Richard Bland College
Quality Enhancement Plan

Enhancing Critical and Higher-Order Thinking Skills at RBC
# Table of Contents

Table of Contents .................................................................................................................................................................................. 2
I. Executive Summary ............................................................................................................................................................................. 3
II. Process Used to Develop the QEP: .................................................................................................................................................. 4
III. Topic Identification and QEP Development Timeline ............................................................................................................. 5
   III.A: The Topic Selection Process ............................................................................................................................................ 5
   III.B: Establishing Definitions and Learning Outcomes ............................................................................................................. 7
   III.C: Developing the Plan Itself ..................................................................................................................................................... 8
IV. Literature Review .............................................................................................................................................................................. 10
   IV.A: How is Critical Thinking Defined? .................................................................................................................................. 10
   IV.B: How is Critical Thinking Measured? .................................................................................................................................. 13
   IV.C: How is Critical Thinking Developed? .................................................................................................................................. 16
   IV.D: Models for Faculty Development ....................................................................................................................................... 18
   IV.E: The AAC&U VALUE Rubric and the Multi-State Collaborative.......................................................................................... 19
V. Definitions and Student Learning Outcomes ............................................................................................................................... 21
VI: The Five-Year Plan: Aspects and Actions .................................................................................................................................... 23
VII. The Five-Year Plan: A Timeline................................................................................................................................................... 25
VIII. Organizational Structure: ......................................................................................................................................................... 32
IX. Resources: ..................................................................................................................................................................................... 34
X. Assessment of the QEP ............................................................................................................................................................... 35
APPENDICES ................................................................................................................................................................................. 41
I. Executive Summary

Mission Statement: The Richard Bland College QEP will focus on improving the critical thinking skills of its students by promoting curricular and pedagogical innovations in the classroom, better assessing students' higher-order thinking and metacognitive abilities, and developing a college culture of engaged reflection and dialog, with the aim of better preparing its graduates for baccalaureate study and beyond.

This intensive focus on critical thinking and the associated pedagogical innovations inspired by the QEP will directly support the College's stated mission "[t]o prepare students for university transfer through academically rigorous programs grounded in the liberal arts tradition of William & Mary and to expand access to college credentials through strategic partnerships, specialized programming, and scalable innovation." These new curricular efforts also support several specific goals of the RBC-19 Strategic Plan, including to “facilitate and inspire learning through proven and innovative teaching and support methodologies”, to “modify existing and create new curricula to provide the right and best portfolio of academic program offerings”, and to “serve as a beta site for innovative solutions in higher education instruction, academic support and management.”

The selection of “critical thinking” as the QEP topic was informed by a multi-phase process that involved faculty, staff, and students at the college. The topic represents a strongly-identified instructional need at RBC. It was one of a small number of topics that 100% of faculty survey respondents ranked either “important” or “very important”, and it received a clear majority vote in the final topic selection ballots.

The QEP Task Force worked with academic departments and the Instructional Programs and Curriculum Committee to draft language for student learning outcomes related to critical thinking. The QEP’s five learning outcomes encompass such skills as clearly articulating a question or issue, evaluating sources of information, constructing and critiquing logical arguments, and synthesizing information in order to draw informed conclusions.

The five-year QEP plan includes initiatives and actions related to professional development, student assessment, critical thinking pedagogy, course and curriculum design, student learning experiences inside the classroom, and campus culture and events outside the classroom. The execution of the QEP will be guided by the QEP Steering Committee (QEPSC), which will be made up of faculty and staff and chaired by an RBC faculty member. The QEPSC will report to the Provost and work alongside the Institutional Effectiveness Committee in its role of overseeing the SACS reaffirmation process.
II. Process Used to Develop the QEP:

In January of 2017, the President of the College appointed a five-member QEP Task Force. This task force was charged with overseeing the initial topic selection and development of learning outcomes for the QEP. The task force membership included three full-time faculty members, the Associate Dean of Student Success, and one student representative from the Student Assembly. (See Appendix E.)

Beginning in February of 2017, the QEP Task Force began soliciting input from faculty in each academic department on possible QEP topics for the college. During the selection process, discussions of the QEP topic took place within several bodies that are charged in some way with the ongoing evaluation and development of curricular programs at the college, including the Faculty Assembly, the Instructional Programs and Curriculum Committee, the Institutional Effectiveness Committee, and individual academic departments. Once an initial list of possible topics was compiled, the QEP Task Force conducted surveys of faculty, staff, and students in order to narrow the list further. These surveys were administered with the cooperation of the Director of Institutional Research, and the results were presented to the Faculty Assembly at each stage of the process.

The development of student learning outcomes began with a Faculty Forum organized by the QEP Task Force. During this forum, the task force presented various definitions of critical thinking and several lists of potential learning outcomes to faculty for discussion. After this open forum, the QEP Task Force worked with the Instructional Programs and Curriculum Committee to create a draft list of learning outcomes. This draft was released to department Chairs for discussion in faculty departmental meetings, and after a round of feedback, the Faculty Assembly voted to approve the adoption of the resulting outcome language.

In the Spring of 2018, the QEP Task Force, which had been responsible for the identification of the QEP topic and learning outcomes, was expanded and rebranded as the QEP Steering Committee (QEPSC). The QEPSC included faculty from each department, two student representatives, a staff member from the learner mentor program, an instructional design librarian, and the Director of Institutional Research. The steering committee was tasked with the development of the actual 5-year plan, building from the efforts of the initial task force. A draft overview of the 5-year plan was presented to faculty at the end of the Spring 2018 semester, and approved by a unanimous vote of the Faculty Assembly. The full QEP plan was finalized by the Steering Committee during the summer of 2018.

As of August 2018, the charge of the QEPSC was changed from developing of the QEP to the actual oversight and execution of the 5 year plan. The Chair of the Steering Committee serves as the de facto “director” of the QEP, and reports directly to the Provost.
III. Topic Identification and QEP Development Timeline

This section describes the timeline for the development of the QEP. It is divided into subsections on the identification of the topic, the establishment of definitions and outcomes, and the development of the five-year plan itself.

III.A: The Topic Selection Process

In February of 2017, the Richard Bland College QEP Task Force began soliciting input from faculty in each academic department on possible QEP topics for the college. The group combined this feedback with research conducted by its members on potential QEP topics from SACS materials and from work done at other colleges and universities. The result was a list of 16 potential QEP topics that were deemed by the task force as worthy goals that both supported the educational mission of the college and addressed current areas of need.

The QEP Task Force developed an online survey that was approved by the administration and the reaffirmation team and distributed to faculty and staff. Respondents were asked to rate each potential topic area on a scale from “not at all important” to “very important” areas of focus at the college. Space was also provided for write-in suggestions and comments.

The President of the college sent out a personal email urging broad participation in the survey. Responses gathered from this initial survey were used to create a short-list of QEP topics that had strong support from the faculty and staff. This final short-list included:

- Critical Thinking and Problem Solving (100% ranked “Important”, 74% ranked “Very Important”)
- Writing Across the Curriculum (97% ranked “Important”, 67% ranked “Very Important”)
- Information Literacy (97% ranked “Important”, 59% ranked “Very Important”)
- Student Research Skills (95% ranked “Important”, 61% ranked “Very Important”)

In late March of 2017, the QEP Task Force shared the results of the initial survey with the full faculty, and members of the group led discussions about these topics in several venues — including the faculty assembly, student assembly, and departmental and staff-team meetings. Feedback at this stage was important in developing definitions and shared language around each of these four potential topic areas in preparation for a final faculty vote.

A written survey (see Appendix B) was submitted to 300+ students, asking them to rank the four QEP topics in order of importance. (181 students responded.) A similar ballot was distributed to faculty during a meeting of the Faculty Assembly, asking for a “ranked choice” vote among the four shortlisted topics.
The topic of “critical thinking” received a majority of votes in both the student and the faculty ballots, and was the clear winner using multiple ranked-preference vote-counting methods. On April 17, 2017, the QEP Task Force submitted the final choice of “Critical Thinking” as the QEP topic to the college administration and the reaffirmation team.

Table 1: QEP Topic Selection Milestones

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic Selection Milestones</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>February 13, 2017</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>February 14, 2017</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>February 20, 2017</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>February 21, 2017</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>March 3, 2017</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>March 15, 2017</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>March 22, 2017</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>March 24, 2017</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>March 25, 2017</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>April 10-14, 2017</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>April 11, 2017</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>April 17, 2017</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>April 17, 2017</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
III.B: Establishing Definitions and Learning Outcomes

Once the topic was selected, the QEP Task Force engaged with the educational literature in an attempt to identify definitions of critical thinking that would guide the development of the QEP learning outcomes. Our review of the educational literature revealed a number of definitions of “critical thinking.” While they all differed somewhat in their details, there were some clear themes that emerged. In October of 2017, the QEP Task Force organized a faculty forum to discuss these definitions of critical thinking and to consider how they relate to our student learning goals as an institution. Rather than adopting a narrow one-size-fits-all “definition” of critical thinking, the faculty settled on an approach that affirmed a commitment to the values and attitudes outlined in the Delphi Report. This lead to a resolution to accept the “habits of mind” listed in Section V.A below as the overarching goals of the QEP.

Next, the QEP Task Force brainstormed a list of potential student learning outcomes. These early draft outcomes were partly informed by our initial surveys of the critical thinking outcomes of other institutions – in this case, NC State’s QEP was particularly helpful. They were also informed by the educational literature on defining and assessing critical thinking.

Student learning outcomes associated with critical thinking might include the following types of skills, dispositions, and habits of mind:

Students are able to...

- Draw logical conclusions that are supported by the informed evaluation of evidence
- Construct, articulate, and support their own arguments using evidence, reason, logic, etc.
- Evaluate and critique the arguments and reasoning of others using those same criteria
- Formulate questions, pose problems, and present issues clearly and precisely
- Evaluate sources of information critically, and analyze them in terms of reliability, biases, relevance, etc.
- Recognize multiple points of view, analyze a question/problem from multiple perspectives, appreciate the role of context, and acknowledge and accept ambiguity
- Synthesize information from multiple sources and generate new ideas
- Solve novel problems using unique or creative approaches/methods
- Evaluate their solutions to problems, test their conclusions, and explore their implications and consequences
- Exhibit empathy and the ability to acknowledge the value of others’ ideas, perspectives, and experiences
- Reflect on their own thinking processes; evaluate their understanding and gaps in their own knowledge; and identify assumptions, prejudices, and biases in their own thinking.
- Demonstrate the ability to reflect on their own intellectual development and to learn from mistakes/failures
- Think creatively, exhibit insight and originality, and take “intellectual risks”
- Present and defend an argument or line of reasoning clearly in their written work, specifically
- Articulate and defend an argument or line of reasoning in an oral argument, presentation, or debate
• Support an argument by making use of quantitative reasoning, data, and statistical arguments

In October of 2017, this preliminary list of potential learning outcomes was presented to faculty during a Faculty Forum organized by the QEP Task Force. Faculty feedback and suggestions gathered from this discussion were used to further refine and narrow this list. The QEP Task Force then organized a joint meeting with members of the Instructional Programs and Curriculum Committee to draft a list of student learning outcomes that reflected those aspects of critical thinking that were most representative of the faculty’s goals and concerns. After one more round of editing by the QEP Task Force, the process resulted in the concise list of learning outcomes found in section V.C below. This list of learning outcomes was presented to the Faculty Assembly for a vote and was approved by the body in December of 2017.

