

## Stakeholder Summary

### George Brown College building capacity in critical thinking

Following on a three-year exploration of critical thinking skills, George Brown College has developed an assessment rubric and handbook to help other institutions explicitly incorporate critical thinking skills into their curriculum and improve the consistency of assessment.

The authors of the study, *Building Capacity to Measure Essential Employability Skills: A Focus on Critical Thinking*, sought to identify measurable elements of critical thinking and whether students are learning and demonstrating critical thinking skills in their coursework. Further, the project team envisioned a generic assessment tool for critical thinking that could be adapted for use in any course in the college.

#### Project description

The three-phase methodology directly involved faculty and students from a broad cross section of the college, beginning with a literature review of common measurable elements of critical thinking, assessment methods and developing rubrics specifically for critical thinking. Following on focus group consultations, the project team developed a provisional critical-thinking assessment rubric designed specifically for marking assignments within a college English course. Writing samples were evaluated through blind marking. A second version of the critical thinking rubric was developed and similarly evaluated, featuring six critical thinking constructs and four levels of mastery or rating scale (see *Appendix C, page 12*).

#### Findings

The project team believes that the development process piloted during this project can be replicated with other essential employability skills if resources are available to support the initiative. The project has also provided a number of key insights and lessons learned that should be considered in followup to this project and for other institutions considering undertaking similar work.

The team found that critical thinking was not explicitly being addressed or assessed within existing college English courses and rubrics. Assessing critical thinking was complicated by the quality of students' English language skills and faculty needed additional training to separate assessment of critical thinking and language. Faculty also had many different interpretations of critical thinking and how it could be demonstrated in student assignments, prompting considerable discussion to establish consensus about the specific constructs to be included in a generic tool. Importantly, faculty engagement was critical in the identification of core critical-thinking constructs to be taught, practised and assessed.

The project team also found that developing an assessment tool on its own provided no benefit unless all the elements to be assessed were clearly incorporated into the curriculum. Faculty acknowledged the importance of identifying and addressing critical thinking more deliberately and more explicitly with

their students to increase their general awareness of critical thinking and the benefits of developing these essential skills.

“We identified a core set of critical thinking constructs, rooted in the literature, that are viewed as most relevant by college faculty,” the authors say of the critical thinking rubric, noting that it serves as a useful starting point for assessing students’ critical thinking skills consistently across the curriculum. “Improving the reliability of the rubric is a work in progress,” they add.

In addition, a faculty working group incorporated the critical thinking rubric into a selection of General Education/Liberal Arts courses. Their experiences became the basis of [Learning, Teaching and Assessment — A Teacher’s Handbook](#).

Overall, the project was designed “to enable a collaborative, inclusive developmental process to unfold, engaging a representative group of faculty volunteers and fostering significant change in curriculum and teaching practices,” say the authors.

Authors of *Building Capacity to Measure Essential Employability Skills: A Focus on Critical Thinking* are Gary Kapelus, Nancy Miyagi and Valerie Scovill, George Brown College

*George Brown College is one of seven Ontario institutions participating in HEQCO’s [Learning Outcomes Assessment Consortium](#). Each is developing and piloting assessment tools and techniques ranging from ePortfolios to analytic rubrics that will be scalable to the institution level in the future.*