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M. Webb

E. Leland

S. Huddleston

S. Kennedy

M. Cole

See next page for additional authors

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Authors

M. Webb, E. Leland, S. Huddleston, S. Kennedy, M. Cole, M. Overdyk, R. Fields, N. Heard, V. Laxgang, J. Stephens, and B. Stephens



Undergraduate Views of Critical Thinking

Matthew Webb, Eliza Leland, Stacey Huddleston, Sara Kennedy, Meredith Cole, Mieke Overdyk, Rebecca Fields

Nicholas Heard, Vanessa Laxgang, Jessica Stephens, Benjamin Stephens

Clemson University Psychology Department



Introduction

- Clemson is initiating a Quality Enhancement Plan to assist undergraduates with critical thinking.
- Critical thinking can be defined as the ability to identify central issues or assumptions in an argument, eliminate useless information, evaluate evidence and alternative explanations, provide support for a conclusion, and read with a high level of comprehension (Terenzini et al, 1995).
- It has been found that professors feel they teach critical thinking explicitly and prioritize it in the classroom (Paul et al, 1997). Faculty also are vague and confusing in their open-ended descriptions of the conceptual and practical components of critical thinking instruction in the classroom (Paul et al, 1997)
- This study looks at the findings of Paul et al from a student perspective as well as faculty perspective.

Method

- Participants: 139 undergraduate students from the Undergraduate Psychology participant pool.
- Procedure: Surveys were constructed based on the surveys in the Paul et al study (1997). Two different surveys were given out: one from the student's perspective and one from the student's opinion of the typical professors perspective. The surveys were given out at the same time to the students and each took them in a different, uncompromised order.

Summary Statement

The purpose of the study was to assess student views of the "a typical professor's views" and student's "own personal views" using modified versions of the survey items that Paul et al (1997) employed.



Discussion

- It is clear from the study that students view the way faculty teach critical thinking different than faculty do.
- Faculty instruction of critical thinking may not be explicit or clear.
- Further research will be done on the clarity of critical thinking instruction and how to teach it.

Results

Table 1 shows how the Paul et al data lines up with data collected from this study

Original Item	Faculty Response	Student View Of Faculty	Student View Of Self
How important is critical thinking to your instructional objectives? (primary importance)	89	70	78
My concept of critical thinking is largely: (explicit)	67	39	30
My concept of critical thinking is largely: (product of theory)	ND	53	35
In your concept of critical thinking, do you explicitly distinguish critical thinking skills and traits? (yes)	50	68	72
In your view, do you think of knowledge, truth, and sound judgment as (fundamentally subjective taste)	41	77	81
Would you say that your department or school has a shared approach to the teaching of critical thinking or is it left more or less to individual faculty members' discretion to decide whether and how they approach critical thinking? (yes)	ND	64	60
In your view, how important is it for students to acquire sound intellectual criteria or standards to use in the assessment of their own thinking and the thinking of others? (primary)	ND	54	54
In your view, how important is it for students to learn how to assess their own work? (primary)	73	70	91
Do you feel that students generally come to your classes with well developed intellectual standards or criteria to use in assessing thinking? (yes)	ND	71	60
Which of the following four descriptions best represents your assessment of the degree to which your department's graduates develop the ability to think critically as a result of their course work? (high level)	81	44	37
Which of the following four descriptions best represents your assessment of the degree to which your department's graduates develop the knowledge and ability to foster critical thinking in their future students? (high level)	ND	40	30

Terenzini, Patrick T., Springer, L., Pascarella, E.T., and Nora, A. (1998) Influences Affecting the Development of Students' Critical Thinking Skills. Research in Higher Education, 30(2) p 21-39.
Paul, R., Eason, L., and Bethel, R. (1997) California teacher perceptions of instruction in critical thinking: research findings and policy recommendations. California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, Sacramento, California, March.