III.C: Developing the Plan Itself

Once the learning outcomes were established and approved, the QEP Task Force developed a list of actions and processes that could potentially be part of the structure of a critical thinking QEP at Richard Bland College. These early brainstorming lists were largely informed by our initial surveys of the critical thinking QEPs of other institutions.

Our preliminary list of concrete actions that might be undertaken in order to work towards the goal of improving students’ critical and higher-order thinking skills included:

• Establishing a campus-wide dialogue on the meaning and the importance of critical thinking that involves faculty, students, and administration. (Perhaps during the QEP development process.)
• Surveying the existing landscape of course learning outcomes at the college in order to determine where and how critical thinking and other higher-order thinking skills are currently being assessed in our courses.
• Working to provide more opportunities (and more intentional opportunities) for students to exercise and demonstrate their critical thinking abilities in the classroom and in their coursework.
• Developing new common shared language for learning outcomes and rubrics that will be implemented throughout the college in order to assess critical thinking consistently across the academic subject areas and disciplines.
• Researching and implementing existing established and validated assessment tools in order to measure students’ critical thinking skills and other academic proficiencies. (MAPP, CAT, NSSE, etc.)
• Developing our own direct and indirect measures of student success in the area of critical thinking.
- Providing professional development opportunities and training specifically designed to improve faculty pedagogy in the area of teaching critical thinking skills.
- Providing professional development opportunities and training specifically designed to improve faculty assessment practices in the area of critical thinking skills.
- Identifying/appointing Faculty Fellows (or some such identifier) as a group responsible for development and delivery of innovative pedagogies focused on critical and higher-order thinking skills.
- Identifying certain specific courses that will serve as pilot courses for the initial implementation of the QEP ideas and methods.
- Creating new courses that are specifically designed, at least in part, to help students develop their higher-order thinking skills. (Perhaps beginning with first-year students, the Honors course, etc.)
- Identifying particular pedagogical tools and assessment best practices (Problem-Based Learning, capstone experiences, etc.) that are the most appropriate and potentially-beneficial at RBC.
- Continually collecting data on the activities above in order to measure and evaluate the effectiveness of these actions and inform our decisions about best practices moving forward.

In January of 2018, the QEP Task Force identified QEPs from 12 other institutions that focused on critical thinking, and came up with a graphic organizer to categorize the efforts of those institutions into four areas – Institutional Processes, Professional Development, Student Experience, and Assessment. The group surveyed the landscape of QEPs that we had identified as similar in scope to our own, and tabulated the major activities of their plans using this organizational scheme. Using the results of this process, the task force developed a more refined list of potential “actions and aspects” around which we might build our QEP.

In February of 2018, The QEP Steering Committee developed a survey that was presented to faculty and academic staff. (See Appendix C.) The survey asked them to rank potential QEP efforts and actions in the four areas describe above as being “worthwhile components of the QEP.” Based on the responses to this survey, the QEP Steering Committee created a draft overview that summarized the activities that would define the scope of our QEP. That overview was presented to the Faculty Assembly for initial discussion, and then refined based on the feedback received into a final draft overview that was approved by the Faculty Assembly as the document that would guide the development of the five-year plan.

The QEPSC worked during the summer of 2018 to create a detailed 5-year plan and to complete this document describing the QEP in depth. On August 24th, the Faculty Assembly held a vote to approve the final QEP document, which passed with a vote of 32 to 0.
IV. Literature Review

This section provides an overview of our investigations of the educational literature on the topic of critical thinking. It is divided into three subsections on the topics of defining, assessing, and developing critical thinking skills.

IV.A: How is Critical Thinking Defined?

In one of the earliest attempts to formally define and develop critical thinking, Edward Glaser described three elements essential to critical thinking:

1. an attitude of being disposed to consider in a thoughtful way the problems and subjects that come within the range of one's experiences
2. knowledge of the methods of logical inquiry and reasoning, and
3. some skill in applying those methods.

Glaser continues...

Critical thinking calls for a persistent effort to examine any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the evidence that supports it and the further conclusions to which it tends. It also generally requires ability to recognize problems, to find workable means for meeting those problems, to gather and marshal pertinent information, to recognize unstated assumptions and values, to comprehend and use language with accuracy, clarity, and discrimination, to interpret data, to appraise evidence and evaluate arguments, to recognize the existence (or non-existence) of logical relationships between propositions, to draw warranted conclusions and generalizations, to put to test the conclusions and generalizations at which one arrives, to reconstruct one's patterns of beliefs on the basis of wider experience, and to render accurate judgments about specific things and qualities in everyday life.

(Edward M. Glaser, An Experiment in the Development of Critical Thinking, Teacher's College, Columbia University, 1941)

Despite being a very early work on the topic, this division of critical thinking into an attitude/disposition + knowledge/methods + skill/application represents a useful construct to keep in mind as we began to think about creating student learning outcomes that break down the notion of critical thinking into accessible (and assessable) pieces.
A more contemporary definition of critical thinking was presented by Michael Scriven & Richard Paul at the 8th Annual International Conference on Critical Thinking and Education Reform:

*Critical thinking is the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action. In its exemplary form, it is based on universal intellectual values that transcend subject matter divisions: clarity, accuracy, precision, consistency, relevance, sound evidence, good reasons, depth, breadth, and fairness.*

*It entails the examination of those structures or elements of thought implicit in all reasoning: purpose, problem, or question-at-issue; assumptions; concepts; empirical grounding; reasoning leading to conclusions; implications and consequences; objections from alternative viewpoints; and frame of reference. Critical thinking — in being responsive to variable subject matter, issues, and purposes — is incorporated in a family of interwoven modes of thinking, among them: scientific thinking, mathematical thinking, historical thinking, anthropological thinking, economic thinking, moral thinking, and philosophical thinking.*

While this statement is a bit semicolon-laden, and not particularly elegant or easy to digest, it captures many of the features that most educators put forward as elements of critical thinking.

One of the most oft-cited sources for defining critical thinking in the context of education is the “Delphi Report”, assembled by a panel of 46 experts convened by the American Philosophical Association to engage in an iterative panel process designed to establish a consensus on the role of critical thinking in education and assessment. (See, for example, Critical Thinking: A Statement of Expert Consensus for Purposes of Educational Assessment and Instruction by Peter A. Facione) Part of the Delphi Report’s consensus statement on CT reads:

*“We understand critical thinking to be purposeful, self-regulatory judgment which results in interpretation, analysis, evaluation, and inference, as well as explanation of the evidential, conceptual, methodological, criteriological, or contextual considerations upon which that judgment is based. CT is essential as a tool of inquiry. As such, CT is a liberating force in education and a powerful resource in one’s personal and civic life. While not synonymous with good thinking, CT is a pervasive and self-rectifying human phenomenon. The ideal critical thinker is habitually inquisitive, well-informed, trustful of reason, open-minded, flexible, fair-minded in evaluation, honest in facing personal biases, prudent in making judgments, willing to reconsider, clear about issues, orderly in complex matters, diligent in seeking relevant information, reasonable in the selection of criteria, focused in inquiry, and persistent in seeking results which are as precise as the subject and the circumstances of inquiry permit. Thus, educating good critical thinkers means working toward this ideal. It combines developing CT skills with nurturing those dispositions which consistently yield useful insights and which are the basis of a rational and democratic society.”*
The Delphi Report also identifies six core cognitive skills and associated sub-skills associated with critical thinking:

1. Interpretation (Categorization, Decoding Significance, Clarifying Meaning)
2. Analysis (Examining Ideas, Identifying Arguments, Analyzing Arguments)
3. Evaluation (Assessing Claims, Assessing Arguments)
4. Inference (Querying Evidence, Conjecturing Alternatives, Drawing Conclusions)
5. Explanation (Stating Results, Justifying Procedures, Presenting Arguments)
6. Self-Regulation (Self-examination, Self-correction)

Lastly, the report identifies what it refers to as “affective disposition” that are indicative of good critical thinking, or are habits-of-mind of good critical thinkers. These dispositions include…

APPROACHES TO LIFE AND LIVING IN GENERAL:
- inquisitiveness with regard to a wide range of issues
- concern to become and remain generally well-informed
- alertness to opportunities to use CT
- trust in the processes of reasoned inquiry
- self-confidence in one’s own ability to reason
- open-mindedness regarding divergent world views
- flexibility in considering alternatives and opinions
- understanding of the opinions of other people
- fair-mindedness in appraising reasoning
- honesty in facing one’s own biases, prejudices, stereotypes, egocentric or sociocentric tendencies
- prudence in suspending, making or altering judgments
- willingness to reconsider and revise views where honest reflection suggests that change is warranted

APPROACHES TO SPECIFIC ISSUES, QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS:
- clarity in stating the question or concern
- orderliness in working with complexity
- diligence in seeking relevant information
- reasonableness in selecting and applying criteria
- care in focusing attention on the concern at hand
- persistence though difficulties are encountered
- precision to the degree permitted by the subject and the circumstance

The consensus report stresses the importance of developing these dispositions alongside the more concrete academic skills. The researchers’ claim is that “the cultivation of these dispositions is particularly important to insure the use of CT skills outside the narrow instructional setting. Persons who have developed these affective dispositions are much more likely to apply their CT skills appropriately in both their personal life and their civic life than are those who have mastered the skills but are not disposed to use them.” (Delphi Report, Executive Summary)
IV.B: How is Critical Thinking Measured?

Teachers assess critical thinking in their own classrooms in a number of ways – via classroom discussions, assignments requiring students to engage in argument and reflection, and through the application of rubrics designed to make explicit the performance criteria that define critical thinking in the context of their own subject matter. But in the process of thinking about how to assess critical thinking across a range of disciplines throughout the college, the QEP Task Force decided it was important to investigate the various formal, standardized, validated measures of critical thinking that are used in the educational community.

There are a number of formal assessments that attempt to probe students’ critical thinking skills. In the process of reviewing the QEPs of other institutions that chose critical thinking as their topic, and in researching the educational literature on assessing critical thinking, the QEPSC identified several of these assessment tools and investigated them as potential tools to assess the effectiveness of our own QEP interventions. These tools can be divided into two broad categories. First, there are assessments that are designed to directly measure some aspect of students’ ability to think critically. Second, there are surveys designed to gather information about students’ metacognition, dispositions, and attitudes towards thinking and learning.

The **Critical Thinking Assessment Test** (CAT) was developed by the Center for Assessment & Improvement of Learning, Tennessee Technological University. The project began as a partnership between TTU and six other universities in 2006, and the partnership produced its final report in 2008. Currently over 250 institutions in the U.S. are collaborating in the CAT project. The test purports to measure students’ critical thinking skills in several areas, specifically: evaluating information, creative thinking, learning and problem solving, and communication. (https://www.tntech.edu/cat/about/skills) The CAT has been validated in several rounds of evaluation and experimentation, mainly through looking at faculty assessments of its effectiveness in helping them identify and address gaps in student critical thinking skills (see Haynes et al, 2016, “Moving Beyond Assessment to Improving Students’ Critical Thinking Skills: A Model for Implementing Change”). The CAT is primarily a short answer essay test, and there is a cost for either training scorers or scoring the exam ($25/student) in addition to the $9.95/student cost of the exam itself. NC State’s Th!ink QEP used the CAT for assessment, reporting overwhelming faculty support for the test, and describing the exams as “eye-opening.”

