prove the invalidity of an argument. Because ambiguous and equivocal meaning are at the root of many student errors in critical reasoning, differences in the connotation and denotation of words will be explored, before going on to understand their various kinds of definitions. A major portion of the course will focus on informal fallacies, including those we commit most often: fallacies of relevance, weak induction, presumption, ambiguity, etc. The course will conclude with a section on categorical reasoning, including problems commonly encountered concerning the quality, quantity, and distribution of terms in such propositions, techniques for determining truth or falsity of converted, obverted, and contraposed sentences, and the validity or invalidity of syllogisms. A critical thinking and writing module will permit faculty to determine the way they intend to emphasize and evaluate critical reasoning in their classes.

“A Study in Critical Thinking-Part 2” focuses, for the most part, on inductive reasoning. Completing Part 1 is recommended before taking Part 2. Topics covered in Part 2 include the role analogy plays in legal and moral reasoning, techniques for determining causality, and the difference between valid reasoning and superstition. A section on probability and statistical reasoning will focus on what the informed citizen (not the scientist or the mathematician) needs to know to make intelligent judgements about current events. Faculty can use a critical thinking and writing module to determine how to use and evaluate critical reasoning in their classes.

To sign up for the first course and reserve your book, or to receive a detailed outline of the courses, e-mail Verna Teasdale at [vteasdale@pgcc.edu](mailto:vteasdale@pgcc.edu). Registration is on a first come, first serve basis.