

# ASSESSMENT NEWS

Department of English, Literature + Reading | Wilbur Wright College

## Retreat: The Essay Institute, Dr. Paul Heilker

On Friday, 6 March 2015, the Wright College Assessment Committee in collaboration with the ELR department and sponsorship from Sara Schupack, Director of Developmental Education and the Title V grant, will host a follow-up to the spring 2014 retreat on critical thinking and writing.

Entitled, *The Essay Institute: Inquiry, Critical Thinking and Writing Pedagogies*, the retreat's workshops are scheduled as follows:

**6 March: 9:00 AM to 1:00 PM**

**Location: S247**

**Facilitator: Paul Heilker, PhD**

**Workshop One: 9:00 AM to 10:50 AM: "Inquiry and Critical Thinking Across Disciplines"**

**Workshop Two: 11:00 AM to 1:00 PM: "Inquiry-based Instruction and Alternatives to the Thesis-Driven Essay"**

**Note:** Participants may choose to attend one or both sessions; each session operates independently of the other.

**Adjunct Faculty:** If you attend either or both of the sessions, you are eligible for the contractually established payment for professional development, i.e., \$25/hour. If you plan to attend, please contact both Professor Vincent Bruckert ([vbruckert@ccc.edu](mailto:vbruckert@ccc.edu)) and Sara Schupack ([sschupack1@ccc.edu](mailto:sschupack1@ccc.edu)).

**Questions?** Please contact [vbruckert@ccc.edu](mailto:vbruckert@ccc.edu).

## Critical Thinking: The ELR Definition

In fall 2015, the Department of English, Literature and Reading (ELR) underwent the process of reconceptualizing its exit process for English 101 in order to better reflect its commitment to assessing student learning, critical thinking, critical reflective practice and professional development. This process revealed a profound commitment to critical thinking as integral to writing (generally) and assessment of student writing in English 101 (specifically).



This spring, we drafted a department-relevant definition of critical thinking using the words and phrases (see word cloud above) most commonly used by the participants in the survey administered in October 2014. In addition, we reviewed the ELR department mission and student learning outcomes, both of which can be found [here](#). Finally, we considered the newly developed Wilbur Wright College definition of critical thinking, which asserts that it is "a process of identifying patterns or ideas within a set of ideas, texts, and/or points of view; interpreting or explaining that pattern; and justifying that interpretation or explanation as meaningful" (*AQIPment Newsletter*, Fall 2014).

The ELR departmental definition is provided below.



**Critical thinking is the process of dialoging with and identifying patterns in texts; reflecting on and questioning one's own assumptions and those of others; and communicating clearly while thinking deeply and logically. A well-practiced critical thinker engages in a transformative process of assessing information through analysis, synthesis and evaluation. Critical thinking encourages creative exploration, civic engagement as well as academic and professional competence.**

*nota bene:* Special thanks to the ELR Assessment Committee, namely, Professors Bill Marsh, Cydney Topping, Susan Grace, Suzanne Sanders and Vincent Bruckert for their work on developing and reviewing the definition above.

Questions, concerns or comments? Please contact Helen Doss, PhD (ELR, Assessment Coordinator) at [hdoss@ccc.edu](mailto:hdoss@ccc.edu).

Image: <http://www.copyblogger.com/critical-thinking/>

### Contemplation Corner: Einstein, Education and Critical Thinking

In the spirit of our collective and collaborative work on critical writing and thinking as well as curriculum redesign, I thought I would share an essay I read long ago. It appeared in Albert Einstein's *Ideas and Opinions* (1956), and concerns the purpose of education. In his October 1931 speech commemorating the tercentenary of higher education in the U.S., at SUNY Albany, Einstein suggests a definition for and the value of critical thinking, i.e., "independently thinking." He argues that:

Knowledge is dead; the school, however, serves the living. It should develop in...individuals those equalities and capabilities which are of value for the welfare of the commonwealth. But that does not mean that individuality should be destroyed and the individual becomes a mere tool of the community, like a bee or an ant. For a community of standardized individuals without personal originality and personal aims would be a poor community without possibilities for development. On the contrary, the aim [of education] must be the training of independently thinking and acting individuals, who, however, see in the service of the community their highest life problem. (Einstein)

For Einstein, thinking "independently" is not only an essential outcome of higher education, but also a necessary skill for individuals and the good of society. Furthermore, Einstein argues that this service to society for which individuals must utilize their critical thinking should not come at the cost of individuality, creativity and choice – *possibilities are paramount*.

#### What do you think? Let's discuss.

If you would like to read a longer excerpt from Einstein's address, find it [here](#).

**Note:** In May 2015, I will feature books on assessment in Literature and Reading. Suggestions? Please send them to [hdoss@ccc.edu](mailto:hdoss@ccc.edu). Thanks! Helen

### Using the New Rubric for Assessing the English 101 Critical Essay

In fall 2014, the ELR assessment committee developed a new tool for the summative assessment of English 101 student writing competencies via a "critical essay." This process required the development of a competency-based rubric for determining the degree to which students achieve success relative to the student learning outcomes of English 101.

#### Using the Rubric

(1) For each critical essay (the one you and your cohort have discussed), you will complete one of the above rubrics. (2) On **each** rubric, you will note **each** (individual) student's performance, i.e., from emerging scholar (most successful) to novice (least successful) in each of the six English 101 competencies. Thus, for each critical essay, you will have a critical essay rubric. See example of annotated/scored rubric below.

#### Data Collection and Use

(3) After your cohort has convened and discussed the five to fifteen exemplars of student competencies, from most to least successful, **you will submit all (not only the exemplars) of the completed critical essay rubrics** (you do not need to submit the essays, nor is it necessary to include student names) **to your cohort chair**. (4) For the purpose of the ELR assessment project, I will aggregate the raw data across all spring 2015 sections of English 101 in the following competencies: (a) exposition and argument; (b) organization and development; and, (c) critical thinking. (5) These data will be used to craft preliminary statements about the degree to which students enrolled in English demonstrate competency in critical thinking. (6) These data will indicate the necessity of repeating this process with design and implementation modifications; and/or, they might indicate the need for department-wide discussion about critical thinking within the context of freshman composition.

**Questions about using the rubric?** Please contact Helen Doss, PhD at [hdoss@ccc.edu](mailto:hdoss@ccc.edu).