The **Critical Thinking Basic Concepts Test** and **International Critical Thinking Reading and Writing Test** were developed by Linda Elder, Richard Paul, and their colleagues at their Foundation for Critical Thinking (http://www.criticalthinking.org/) The CTBCT purports to measure comprehension of specific concepts “essential to CT”, and the ICTRWT attempts to measure students’ ability to analyze short readings. We were unable to find any published studies that attempted to formally establish the validity of either test. The cost to administer the tests involves a $1000 license, plus $14.99/ test for the CTBCT and $9.99/test for the ICTRWT. The Foundation for Critical Thinking provides several other assessment tools and instruments that could be interesting or useful, including a course evaluation form to assess student perceptions of critical thinking in instruction, and a protocol for interviewing faculty regarding critical thinking. They also provide some guidelines for creating a faculty development program around the topic of critical thinking, as well as offering services to customize and deliver such programs.
The Test of Everyday Reasoning (TER) (Facione, 2001) is a 35 item multiple-choice test designed to measure reasoning and critical thinking skills. The items of TER are multiple choice questions designed to be scored dichotomously with one correct answer and three or four distractors which represent frequently made errors or are designed to attract the attention of those who exhibit what are known as “dispositional failures in reasoning” (Engel, 1999). The test is currently offered as a commercial product by Insight Assessment (www.insightassessment.com), and the cost to administer the test to 1500 students was quoted to us at $20,220. This cost could make using the TER impractical for our institution, particularly if we wanted to administer the test every year of the QEP.

Another product of Insight Assessment, the California Critical Thinking Skills Test (CCTST) bills itself somewhat grandiosely as “the premier critical thinking skills test in the world today.” (www.insightassessment.com) The 45-50 minute test employs multiple choice items using everyday scenarios, and asks test-takers to analyze information presented in text, charts, or images; to draw and evaluate inferences; and to differentiate between strong and weak reasoning. The test report returns results on several scales, including analysis, evaluation, inference, deduction, induction, overall reasoning skills, interpretation, and explanation. The instrument does have comparison percentiles available that are normed to other two-year colleges. A companion assessment tool, the California Critical Thinking Disposition Inventory purports to measure the “dispositional aspects” of critical thinking by asking respondents to indicate the degree to which they agree or disagree with statements about thinking and reasoning. Like the TER, the CCTST and CCTDI are commercial products with a significant cost to administer and score. ($12 per student + licensing/registration costs.)

The Measure of Academic Proficiency and Progress (MAPP) test is a direct assessment instrument that was introduced in January 2006 by Educational Testing Service. Since 2009, it has been known as the ETS Proficiency Profile (EPP). (There is no difference between the two assessments, and the older name is frequently encountered in the educational literature.) The EPP focuses on the skills acquired through general education courses rather than on the knowledge acquired about the subjects taught. It is an integrated test of four academic skills (critical thinking, reading, writing and mathematics) measured in three contexts: humanities, social sciences and natural sciences. The test is available in two formats – a standard form (2-hour, 108 questions and an abbreviated form (40-minutes, 36 questions). Both versions may include an optional essay portion. Several local institutions have used the EPP as part of their QEP assessment, including Norfolk State University and Reynold Community College. ETS provides comparative data reports to institutions who use the EPP. This data is updated every year and provides institutions the opportunity to identify progress and ability as related to the national average. Since the EPP is a commercial product of ETS, there is a cost to administer the test, roughly $14 to $20 per student, depending on the version and the method of delivery. As with the TER, affordability could be a concern if we intended to use an instrument of this sort every year during our QEP.

The Epistemological Beliefs Survey (EBS) was developed in the early 2000s by Philip Wood and Carol Ann Kardashian of the University of Missouri at Columbia. The authors designed the survey in response to perceived limitations in both content and implementation of existing measures of student epistemology. The EBS is an (35?) 80-item questionnaire intended to discern students’ opinions about learning and the nature of knowledge in your academic major.” Respondents indicate the degree to which they agree or disagree with each statement using a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 "strongly disagree – 5 "strongly agree"). Many items probe students’ opinions about metacognitive aspects of
learning and studying, such as “Almost all the information you can understand from a textbook you will get during the first reading” or “If I can't understand something quickly, it usually means I will never understand it.” Some questions relate to the reliability of sources of information, such as “You can believe most things you read”, or “Even advice from experts should be questioned.” Some of these questions are related, at least peripherally, to the critical thinking outcomes we have developed for our QEP. It would appear that some institutions, rather than administering the entire EBS, have used selected questions from the EBS alongside other assessments in order to create their own customized assessment instruments. (See for example, the QEPs of NC State and McNeese University.)

Schraw and Dennison’s **Metacognitive Awareness Inventory** (MAI) asks respondents to think of themselves in the context of a learner and to respond to questions about their own thinking processes. *(Schraw & Dennison, 1994, Assessing metacognitive awareness. Contemporary Educational Psychology, 19, 460-475.)* The MAI consists of 52 true/false questions that are evaluated using a scoring guide. The scoring guide is divided into two categories: “knowledge about cognition” (declarative, procedural, and conditional knowledge) and “regulation of cognition” (planning, information management strategies, comprehension monitoring, debugging strategies, and evaluation). The survey includes questions like “I consider several alternatives to a problem before I answer,” and “I understand my intellectual strengths and weaknesses.” ([https://services.viu.ca/sites/default/files/metakognitive-awareness-inventory.pdf](https://services.viu.ca/sites/default/files/metakognitive-awareness-inventory.pdf) ) While these questions don’t directly test a students’ critical thinking abilities, they do probe metacognitive attitudes that are important components of the “habits of mind” of effective critical thinkers. The MAI assessment is free to administer and score, which makes it an attractive option as a component of a larger assessment strategy. NC State used multiple instruments, one of which was the MAI, to collect baseline data about first-year students’ critical and thinking before any faculty development or curricular intervention took place. Georgia Military College used the MAI to assess students in their first year experience courses in order to measure the effectiveness of the metacognitive and critical thinking components of the revised courses.

While it was not specifically designed solely to assess critical thinking, we found that many institutions made use of the **National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)** as part of their critical thinking assessment process. Developed in 1998-2000 by a working group convened by the Pew Charitable Trust, the NSSE collects self-reported data from students about how they spend their time, what they have gained from their courses, their relationships and interactions with faculty, advisors, and peers, what and the types of work they are asked to do in their classes. A version of the questionnaire for 2-year colleges, the **Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE)**, exists as well, and has been administered by RBC in the past (2012, 2015, and 2016) as a way of gathering information about our institutional effectiveness. Some of the questions on the survey are directly connected to critical thinking. For example, question #5 asks students to estimate how much of their time in their courses is spent performing various activities, from a) “Memorizing facts and ideas…” to d) “Making judgements about the value of information, arguments, or methods.” Question #11d asks students to gauge how much their experience at the college has contributed to their skills in the area of “thinking critically and analytically.” Changes in student responses to these questions over the course of the 5-year QEP could be a useful indicator of perceived effectiveness of critical thinking instruction at RBC.
IV.C: How is Critical Thinking Developed?

Having chosen critical thinking as our topic, the QEP Steering Committee needed to answer two crucial questions. First, what is the evidence that critical thinking can be effectively developed in the college classroom, and what sorts of gains can have been achieved and measured? And second, what pedagogical best practices have been shown to be effective in fostering students’ ability to think critically?

In their survey of the research on the topic, “Critical Thinking in Education: A Review”, Pithers and Soden cite some promising studies on the teaching of critical thinking, including those which suggest the efficacy of placing an emphasis on evaluative writing and on particular forms of evaluative reasoning within specific disciplines. The authors assert that the literature supports an interdisciplinary approach to teaching critical thinking as opposed to reliance on a dedicated critical thinking course. They also claim that the most important common approach for promoting critical thinking they note is for instructors to encourage and assist students in evaluating their own views. The review of the literature suggests that the impact of formative teaching aimed at critical thinking (“student-centered” learning) may be slower than straight lecturing (“teacher-centered” learning) at producing results, but the long-term benefits are greater. They also conclude that problem-based learning can provide an effective platform for teaching critical thinking.

Another systematic review of critical thinking interventions, “Effectiveness of Critical Thinking in Higher Education” (Tiruneh), aggregates and analyzes multiple studies on the topic. They divide the approaches to critical thinking instruction into four categories: “General”, in which critical thinking is taught separately from existing curricula; “Infusion”, in which critical thinking instruction is explicitly infused with regular subject matter; “Immersion”: in which critical thinking concepts are implicitly woven into subject matter instruction; and “Mixed”, which combines a dedicated critical thinking course with subject-specific courses. Unlike the authors of the previous study, Tiruneh et. al. advocate for some combination of the “General” and “Mixed” approaches, although they are cautious about the lack of data to fully support this recommendation.

The majority of faculty survey responses about the structure of the QEP were strongly opposed the idea of implementing a dedicated, one-size-fits all, required course in critical thinking at RBC, and our research lends some support to that collective inclination. Many researchers suggest a more multi-faceted approach, and one that teaches critical thinking within the context of disciplinary work. Thus, the research lends support to our initial ideas for implementing a wide range of pedagogical strategies across the curriculum.

Even when studies disagree about whether a dedicated course or disciplinary immersion is preferable, it seems apparent from most of the research that improvements in students’ critical thinking are more likely to occur when the teaching of these skills is explicit rather than implicit (Behar-Horenstein). Faculty need to engage their students in mental activities such as analyzing, synthesizing, making judgements, etc., but these skills need to be developed with some guidance and direction in the classroom. It is not enough to simply require and assess these skills without explicitly addressing the practice of critical thinking within the disciplinary context of a particular course.
So how do we foster and develop critical thinking in our classrooms? In “Distinguishing Features of Critical Thinking Classrooms”, Browne and Freeman describe several pedagogical characteristics of classrooms that foster the development of higher-order thinking skills. Among these are frequent evaluative questioning, the encouragement of active/participatory engagement over passivity, the cultivation of “developmental tension” in the form of doubt or controversy, and the acceptance of multiple perspectives and the “contingency of conclusions.” All of these approaches to knowledge and understanding can be applied in any disciplinary context or subject area.

Many pedagogical techniques frequently cited as “best practices” for teaching in general have been shown to have particular value in teaching critical thinking skills. For example, constructivist learning methods, which strive to amplify students’ roles in their own learning while de-emphasizing the role of the teacher (Lai) are preferred over more structured, teacher-centered methods of instruction. There is also value in the technique of “modeling” critical thinking for students. When faculty make their reasoning visible to students by “thinking aloud”, they allow students observe the teacher the practice of using evidence and logic to support arguments and assertions (Facione, 2000; Paul, 1992). When giving students problems to solve, instructors should offer “authentic” open-ended problems as often as possible, and give students questions that require them to go beyond the information made available to them in order to make inferences and connections. (Moss & Kozoi)

So how do institutions who choose to focus their QEP efforts on critical thinking actually approach this pedagogical challenge? There many different approaches. Some institutions develop dedicated standalone courses on critical thinking (Union College), or simply designate a certain subset of required courses as satisfying a critical-thinking requirement (Clemson, NC State). As was mentioned before, this approach was not seen by faculty as a good “fit” for Richard Bland College as an institution. Some institutions choose an existing required course (or course sequence) sequence and focus in increase students’ exposure to critical thinking instruction within that already-required structure. (Georgia Military College.) Finally, some institutions seek to improve student learning by broadly enhancing faculty practice across the institution – through a combination of professional development designed to better inform faculty about best practices in teaching and assessment, and an incremental application of pedagogical innovation throughout the curriculum. (Pfeiffer University)
IV.D: Models for Faculty Development

It was clear from an early stage that faculty professional development would play a major role in the QEP at Richard Bland College. The institution already has a structure in place for formal faculty development, with dedicated faculty work days before the start of every academic semester devoted to PD. As part of our review of the educational literature, the QEPSC investigated best practices in faculty development as they pertain to teaching and assessing critical thinking.

According to Linda Elder of the Center for Critical Thinking, the only effective approach to improving the ability of faculty members to teach and assess critical thinking is to offer workshops on critical thinking delivered by experts. (Elder: Critical Thinking as the Key to Learning in College) Of course, it should be noted that a significant portion of the business model for the Center for Critical Thinking rests on providing workshops on critical thinking delivered by experts, so this bold claim should perhaps be taken with a grain of salt. But with this caveat in mind, we can examine some of the characteristics that Paul and Elder present as characteristics of a good faculty development plan. Some of these aspects are already built into our existing structure and the structure of the QEP. For example, Elder recommends that the PD plan call for administrative commitment, an advisory team, and a long term approach to the topic – all of which are implicit in our selection of critical thinking as our QEP topic. The Center for Critical Thinking also recommends that more informal activities and opportunities accompany the formal professional development workshops – things like campus newsletters, faculty forums and roundtables, visiting seminars, and access to publications and other resources on critical thinking.

There is some evidence that PD which is focused on critical thinking skills can have measurable effects in the classroom, in terms of how instructors approach their teaching and assessment. In one study, instructors who participated in six two-hour PD sessions were shown to have increased awareness of their students as learners, a greater tendency to assess students via questions that required critical thinking, and a willingness to implement instructional changes that foster the goal of developing higher order thinking. (Behar-Horenstein)

Several of the model institutions that shared critical thinking as their QEP topic made professional development a major focus of their program. The QEP at NC State involved a broad spectrum of faculty development activities, from self-directed knowledge-building activities to a formal “Faculty Seminar” designed to introduce faculty to practical teaching and assessment techniques. They also employed a model using “Faculty Fellows” with particular pedagogical expertise to serve as consultants for other instructors. Part of their faculty development process also involved faculty peer teaching and a portfolio analysis of classroom activities.

Clemson’s “Thinks2™ QEP stressed the value of developing a self-reflective, scholarly, “critical thinking community” among its faculty. Instructors who taught their critical thinking seminars were required to participate in a “Faculty Institute” that focused on course and curriculum design, creation of new learning experiences for students, strategies to improve student engagement, and the use of multiple assessment strategies. In addition to this formal institute, Clemson invited outside speakers and workshop facilitators to give campus-wide presentations and lead workshops, colloquia, and discussions for faculty and graduate student instructors. Invited speakers also spoke to students about the importance of critical thinking in the professional and business worlds. Faculty leaders were
encouraged to lead workshops, colloquia, and discussions among their colleagues to share their own teaching experiences and classroom research.

Common themes emerged when looking at the professional development plans of other institutions. Most notably, these QEPs tended to favor a multi-faceted approach that combined formal faculty development workshops (using both internal and external expertise) with more informal spaces for the faculty to share ideas and the increased availability of professional resources for self-study and improvement. The QEPSC has already administered a survey to faculty (see Appendix D) to try to gauge their initial thoughts about where professional development would be most helpful in the area of critical thinking.

IV.E: The AAC&U VALUE Rubric and the Multi-State Collaborative

VALUE (Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education) is a campus-based assessment approach developed by The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U). Teams of educational professionals from institutions across the country developed rubrics in 16 areas – Inquiry and Analysis, Critical Thinking, Creative Thinking, Written Communication, Oral Communication, Quantitative Literacy, Information Literacy, Reading, Teamwork, Problem Solving, Civic Knowledge and Engagement, Intercultural Knowledge and Competence, Ethical Reasoning, Global Learning, Skills for Lifelong Learning, and Integrative Learning. These rubrics are intended to help institutions assess and share information about student learning in progressively more advanced and integrative areas. Since their release in 2009, these rubrics have been used at more than 2,800 colleges and universities across the United States and internationally.

AAC&U is now engaged in a new phase of the VALUE initiative called the Multistate Collaborative to Advance Learning Outcomes Assessment (MSC) that partners the State Higher Education Executive Officers’ association (SHEEO) with twelve state higher education systems and 88 two- and four-year public campuses. Participating campuses submit samples of student work from students near the end of their degree programs to a nationwide VALUE database. These student artifacts are evaluated by faculty scorers using the appropriate VALUE rubrics. Campuses receive the results for their students’ work along with comparisons to established benchmarks and to the results of other institutions.

In 2016, Richard Bland College was asked to participate in the MSC’s scoring of the Critical Thinking VALUE rubric. (This was before our institution had settled on critical thinking as the topic for our QEP. It is just a fortuitous coincidence that the topics wound up being the same.) After several rounds of solicitations, the faculty team tasked with overseeing the process gathered 50 samples of student work from 15 instructors at the College. These artifacts were submitted to the MSC and scored over the summer of July 2017.

The artifacts from RBC students scored an average of 1.67 across the five rubric criteria. As Wende Garrison, director of the VALUE project at AAC&U, explained to us, the benchmarks are meant to roughly correspond to years of schooling toward a four-year degree. So a two-year school scoring an
average of 1.67 falls below the “ideal” two-year milestone of 2.0. However, when compared to the other participating two-year school in Virginia, RBC scored slightly above its peer institution on every criterion (the peer institution scored an average of 1.64). Similarly, when compared to two-year schools across the thirteen participating states, RBC artifacts were solidly in line with national peers across the various criteria. After reviewing the results, it seems reasonable to conclude that late sophomores at RBC are performing similarly to students at peer institutions, with plenty of room for improvement to the ideal benchmark. While the project-wide numbers confirm a respectable showing for RBC in the critical thinking category, lower scores on certain specific criteria (particularly those relating to the strength of student’s positions and to the strength of their conclusions) may serve as areas on which to focus future improvement efforts.

One important lesson we learned while participating in the MSC process is that our instructors may simply not be giving as many assignments that allow them to assess student critical thinking as they think they are. It took the faculty organizers of the task several calls for student work to compile the number of student artifacts they needed, and they found that many instructors, upon viewing the VALUE rubric for critical thinking, did not feel that they had any eligible samples of student work that could be appropriately scored by the rubric. This result suggests that faculty need to be more mindful about the relationship between the critical thinking skills they expect of their students and the design of their course assignments and assessments. This tells us that our QEP needs to include significant professional development that focuses on the design of assignments that probe critical thinking, and the design of rubrics that allow faculty to meaningfully assess those skills.

While we did not intentionally or consciously model or derive our learning outcomes from the structure of the VALUE critical thinking rubric, our draft student learning outcomes were remarkably similar to the skills evaluated by the rubric. As a result, we revised our outcomes to bring them into even closer alignment with the AAC&U VALUE rubric for critical thinking. This close alignment will allow us to use this rubric as part of our shared assessment practice across the College.

Table 2: RBC Critical Thinking Outcome Performance Compared to Project-Wide Performance Among Two-Year Colleges

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criterion</th>
<th>RBC Score</th>
<th>Project-Wide Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Explanation of Issues</td>
<td>2.06</td>
<td>1.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence of Context and Assumptions</td>
<td>1.56</td>
<td>1.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student’s Position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis)</td>
<td>1.38</td>
<td>1.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions and Related Outcomes</td>
<td>1.56</td>
<td>1.58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
V. Definitions and Student Learning Outcomes

This section presents the learning goals of the QEP. The first subsection presents the list of the enduring “habits of mind” that we aim to foster as the overarching goal of the QEP. The second subsection presents the list of five student learning outcomes that will be assessed in our courses.

V.A: The Habits of Mind of Critical Thinkers

Rather than deciding on a narrow definition of such a complex topic, we focused instead on the long-term attitudes and dispositions that we wish to develop in our students. By selecting “Critical Thinking” as our QEP topic, Richard Bland College is making an explicit commitment to fostering the following lifelong habits of mind in our students:

1. **Inquisitiveness, intellectual curiosity, informed skepticism, and a desire to be generally well-informed individuals.**

2. **Open-mindedness to opposing views, flexibility in considering alternative opinions, and understanding and empathy for the perspectives of others.**

3. **The ability to reflect upon one’s own thinking process, identify one’s own biases and assumptions, and evaluate one’s own personal intellectual development.**

4. **Flexibility and persistence when faced with intellectual obstacles, and a facility for navigating complexity and tolerating ambiguity.**

5. **Confidence in one’s own critical thinking ability and a trust in the process of reasoned inquiry.**

V.B: Information Literacy and Critical Thinking

During the topic-selection process for the QEP, the topic of information literacy made a strong showing among both students and faculty. Because of the obvious importance of information literacy, and the clear perceived need to address this topic, the QEP Task Force also researched the role of information literacy in critical thinking. In their booklet, “A Guide for Educators to Critical Thinking Competency Standards”, Richard Paul and Linda Elder make the case for treating information literacy as an aspect of critical thinking:

> Information literacy is an aspect or dimension of critical thinking. It is dependent on critical thinking, but does not exhaust it. The reason is simple. Information is but one of eight basic structures of thought which function in relation to one [another]. To understand any body of content, any human communication, any book, film, or media message, a person must
understand not simply the raw “information” it contains, but also its purpose, the questions it raises, the concepts that structure the information, the assumptions underlying it, the conclusions drawn from it, the implications that follow from those conclusions, and the point of view that informs it.

Furthermore, it is not enough to possess information, one must be able to assess it for its clarity, accuracy, precision, relevance, depth, breadth, logic and significance.

Because this topic received such strong support from faculty, we planned early on to make sure that at least one of our critical thinking learning outcomes would be explicitly related to the critical evaluation of sources of information. This would eventually become Student Learning Outcome #2 below.

V.C: Student Learning Outcomes

As evidence that reveals their ability to engage in critical thinking, students will demonstrate the ability to…

1) Clearly define and articulate a question or issue

   Students are able to formulate questions, pose problems, and present issues clearly and precisely.

2) Gather and evaluate sources of information

   Students are able to gather relevant information, to critically evaluate their sources, and to analyze them in terms of their reliability, credibility, expertise, and bias.

3) Identify and evaluate claims and assumptions

   Students are able to evaluate claims, identify important underlying assumptions, and analyze the relevance and influence of context.

4) Identify or articulate a clear position or thesis

   Students are able to articulate a clear position, thesis, or hypothesis and analyze alternative perspectives.

5) Synthesize information and use logic to draw informed conclusions

   Students are able to draw logical, evidence-based conclusions, apply knowledge in new contexts, and synthesize information from multiple sources to generate new ideas and to support and evaluate positions.
VI: The Five-Year Plan: Aspects and Actions

This section provides an description of the scope and organization of the critical thinking QEP at Richard Bland College. The first subsection presents an overview of the aspects of the QEP in broad strokes. The second subsection outlines the various sorts of interventions and innovations in pedagogy and assessment that will constitute the QEP at the level of classroom instruction.

VI.A: Aspects of the QEP

Our QEP will involve many complementary approaches, from institution-wide faculty development and assessment initiatives, to innovations in classroom pedagogy, to efforts to foster an ongoing campus-wide conversation about the value of critical thinking. The aspects of the critical thinking QEP can be organized into the following four categories:

Administration and Assessment: The execution of the 5-year QEP will be guided by a Steering Committee under the direction of a Chair who will serve as the QEP Director. During the first year of the QEP, the college administration and the QEP Steering Committee will survey the existing landscape of student learning outcomes in our courses in order to determine where and how critical thinking is being taught and assessed in our curriculum. These baseline data will help shape the professional development opportunities and new classroom approaches that will be developed over the course of the 5-year plan. The college will also collect data about critical thinking skills at RBC, using a combination of faculty surveys, student self-reported assessments, and externally validated assessment tools. These assessment tools will be applied and evaluated over the course of the entire 5-year process.

Professional Development: For the duration of the QEP, the college’s existing structures for faculty and professional development will be focused specifically on pedagogy and assessment in the area of Critical Thinking. This will include not only providing programming during our professional development workshops, but actively supporting faculty conference travel and scholarship related to critical thinking and assessment. A series of more informal faculty forums – teaching and learning colloquia, roundtable/panel discussions, “brown bag lunches”, and the like – will give faculty opportunities to share their approaches and experiences with one another. The RBC Library will work with the QEP Steering Committee to develop a “Critical Thinking Lib Guide” and other online and physical resources, and to constantly update and publicize these resources to the faculty. The faculty will work together to develop shared language and common rubrics around the topic of critical thinking that can be applied broadly throughout courses at the college.

The Student Experience in the Classroom: Within the classroom, our primary goal will be to provide students with more opportunities to both develop and to demonstrate their critical and higher-order thinking skills, as defined in the learning outcomes. New pedagogical approaches and assessment practices will be piloted in the first two years within a few limited “sandbox” environments – such as the RBC Honors courses, the “Exceptional Student Experience” courses, and a subset of courses
designated by each department as pilot courses for new approaches. Instructors will be encouraged to take advantage of the new Writing Center to help students improve upon writing assignments that utilize critical thinking. Faculty proposing to implement major pedagogical changes within these pilot courses may receive support from the college in the form of stipends or course releases. Part of their responsibility will be to report back to the QEP Steering Committee and to their fellow faculty on the results of their course innovations.

**Campus Culture Outside the Classroom:** The RBC Campus Forum will become a venue for an ongoing series of “RBC Critical Discussions”, which will encourage students to engage critically with ideas outside of the classroom. Faculty will be encouraged to propose events that are closely connected to their coursework, and to develop follow-up activities and discussion guides that bring these dialogues back into their classrooms. Student support services, such as the Writing Center and tutoring center, will be equipped with resources and materials to help students address critical thinking learning outcomes in all of their courses – particularly in the area of gathering and evaluating sources of information.

**VI.B: Course Innovations and Enhancements**

Our plan for enhancing classroom practice at RBC involves the application of new pedagogical approaches and assessment practices across the entire curriculum of the college, While we are not necessarily imagining that each and every faculty member will engage in a major overhaul of their course syllabi or their assignments, we do intend the reach of these pedagogical enhancements to eventually impact every student at the college. The type and scope of these interventions may vary from department to department, or from course to course. The sorts of modifications promoted by the QEP will run the gamut from modest changes in assessment practices to major curricular innovations. New approaches inspired by the QEP may include the following sorts of actions:

- Developing rubrics for existing course assignments that make the assessment of critical thinking explicit in a way that is aligned with the QEP’s student learning outcomes.
- Adding new student learning outcomes to course syllabi to reflect the fact that one or more of the critical thinking outcomes will be assessed explicitly in the course.
- Transforming existing assignments from ones that simply require students to research and relate information into assignments that require them to take a position and construct and defend an argument supporting that position.
- Creating new assignments based on a close reading and analysis of a primary text.
- Requiring students to write an “annotated bibliography” for a paper that asks them to discuss each of their sources in terms of its reliability, biases, etc.
- Encouraging students to visit the Writing Center to receive assistance in the development of an argumentative or evaluative essay.
- Developing new problem-based or project-based learning (“PBL”) assignments for an existing course.
- Introducing guest lectures or interdisciplinary material into a course.
- Requiring/encouraging attendance at on-campus events, and developing assignments associated with those events.
• Creating forums outside of the classroom for students to engage in a productive and respectful dialog on a controversial issue.
• Organizing “Campus Forum” events related to specific course content.
• Introducing major new units or multi-week topics into existing courses that are designed to address the CT learning outcomes.
• Developing new team-taught courses that are designed specifically to improve students’ ability to think and work across disciplinary boundaries.

VII. The Five-Year Plan: A Timeline

This section presents a schedule for the 5-year plan. Although the QEP will not receive final acceptance from SACSCOC until during the 2018/19 academic year, the activities of the QEP will begin in August of 2018. An overview of the highlights of the plan appears in Table 3 on page 31.

Fall 2018 (Y1.0)

During the August 2018 professional development retreat, the QEPSC will present faculty with an overview of the 5 year plan and conduct workshops on outcome-based assessment. The VALUE Critical Thinking Rubric will be presented as a tool for assessing student critical thinking across the college. The concrete outcome of this work is to identify a core group of courses and instructors in each department that will begin regularly using the VALUE rubric as an assessment tool.

At the end of this event, the administration and the QEPSC will conduct faculty surveys about what types of PD activities the faculty considers the most desirable and effective, and use this information to develop a detailed schedule for the next two years of professional development.

Over the course of the first year of the QEP, the administration and the QEPSC will perform an overview of learning outcomes across departments and courses to determine how/where critical thinking is being assessed currently. The QEPSC will assist departments in establishing baseline data about which of their course outcomes explicitly or implicitly assess critical thinking. Course-level learning outcomes will be mapped onto the critical thinking learning outcomes in order to allow our existing structures for collecting assessment data across the College to be applied to the assessment of the QEP. During this first year, all of the Honors courses and “Exceptional Student Experience” (ESE) courses will adopt aspects of critical thinking as explicit course outcomes.

New classroom initiatives in the first year will be focused on assessment practices. The administration will encourage the following course interventions during the first year of the QEP:

• Using the VALUE rubric for an existing course assignment in order to make the assessment of critical thinking more explicit and uniform at the College.
• Transforming an existing course assignment from one that simply requires students to research and relate information into one that requires them to take a position and construct and defend an argument supporting that position.

• Adding a new student learning outcome to a course syllabus (or substantially rewording an existing outcome) to reflect the fact that one or more of the critical thinking outcomes will be assessed explicitly in the course.

The QEP will launch with an inaugural series of events designed to educate the campus community about the goals of the QEP and explore the question of “What Is Critical Thinking?” The aim of these events is to foster a conversation about the ways in which “critical thinking” plays a role in a student’s life and decision-making outside of the classroom. These programs will be developed via a collaboration between the QEPSC, the Office of Residence Life, the Office of Student Success, the Office of Student Activities & Leadership, the Director of Counseling Services, and other interested parties at the College. This group will develop programs and events to promote awareness of the QEP topic across the campus and within the student body, and brainstorm a list of topics and formats for the Campus Forum and other student events for the first two years of the QEP. The goal is to schedule one large event (public talk, roundtable forum) and 1-3 smaller events (brown bag lunches, faculty panels) per semester.

During this first semester, the QEPSC and the administration will also evaluate 2 or 3 externally validated and standardized tests and surveys (the CAT, the TER, and/or the CCTST) that are used in the educational community to measure critical thinking. These tests will be piloted with small groups of students and the results will be used to select the assessment which is the best fit for our students and gives us the most useful information about student learning.

**Spring 2019 (Y1.5)**

During the professional development retreat regularly held before the Spring semester, RBC instructors will attend workshops facilitated by our own faculty, exploring the diverse ways that we already encourage, develop, and assess critical thinking in our courses. Faculty will also report on their use of the VALUE rubric, and discuss the strengths and the weaknesses of the tool for the type of assessment we wish to perform as part of our QEP. In addition to the formal professional development activities that take place before each semester, the administration and the QEPSC will establish other, ongoing forums for faculty to share experiences and approaches (faculty-led seminars and mini talks, brown bag lunches, etc.).

By the end of the spring 2019 semester, the QEPSC and the administration will have evaluated the selected standardized tests and surveys of critical thinking. One or more of these tools will be chosen to collect longitudinal data for the 5-year QEP. The administration will also put tools into place to collect more informal, self-reported data about students’ critical thinking experiences in the classroom. Questions inspired by the EBS, the MAI, and the NSSE will be added to the existing course evaluation tool to probe students “attitudes and dispositions” regarding critical thinking, and asking them to report how often they are required to demonstrate higher-order thinking skills in their courses.
Around the midpoint of the first year of the plan, the QEPSC will test-drive a Critical Thinking e-Newsletter, which will feature a combination of QEP updates, summaries of academic research articles, faculty case studies, student editorials, and other short written pieces on the topic of critical thinking. The original plan is for two “issues” of the newsletter per semester. This effort will be supported in part by the RBC Library.

The formal assessment tools having been piloted and evaluated in the fall, the college will administer the selected assessment tool to a larger group of students in the spring semester. The Director of Institutional Research will work with the QEPSC this year and each following year to collect and analyze the results of this assessment, as well as course-level assessment data on student learning.

By the end of the spring semester of the first year of the QEP, the first group of faculty interested in piloting major innovative critical thinking initiatives in their courses will apply for professional development support from the administration. Department Chairs will present the QEPSC with a list of the significant critical thinking projects that their department’s faculty plan to put in place in fall 2019.

**Fall 2019 (Y2.0)**

The focus of professional development during the second year will be on critical thinking pedagogy. Outside experts will be brought in to deliver workshops on best-practices associated with fostering and improving higher-order thinking in the classroom.

New critical thinking pedagogies and assessment methods will be introduced first in the “sandbox” environments of the Honors courses, the ESE seminars, and a small number of courses chosen by each department as pilot courses for the QEP initiatives. To support these efforts at the level of the students, the Writing Center will begin to make use of the VALUE rubrics for writing and critical thinking to help evaluate and assist students according to a uniform set of expectations.

Innovative classroom initiatives in the second year will be focused on the creation of new learning experiences that foster critical thinking. The administration will encourage the following types of course interventions during the second year of the QEP:

- Creating new coursework and assessments that are designed specifically to engage students’ critical and higher order thinking skills.
- Developing new problem-based or project-based learning (“PBL”) experiences for an existing course.
- Introducing guest lectures, team-teaching, or substantial interdisciplinary content into a course.
- Developing course assignments associated with on-campus events, and requiring/encouraging attendance at such events.
As was the case in the previous year, public forums and campus events will continue to be offered to give students the opportunity to engage with the topic of critical thinking outside of the classroom environment.

**Spring 2020 (Y2.5)**

Each spring semester, faculty who are interested in piloting major innovative critical thinking initiatives in their courses will apply for professional development support from the administration. Department Chair will present the QEPSC with a list of the significant critical thinking projects that their department’s faculty plan to put in place in the fall of 2020. This will be an iterative process that continues throughout years 3, 4, and 5 of the QEP.

As these new course enhancements are being piloted, the QEPSC will guide the faculty in further refining and developing rubrics to assess critical thinking skills in a consistent way across courses and disciplines, using uniform language for learning outcomes and performance criteria.

**Fall 2020 (Y3.0)**

As year three begins, the College will conduct professional development workshops around the topic of *curriculum and course design*, and work to foster a discussion about how we “scaffold” and build upon students’ critical thinking skills across our curriculum, from the introductory to intermediate courses. The administration will encourage the following types of course interventions during the third year of the QEP:

- Restructuring existing courses to add a major new unit or multi-week topic designed to address the CT learning outcomes.
- Substantially altering the mode of delivery of a course (from lecture to discussion, from traditional labs to inquiry or PBL-based, etc.) with the goal of developing students’ critical thinking.
- Creating an entirely new course that is designed *specifically* to improve students’ critical and higher-order thinking skills.
- Developing a team-taught course that is designed to improve students’ ability to think and work across disciplinary boundaries.

Expanding on the experiences of the prior year, enhanced CT pedagogies and assessment methods will be extended *beyond* the “sandbox” environments of the Honors and ESE courses and the first set of pilot courses to a broader spectrum of courses at the College. Departments will work with the QEPSC to determine which approaches are proving themselves to be the most appropriate and effective in their discipline(s).

During the third year of the QEP, the second battery of formal critical thinking assessments will be delivered to students.
Spring 2021 (Y3.5)

Before the spring 2021 semester, QEPSC will organize professional development workshops for the faculty that focus on the successes and challenges of the critical thinking interventions that have taken place so far. Faculty members who played a major role in piloting new CT pedagogies and assessment approaches will report back to the faculty about their experiences.

At the midpoint of the year, the Steering Committee will conduct a survey of faculty and staff to gauge their opinions about the effectiveness of the critical thinking interventions that have been implemented so far, and gather recommendations about which approaches should be continued and expanded. During this year, the QEPSC will also conduct a survey of students and faculty to gauge their opinions about the effectiveness of the Campus Forum and other public events, and use this feedback to develop a schedule of events and activities for years four and five.

By the end of year three, any faculty who are interested in further developing innovative CT initiatives in their courses will apply for professional development support from the administration. Chairs will present the QEPSC with a list of the significant CT projects that their department’s faculty plan to put in place in fall of 2021, along with a plan to evaluate the effectiveness and “reach” of these course modifications.

By the end of year three, the second batch of external tests of critical thinking will be delivered to a large group of students. The Director of Institutional Research will work with the QEPSC collect and analyze the results of this assessment.

Fall 2021 (Y4.0)

Expanding on the experiences of the past several years, enhanced critical thinking pedagogies and assessment methods will be extended and applied even more widely, with the ultimate goal that they impact every student during their time at RBC.

Professional development activities during years four and five will be developed based on the perceived needs as reported by faculty and the administration.

Departments will continue to work with the QEPSC to determine which approaches are proving to be the most appropriate and effective in their discipline(s).

Public forums and campus events will continue to be offered to give students the opportunity to engage with the topic of critical thinking outside of the classroom environment. Over the course of the QEP, college faculty will be encouraged to develop discussion guides, assignments, and other content that ties their coursework directly to the public campus events as often as possible.
Spring 2022 (Y4.5)

By the end of the spring 2022 semester, Chairs will present the QEPSC with a list of the significant critical thinking projects that their department’s faculty plan to put in place in fall of 2022, along with a plan to evaluate the effectiveness and “reach” of these course modifications.

Fall 2022 (Y5.0)

Departments will continue to work with the QEPSC to determine which approaches are proving to be the most appropriate and effective in their discipline(s). Public forums and campus events will continue to be offered to give students the opportunity to engage with the topic of critical thinking outside of the classroom environment.

Professional development activities during the final year will take on a reflective tone – looking back at the activities of the 5-year QEP and asking the question “What's next?” when it comes to continuing to develop our tools for assessment and pedagogy.

Spring 2023 (Y5.5)

By the end of year five, the final batch of external tests of critical thinking will be delivered to a large group of students. Over the course of this final year of the QEP, the QEPSC and the Director of Institutional Research will assemble and review all of the qualitative and quantitative data on student learning and the impact and effectiveness of the QEP. This final assessment will make use of various internal measures, as discussed in the next section, as well as the assessment tools identified at the start of the QEP.

During the spring semester, the QEPSC will begin to outline the report on the effectiveness of our QEP for SACSCOC. The QEPSC will assemble the final report on the QEP for SACSCOC in time for the appropriate 2024 deadline.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Semester</th>
<th>Activities and Actions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| F 2018   | Review learning outcomes across departments and courses  
          | Conduct PD around the topic of outcomes based assessment  
          | Introduce the VALUE rubric as an assessment tool across the College  
          | Launch an inaugural series of events designed to explore the question of “What Is Critical Thinking?”  
          | Evaluate multiple externally validated and standardized tests of critical thinking |
| S 2019   | Hold PD workshops conducted by RBD faculty and establish ongoing forums for sharing practice  
          | Administer selected assessment tool to larger group of students  
          | Add self-reported questions about critical thinking to all student course surveys  
          | Create QEP “Critical Thinking eNewsletter” for campus community  
          | Faculty piloting major innovative CT initiatives apply for PD support from the administration. |
| F 2019   | Arrange PD workshops with outside experts on the topic of critical thinking pedagogy.  
          | Innovative classroom initiatives focus on the creation of new learning experiences to foster CT  
          | Introduce new pedagogies into Honors, ESE, and selected pilot courses.  
          | Hold public events to allow students to engage with CT outside of the classroom environment. |
| S 2020   | Additional faculty apply for professional development support from the administration.  
          | Further refine and develop rubrics to assess critical thinking skills. |
| F 2020   | Conduct professional development workshops around the topic of curriculum and course design.  
          | Expand successful pedagogical and assessment approaches beyond initial pilot courses. |
| S 2021   | Instructors who played a major role in early CT initiatives report back to the faculty  
          | Organize PD workshops on the successes of the CT interventions that have taken place so far  
          | Survey faculty and staff about the effectiveness of the CT interventions implemented so far  
          | Survey students and faculty about the effectiveness of the Campus Forum and other public events  
          | Deliver the second battery of formal critical thinking assessments to students. |
| F 2021   | Extend & apply new critical thinking pedagogies and assessment methods even more widely  
          | Develop additional PD activities based on the perceived needs as reported by faculty  
          | Encourage faculty to develop discussion guides & other content to ties coursework to public events |
| S 2022   | Extend & apply new critical thinking pedagogies and assessment methods even more widely |
| F 2022   | Look back at the activities of the QEP and create PD activities that ask the question “What’s next?” |
| S 2023   | Deliver the final batch of formal critical thinking assessments to students.  
          | Assemble and review data on student learning and the impact and effectiveness of the QEP  
          | Outline the report on the effectiveness of our QEP for SACSCOC. |
VIII. Organizational Structure:

**President:** The role of the President at RBC is to “supervise the entire program of activities at the College.” Accordingly, the President will oversee the QEP activities in the same manner as every other academic program and initiative at the institution.

**Provost:** As the Chief Academic Officer at RBC, the Provost is responsible for overseeing the full range of academic programs at the institution, including the implementation and evaluation of the QEP.

**Institutional Effectiveness Committee:** The duties of the IEC relate primarily to connecting assessment, data, and strategic planning, and will provide oversight of that particular aspect of the QEP. When the QEPSC has results about the effectiveness of various pedagogical interventions, this assessment data will be reported to the IEC with recommendations for going forward, and the IEC will provide feedback on those recommendations to the QEPSC and the Provost.

**QEP Steering Committee:** The QEPSC will be made up of faculty, staff, and student representatives recommended by the Provost and appointed by the President to oversee and coordinate the development and implementation of the QEP. This group will be tasked with overseeing the execution of the QEP and working with the administration and the Director of Institutional Research to assess its effectiveness. The role of the QEPSC and its relationship to other College committees is illustrated in Figure 1 below.

**QEP Steering Committee Chair:** The Chair of the QEPSC will be a full-time faculty member appointed by the Provost to coordinate the activities of the steering committee and serve as the primary point person for the ongoing implementation of the QEP. As the de facto director of the QEP, the chair of the QEPSC may receive a “course release” to allow them adequate time to perform the additional duties required by the position.

**Department Chairs:** The Chairs of the academic departments will facilitate classroom initiatives in their departments, and produce documentation for the QEPSC concerning the reach and effectiveness of these activities.

**The Instructional Programs and Curriculum Committee:** The IPCC is a standing committee at the college, charged with, among other duties, reviewing modifications to degree requirements and college curricula, and approving new courses and new programs. Any entirely new courses that are proposed as part of the QEP would be reviewed and approved by the IPCC as part of the committee’s regular duties. The IPCC will also work closely with the QEPSC whenever decisions need to be made about policies and procedures that will be adopted broadly across the curriculum.
The Faculty Assembly: The Faculty Assembly is the primary body of faculty self-governance at Richard Bland College. The purpose of the Faculty Assembly is to advise the administration on matters affecting the welfare of the College, and to ensure effective faculty participation in College governance. By deliberating over policies and making recommendations to the administration, it plays an important role in the development of educational, curricular, research, and service components of the work of RBC. As part of its regular duties, the Faculty Assembly has approved every step of the process of developing the QEP, and will continue to play an important role in the approval of any further initiatives that arise as a consequence of the ongoing execution of the QEP.

Director of Institutional Research: The Director of Institutional Research is responsible for managing data reporting and analysis at RBC and contributing to strategic, data-driven policy development and decision-making to advance the College’s mission, vision, and strategic goals. As part of these duties, she will oversee the collection of qualitative and quantitative data related to the QEP, and assist the QEPSC with their own analysis of the effectiveness of the QEP programs. The Director of Institutional Research will also assist the Chair of the QEPSC with the development of the final five-year impact report.

![QEP Organizational Chart](image)

Fig 1. QEP Organizational Chart
IX. Resources:

The QEP is designed to leverage existing programs at the College and focus them on the goals of the QEP. As such, the totals below do not reflect major new expenditures, but rather how funds will be allocated to the QEP activities within our current budgets. The amounts below were the arrived at via consultation between the QEP Steering Committee and the Chief Financial Officer of the college. The total projected cost of the QEP is $275,000. The following totals are budgeted for each year of the 5-year QEP:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional development</td>
<td>$15,000</td>
<td>$25,000</td>
<td>$50,000</td>
<td>$50,000</td>
<td>$50,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course release for QEPSC Chair</td>
<td>$4000</td>
<td>$4000</td>
<td>$4000</td>
<td>$4000</td>
<td>$4000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical resources (books, journals, etc.)</td>
<td>$5000</td>
<td>$3000</td>
<td>$2500</td>
<td>$500</td>
<td>$500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public events (4/year)</td>
<td>$3000</td>
<td>$3000</td>
<td>$3000</td>
<td>$3000</td>
<td>$3000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delivery of standardized assessments</td>
<td>$6000</td>
<td>$2000</td>
<td>$8500</td>
<td>$2000</td>
<td>$10000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTALS</td>
<td>$35,000</td>
<td>$39,000</td>
<td>$70,000</td>
<td>$61,500</td>
<td>$69,500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the QEP rolls out, the fraction of professional development funding devoted to supporting critical thinking will gradually increase to 50% of the college’s total $100,000 annual budget for professional development. This amount covers the cost of invited workshops, conference travel, faculty stipends, and represents the primary outlay of funds for the QEP.

A one-course release for the faculty member serving as QEPSC chair is estimated at $4000/year.

The Library and administration will work with the QEPSC to create a library of physical and digital resources for faculty during the first few years of the QEP. The cost of acquiring these books, journals, and other resources is estimated at $5000 the first year, and decreases gradually as this resource library is developed.

The budget for organizing and promoting public events associated with the QEP is based on the known cost of offering similar events at the college on a regular basis. The plan for holding two large and two small events per academic year is estimated at $3000, and the cost to promote these events at $2000.

The cost of delivering standardized assessments in years 1, 3, and 5 are based on quotes provided by the developers of those tools. The amount that the office of Institutional Research typically spends to administer the CCSSE and similar tools is $6000/year. Some increase is built into these numbers over the five years to allow for possible increases in the costs of the assessment tools. During years 2 and 4, some funds are allocated to aggregate and analyze the resulting data.
X. Assessment of the QEP

The reach and effectiveness of the QEP will be measured using a variety of tools – both internal and external, and both formal and informal. This section gives an overview of the various forms of assessment that will be employed to gauge the perceived effectiveness of the QEP and to measure actual gains in student learning.

X.A: Evidence and Benchmarks for Success

There are multiple measures of success for the QEP, each related to a slightly different aspect or goal of the program. Success will be measured by the following criteria:

1. Do faculty regard the ongoing professional development program as successful, in terms of preparing them to more effectively develop and assess student critical thinking?

2. Do faculty and students report an improvement in student critical thinking skills, and an increase in the number of opportunities to develop and demonstrate their critical thinking abilities, both inside and outside the classroom?

3. Have students shown quantifiable improvements in their critical thinking abilities?

X.B: Outcomes-Based Assessment at the Course Level

Outcomes-based assessment will be a major focus of the College’s professional development program for the next several years. Having established shared outcomes, the faculty will apply the VALUE critical thinking rubric and develop their own rubrics that use shared language and common criteria to assess student work across the academic disciplines. Student achievement in meeting these outcomes will be gathered alongside the College’s standard procedure for evaluating student progress towards meeting the College-wide learning goals, and progress in this course-level achievement will be tracked for the duration of the QEP.

X.C: Using External Tools to Evaluate Critical Thinking

In section IV.B above, we identified several instruments developed to measure and evaluate critical thinking skills and other higher-order thinking processes. Many of the tests that purport to measure student critical thinking skills directly are both costly and time-consuming to administer and score. It is not obvious at this point which of these tools is the best “fit” for the kind of assessment that the QEPSC deemed necessary for evaluating the success of the QEP. As a result, we will be piloting several of these assessment tools with small groups of students the first semester of the QEP, in order to help decide which instrument will best serve our purposes. Once a tool is selected, it will be delivered to a large group of students in the spring of the first, third, and fifth years of the QEP in order to look for improvements in student performance.
A different class of assessment instruments – more informal surveys of student attitudes towards critical thinking and metacognition – are typically free to use, simple to administer, and can be applied in their entirety or in part. In particular, the EBS and the MAI were seen as useful tools to establish some snapshots regarding students “habits of mind.” From time to time, the EBS and MAI may be administered within individual courses as a way for instructors to inform their own practice and assess the role of these metacognitive attitudes in their own disciplines and courses.

**X.D: Assessing the Reach of the QEP Within the Classroom**

Each semester, the Department Chairs will provide the QEP Steering Committee with a report that outlines the course interventions being planned by that department’s faculty for the upcoming semester. These reports will be combined with enrollment data each semester in order to estimate the number of students impacted by improvements in pedagogy and assessment each year. The goal is that by year four of the QEP, every student at the college is being impacted in some way by the innovations and interventions in pedagogy and assessment inspired by the QEP.

**X.E: Assessing the Reach of the QEP Outside the Classroom**

The QEPSC will track attendance to the Campus Forum and other events connected to the topic of critical thinking at RBC. As is already the case with our campus events for students, short survey cards will be collected after each Campus Forum to gauge opinions about the event.

**X.F: Faculty Self-Reported Measures**

During the first year of the QEP, we will develop our own surveys to gauge faculty opinions about the effectiveness of our professional development, new assessment practices, and other aspects of the QEP. These surveys will be administered annually by the QEPSC, and the results and suggestions will be used to further refine and improve the activities of the QEP.

We will also administer annual surveys to faculty asking them to assess how well their students are currently meeting each of the critical thinking outcomes overall.

**X.G: Student Self-Reported Measures**

We will make use of a subset of questions from the CCSSE in order to track students’ self-assessment of how frequently they are required to engage in higher-order reasoning skills, synthesis and application of ideas, and critical thinking. These questions will be integrated into the course evaluation forms and administered every semester.
Research Bibliography
Web-Accessible Resources and Reports


Books


University of Maryland University College. (2006). *Critical thinking as a core academic skill: A review of the literature*. Adelphi, MD: University of Maryland University College
Other Journal Articles


# Other Institutional QEPs Consulted and Referenced

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>URL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Georgia Military College</td>
<td><a href="https://www.gmc.edu/skins/userfiles/files/QEP%20Report%20Final_v5_postSACS.pdf">https://www.gmc.edu/skins/userfiles/files/QEP%20Report%20Final_v5_postSACS.pdf</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McNeese University</td>
<td><a href="https://www.mcneese.edu/ire/critical_thinking_qep_topic_selection">https://www.mcneese.edu/ire/critical_thinking_qep_topic_selection</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDICES

Appendix A  Descriptions of Top-Ranked QEP Topic Areas
Appendix B  QEP Faculty Topic Ballot
Appendix C  RBC Critical Thinking QEP – Actions and Aspects (Faculty survey & results)
Appendix D  Faculty Baseline Survey on Critical Thinking
Appendix E  QEP Task Force and Steering Committee Membership
APPENDIX A: Descriptions of Top-Ranked QEP Topic Areas

Critical Thinking and Problem Solving  
(100% Important, 74% Very Important)

While “critical thinking” may be difficult to define in a precise way, we are talking about modes of learning and thinking that go beyond the memorization and recall of facts. The goal is to provide our students with the skills to analyze, evaluate, interpret, and synthesize information, and opportunities to apply creative thought to formulating arguments and solving problems. (The upper levels of “Bloom’s Taxonomy.”)

By focusing on this QEP topic we would be committing to a plan to improve our students’ ability to formulate insightful questions; to evaluate evidence and develop well-reasoned arguments; to examine concepts from multiple perspectives; to devise creative approaches to novel or complex problems; and to synthesize information and make connections across subjects and disciplines.

Writing Across the Curriculum  
(97% Important, 67% Very Important)

“Writing across the curriculum” refers to a program that stresses writing skills outside of traditional composition and literature courses. According to Wikipedia, approximately half of American institutes of higher learning have something that can be identified as a WAC program.

By focusing on this QEP topic we would be committing to a plan to improve our students’ ability to become better writers and to express themselves effectively in writing in a variety of academic and professional contexts, and according to the norms and conventions of specific disciplines. A large part of this QEP will likely involve professional development for instructors and the establishment of writing outcomes and rubrics that would be applied consistently across the college’s courses.

Information Literacy  
(97% Important, 59% Very Important)

Information literacy allows students to recognize when information is needed, and gives them the necessary skills to locate, evaluate, and effectively make use of the information that they find. As the information available to us via media and the internet becomes more and “unfiltered”, students must learn to carefully consider questions that arise about its authenticity, validity, reliability, and bias.

By focusing on this QEP topic we would be committing to a plan to improve our students’ ability to identify, gather, critique, and utilize information from a variety of sources. These skills should allow them to both develop information-based solutions to real-world problems and to present their information in an accessible format. Our eventual definition of this topic could be broad enough to encompass not just computer and internet literacy, but media literacy, “numeracy” and the ability to interpret and analyze data, an understanding of scientific methodology, and perhaps even global and multicultural awareness.

Student Research Skills  
(95% Important, 61% Very Important)

While truly “original” research is often considered an upperclass endeavor, we need to consider how best to build the skills and experiences of our first and second year students at RBC so that they are prepared for doing research as they continue their academic careers. What kinds of experiences can we provide for our students to prepare them for doing authentic, original research? How do we better model this process – which may be very different in different fields – for our students? And how might those of us who are engaged in original research of our own involve students in our scholarship in meaningful ways?

By focusing on this QEP topic we would be committing to a plan to improve our students’ ability to identify research questions, engage in independent and collaborative scholarly activity, and present the results of their work. It should be noted that the previous proposed topic — improving students’ “information literacy” — might be a piece of this topic.
Appendix B: QEP Faculty Topic Ballot

As part of Richard Bland’s renewal of its accreditation with the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, we need to put together a 5-year Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP). The purpose of the QEP is to lay out a clear, achievable plan for improving student learning in a particular area. We have, so far, identified these four topic areas as possible choices for our QEP:

- **Critical Thinking:** Improving students’ ability to analyze and synthesize information, and to apply creative thought to formulating arguments and solving problems.

- **Writing Across the Curriculum:** Helping students to become better writers and to express themselves effectively in writing by stressing writing skills in all classes, not just English.

- **Information Literacy:** Improving students’ ability to identify, gather, critique, and utilize information from a variety of sources and to critically analyze information and media.

- **Student Research Skills:** Fostering students’ ability to identify research questions, engage in independent and collaborative scholarly activity, and present the results of their work.

In each box above, RANK the four QEP topic choices in order of preference. In other words, put a “1” in the box for your top choice, a “2” for your second choice, etc. (We will be using a “ranked choice” voting system to determine the winner.)
APPENDIX C: RBC Critical Thinking QEP – Actions and Aspects

Faculty Survey (with results)

Introduction:
The QEP Task Force has researched the QEPs of 12 other institutions that devoted their QEPs to the topic of Critical Thinking. As part of this process, we developed an organizational scheme that divided the actions of each institution into four categories – Institutional Processes, Faculty Development, Student Experiences and Coursework, and Student and Programmatic Assessment. We then took the actions and aspects of those QEPs that were most common and most applicable to our own institution and our QEP learning outcomes and sorted them into these categories.
The following survey presents a list of potential activities that might be implemented at Richard Bland College as part of our QEP. We would like you to respond to each one according to the following single criterion: “This feature would be a worthwhile component of the QEP at RBC.” You are not being asked to RANK these activities at this point in time, only to evaluate whether or not the activity would be a worthwhile component of the QEP. There is also room at the end of each section for you to comment on the items, or suggest activities of your own.
The QEP Task Force will use this feedback to prepare one or more draft models of the 5-year QEP, which we will present at an upcoming Faculty Assembly meeting. To help us prepare these drafts in a timely manner, please submit your feedback by Friday March 9th.
If you have any questions or concerns about the survey, please reach out to the Chair of the QEP Task Force, Dave Morgan. Our team appreciates your participation and input during this ongoing process.

(A NOTE ON TABULATION OF RESULTS: The faculty survey is shown on the following pages with the responses tallied and tabulated. Items colored in blue received positive responses from 50% - 75% of respondents. Items colored in yellow received overwhelmingly positive responses – 75% or higher.)
### Section I: Institutional Processes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendation</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>NOT SURE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Survey the current course learning outcomes at the college in order to determine where and how critical thinking and other higher-order thinking skills are being assessed in our courses.</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support and encourage professional development opportunities and conference travel that is directly related to the development and assessment of critical thinking.</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actively support and encourage faculty and departments engaged in applying for external grants to improve instruction and assessment in areas connected to critical and higher-order thinking.</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consult with other institutions that possess critical thinking expertise, or who are conducting a critical thinking QEP themselves.</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actively and regularly promote and publicize the QEP activities via a dedicated web page, as well as regular email and print communications from Provost and President. (Such as a “Critical Thinking Newsletter.”)</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify/appoint an “QEP Director” or “Associate Dean of Curriculum and Assessment” to oversee the faculty development and implementation of these pedagogical and assessment techniques, and the QEP in general.</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organize a Critical Thinking Day to promote the goals and activities of the QEP.</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop new common language for learning outcomes and shared rubrics that will be implemented throughout the college in order to assess critical thinking consistently across the academic subject areas and disciplines.</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify/appoint a small number of Faculty Fellows to be responsible for the development, delivery, and dissemination of innovative pedagogies focused on critical and higher-order thinking skills. Support these Fellows via stipends or course releases.</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Additional Suggestions/Comments: [Free response box]**
### Section II: Faculty and Professional Development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proposal</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>NOT SURE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Create dedicated forums for faculty to share their experiences and successes in developing new approaches in this area. (Faculty lunches, roundtable panel discussions, etc.)</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establish an ongoing <em>campus-wide dialogue</em> on the meaning and the importance of critical thinking that involves faculty, students, and administration.</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide professional development opportunities and training on the topic of <em>pedagogy</em> in the area of teaching critical thinking skills.</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establish a <em>virtual resource library</em> of materials on critical thinking for faculty, either on Canvas or through the Library’s “lib-guides.”</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide professional development opportunities in the form of <em>course design</em> workshops for faculty.</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invite outside experts on critical thinking to give workshops for faculty.</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establish a physical <em>“Center for Teaching and Learning”</em> to support faculty with materials and resources.</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop new <em>common shared language</em> and <em>shared rubrics</em> that will be implemented throughout the college in all of our courses.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Additional Suggestions/Comments:** [Free response box]
**Section III: Student Experiences and Courses**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Suggestion</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>NOT SURE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Offer programs and events to the students, through the Library or other venues, aimed at creating a conversation around the QEP topic.</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide more opportunities for students to exercise and demonstrate their critical thinking abilities in existing RBC courses.</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify certain existing RBC courses to serve as <strong>pilot courses</strong> for the implementation of methods to develop critical thinking skills.</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create guidelines for the <strong>RBC honors courses</strong> that require these courses to explicitly address critical thinking and higher-order thinking skills.</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incorporate new content and methods into our <strong>ESE course(s)</strong> to address critical thinking skills explicitly.</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide students with an online <strong>Critical Thinking Help Center</strong> that would include tutorials, guides, and other resources.</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incorporate the teaching of critical thinking and information literacy skills into the activities of the <strong>Writing Center</strong>.</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create a new <strong>Digital and Information Literacy</strong> course that supports the QEP by focusing on aspects of information literacy, analyzing bias and points of view, etc.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create or designate specific Critical Thinking courses that would be a <strong>graduation requirement</strong> for all students.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create <strong>new courses</strong> that are specifically designed, at least in part, to help students develop their higher-order thinking skills.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Additional Suggestions/Comments: [Free response box]**
**Section IV: Student and Programmatic Assessment**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>NOT SURE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assess the effectiveness of the critical thinking QEP via surveys of faculty.</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assess the effectiveness of the critical thinking QEP via surveys of graduating students and alumni.</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assess the effectiveness of the critical thinking QEP through the use of one or more established and validated <em>external assessment tools</em>.</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop new assignments at the course level that are designed specifically to assess student progress in critical thinking.</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create an archive of student work samples and “artifacts” on a special section of Canvas devoted to the QEP and assessment.</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop and implement shared <em>rubrics</em> throughout the college in order to assess critical thinking consistently across the academic subject areas and disciplines.</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assess the effectiveness of the critical thinking QEP through the use of a <em>pre-and-post test</em> of student skills and attitudes that we develop <em>internally</em> for this purpose.</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Require all courses to have at least one learning outcome that is directly related to critical thinking.</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implement the use of <em>student portfolios</em> as a student-assessment tool.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assess the effectiveness of critical thinking interventions relative to a “control” group of students who did not receive the same curricular/pedagogical experiences.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assess the programmatic effectiveness of the QEP via a <em>syllabus improvement rubric</em> to be applied to RBC courses.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Additional Suggestions/Comments: [Free response box]**
APPENDIX D: Faculty Baseline Survey on Critical Thinking

1. Faculty Assessment of Student Critical Thinking Abilities

For each of the following learning outcomes, mark how well you think your typical RBC student demonstrates proficiency in that area, based on your recent teaching experiences in your courses.

Students demonstrate the ability to…

1) **Clearly articulate a question or define a problem**
   Students are able to formulate questions, pose problems, and present complex issues clearly and precisely.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No Proficiency</th>
<th>Beginning Proficiency</th>
<th>Satisfactory Proficiency</th>
<th>Advanced Proficiency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2) **Gather and evaluate sources of information**
   Students are able to gather information, to critically evaluate their sources, and to analyze them in terms of their relevance, reliability, credibility, and bias.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No Proficiency</th>
<th>Beginning Proficiency</th>
<th>Satisfactory Proficiency</th>
<th>Advanced Proficiency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3) **Summarize and critique the arguments and reasoning of others**
   Students are able to summarize, evaluate, and critique the arguments and reasoning of others, recognize multiple points of view, and understand and analyze alternative perspectives.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No Proficiency</th>
<th>Beginning Proficiency</th>
<th>Satisfactory Proficiency</th>
<th>Advanced Proficiency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4) **Construct a well-formed argument or line of reasoning**
   Students are able to articulate and defend a position through the construction of well-formed arguments that make effective use of evidence, credible sources, logical reasoning, and well-established principles.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No Proficiency</th>
<th>Beginning Proficiency</th>
<th>Satisfactory Proficiency</th>
<th>Advanced Proficiency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5) **Identify connections, synthesize information, and draw informed conclusions**
   Students are able to apply their preexisting knowledge in new contexts, and synthesize information from multiple sources to generate new ideas.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No Proficiency</th>
<th>Beginning Proficiency</th>
<th>Satisfactory Proficiency</th>
<th>Advanced Proficiency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. Professional Development Survey on Assessing Critical Thinking

For each of the following critical thinking outcomes, mark how well-prepared you feel as an instructor to establish performance criteria and assess student performance in that skill through your design of assignments and rubrics.

Students will demonstrate the ability to…

1) Clearly articulate a question or define a problem
Students are able to formulate questions, pose problems, and present complex issues clearly and precisely.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very unprepared</th>
<th>Somewhat unprepared</th>
<th>Somewhat prepared</th>
<th>Very well-prepared</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

2) Gather and evaluate sources of information
Students are able to gather information, to critically evaluate their sources, and to analyze them in terms of their relevance, reliability, credibility, and bias.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very unprepared</th>
<th>Somewhat unprepared</th>
<th>Somewhat prepared</th>
<th>Very well-prepared</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

3) Summarize and critique the arguments and reasoning of others
Students are able to summarize, evaluate, and critique the arguments and reasoning of others, recognize multiple points of view, and understand and analyze alternative perspectives.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very unprepared</th>
<th>Somewhat unprepared</th>
<th>Somewhat prepared</th>
<th>Very well-prepared</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

4) Construct a well-formed argument or line of reasoning
Students are able to articulate and defend a position through the construction of well-formed arguments that make effective use of evidence, credible sources, logical reasoning, and well-established principles.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very unprepared</th>
<th>Somewhat unprepared</th>
<th>Somewhat prepared</th>
<th>Very well-prepared</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

5) Identify connections, synthesize information, and draw informed conclusions
Students are able to apply their preexisting knowledge in new contexts, and synthesize information from multiple sources to generate new ideas.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very unprepared</th>
<th>Somewhat unprepared</th>
<th>Somewhat prepared</th>
<th>Very well-prepared</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
3. Professional Development Survey on Developing Critical Thinking

For each of the following critical thinking outcomes, mark how well-prepared you feel as an instructor to help students achieve proficiency in that skill through your teaching and coursework.

Students will demonstrate the ability to…

1) **Clearly articulate a question or define a problem**
   Students are able to formulate questions, pose problems, and present complex issues clearly and precisely.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very unprepared</th>
<th>Somewhat unprepared</th>
<th>Somewhat prepared</th>
<th>Very well-prepared</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2) **Gather and evaluate sources of information**
   Students are able to gather information, to critically evaluate their sources, and to analyze them in terms of their relevance, reliability, credibility, and bias.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very unprepared</th>
<th>Somewhat unprepared</th>
<th>Somewhat prepared</th>
<th>Very well-prepared</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3) **Summarize and critique the arguments and reasoning of others**
   Students are able to summarize, evaluate, and critique the arguments and reasoning of others, recognize multiple points of view, and understand and analyze alternative perspectives.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very unprepared</th>
<th>Somewhat unprepared</th>
<th>Somewhat prepared</th>
<th>Very well-prepared</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4) **Construct a well-formed argument or line of reasoning**
   Students are able to articulate and defend a position through the construction of well-formed arguments that make effective use of evidence, credible sources, logical reasoning, and well-established principles.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very unprepared</th>
<th>Somewhat unprepared</th>
<th>Somewhat prepared</th>
<th>Very well-prepared</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5) **Identify connections, synthesize information, and draw informed conclusions**
   Students are able to apply their preexisting knowledge in new contexts, and synthesize information from multiple sources to generate new ideas.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very unprepared</th>
<th>Somewhat unprepared</th>
<th>Somewhat prepared</th>
<th>Very well-prepared</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Additional Comments (optional)

In the space below, include any other comments about what sorts of professional development opportunities, resources, and experiences you think would be valuable for RBC instructors as part of the Critical Thinking QEP

COMMENTS:
APPENDIX E: QEP Task Force and Committee Membership

**QEP Task Force** (February 2017 – March 2018)
- David Morgan (Chair)  Associate Professor of Physics and Astronomy
- Dan Zelinski  Professor of Philosophy & Religion
- Daniel P. Franke  Assistant Professor of History
- Kim Dupre  Associate Dean of Student Success
- Ricardo Feinstein  RBC Student

**QEP Steering Committee** (April 2018 – present)
- David Morgan (Chair)  Associate Professor of Physics and Astronomy
- Dan Zelinski  Professor of Philosophy & Religion
- Daniel P. Franke  Assistant Professor of History
- Vanessa Stout  Assistant Professor of Sociology
- Alice Henton  Assistant Professor of English
- Celia Brockway  Assistant Professor of Music, Honors Program Coordinator
- Shawn Holt  Professor of Biology, Chair of Natural Sciences & Mathematics
- Carol Kelejian  Director of Institutional Research
- Carly Winfield Baskerville  Reference & Instructional Design Librarian
- Cathryn Coffey  Learner Mentor
- Alexis M. Pedrick  RBC Student
- Alexis L. Ange  RBC Student