

## QEP Faculty Champion Report: Fall Semester 2013

### Faculty Champion: Val Czerny

#### Directions:

**Summarize the critical thinking activities that you engaged in by responding to the following questions. Include important details and attach relevant documents if desired. Please return complete reports by Friday, January 10, 2014.**

#### **How did you teach critical thinking in your courses?**

##### ➤ **Critical thinking goals:**

To explain my critical thinking goals, I want to refer to ideas provided by an author of a recent book I have been reading, entitled *The Nature of College: How a New Understanding of Campus Life Can Change the World*, by James J. Farrell (2010). In his introduction, Farrell quotes from Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner's text, entitled *Teaching as a Subversive Activity*. Farrell writes:

Words structure our worlds but they can also change the world. . . . Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner suggest: "We act on the basis of what we see. If we see things one way, we act accordingly. If we see them in another, we act differently. The ability to learn turns out to be a function of the extent to which one is capable of perception change. If a student goes through four years of school and comes out 'seeing' things in the way he did when he started, he will act the same. Which means he learned nothing. If he does not act the same, it means he changed his way of talking. It's as complicated as that." With any luck, the words in this book will help to change ways of seeing, ways of talking, and ways of acting.

Referring to the purpose of his book, Farrell also says that his goal is to "discover new patterns of thinking and acting to create the world we want to live and work in." My goals in terms of using and teaching critical thinking are the same as Farrell's, Postman's and Weingartner's. That is, I want to be able to see students demonstrating being "capable of perception change," as much as possible, and I want students at least to begin to discover new patterns of thinking in order, hopefully, for them to recognize that it is possible to, in some ways, "create the world we want to live and work in."

##### ➤ **Teaching strategies:**

☞ One strategy I have implemented is to put, on all of my D2L pages for all of the classes that I teach, a quotation from Gerald M. Nosich's book, *Learning to Think Things Through: A Guide to Critical Thinking Across the Curriculum*. The quotation that I post at the top of each D2L page is:

Whether it is in writing or reading, in analysis or evaluation, in the discipline as well as in your life outside school, critical thinking creates value. It takes effort, especially before you get used to it. But it has clear practical benefits that far exceed the effort. It will produce better answers, better grades, in more courses, in more professions, with ultimately less work, than any alternative. More than that, it gives insight that can make your life richer by bringing the elements, the standards, and the disciplines into learning to think things through.<sup>†</sup>

James Farrell also points out that "[t]oo often, . . . students take courses to complete requirements instead of requiring that their courses help to build [a] better world." In order to demonstrate to students that they should begin to think of composition and literature skills as more than a "requirement," I go over Nosich's quotation with them on the first or second day of class. The idea is to convince them that, as Nosich truthfully points out, *less work* is a result of successful critical thinking. On the other hand, critical thinking does not just happen. I point out to my students that it does take effort, but the value of critical thinking, if used, can lead to a better

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<sup>†</sup> I have attached a sample D2L page from my Fall 2013 World Literature II class, which illustrates the quotation.

career, as well as to a more improved, richer “life outside school.” I then explain that my goal in the class is to teach them that words, when used figuratively to paint pictures, can say more than pages and pages of literal writing. So, I also explain that I plan to teach them how to think metaphorically and to break the habit of writing plot summaries. Many college students are used to “parroting” or summarizing and do not know how to think figuratively; therefore, they do not recognize the value in it. When they do make the effort to think critically and figuratively, their ideas become engaging, interesting, sometimes beneficially humorous, and, occasionally, profound. I tell my students that some will want to give up on figurative thinking because they will think it’s strange or too difficult, but I encourage them not to do so. I keep Nosich’s quotation on the D2L page throughout the term so that students can hopefully be reminded of the value of critical thinking.

☞ I have implemented other teaching strategies to encourage critical thinking that will motivate students to find value in the texts that they read, but for the purposes of this report for this term, I will focus here on one strategy—the willful, deliberate use of vocabulary. In Composition I, I have created assignments that encourage students to use definitions to support the reasoning behind their arguments, and I’ve had them analyze the connotations of words in persuasive documents. I use similar strategies involving vocabulary comprehension in Composition II. A Composition II student this fall term regularly visited me in my office for assistance on her writing projects, and when I suggested some different terms to use in her sentences, she found such terms to be both novel, for her, and interesting. Quite frequently, she would say: “I **like** that.” Her pleasure in discovering new terms came from the skill in “economy” that she was learning. She discovered that she could say, in one word, what she was trying to say in seven or eight. She particularly enjoyed learning the word, “rendezvous,” especially in terms of its different connotations, and she appreciated the rhythm and French sound in the term. An appreciation of our language’s history and of the way words can roll on our tongues is an avenue to better critical thinking skills. Choosing just the right term to use to convey meaning and even a bit of poetic lyricism involves stopping, considering, erasing, revising, and rearranging one’s thoughts to involve and interest an audience of readers. For words to be able to “change the world,” as Farrell says, the “world” needs to be addressed. Many students write papers at the last minute with little to no consideration of their audience, so their words merely say, “Me, Me, Me,” in a muffled, confused sound under a fogged, glass ceiling. Simply by paying attention to her audience and to her vocabulary, my Composition II student was learning how to break the glass, bit by bit, in order to bring in the fresh air of a larger world. Her final paper for the course ended up being quite good, and I recommended that she continue to work with it and transform it into a paper that she could present at EGSC’s Critical Thinking Conference in April 2014. At this point, she is enthusiastic about doing so, and I hope the busyness of life and coursework does not keep her from pursuing that goal. The transformation of her writing from poor writing to a well-conceived creative paper at the end of the term all began with discussions about the connotations of words.

➤ **Rubrics/other assessment methods:**

I have never been a big fan of using rubrics in the form of charts for grading because they usually end up, for me, taking more time—even though they’re supposed to save time. They’re useful, however, in that they can provide a clear, direct “picture” of skill placement. So, on each of my D2L pages, I provide a link to EGSC’s “Holistic Critical Thinking Rubric for Evaluating Written Work,” and I direct students to use that rubric in order to determine, first, where they “stand,” and second, how they can improve in terms of their writing abilities. I do, however, use a rubric for grading for my online class because I have discovered that a rubric works well for me when it comes to grading not papers, but discussions. When students receive their scores for their discussions for the week, the score corresponds to each section of the rubric. Once again, students who tend not to consider their audience begin to learn how much their writing should be directed to an audience of readers who have different views than they do. The rubric assists in providing guidelines for the students to use when they write to college-level classmates, which leads them to “change ways of seeing [and] ways of talking,” as Postman and Weingartner say, and increases their critical thinking skills.‡

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‡ I have attached the rubric to illustrate how it appears on the discussion blog for my online Children’s Literature course.

### **What worked best for you in teaching critical thinking?**

What worked best for me this past fall was my creation of different assignments that utilized metaphorical thinking. Although I created some assignments using metaphors for my other classes, I revamped my Composition II course assignments to include the use of direct, creative metaphors. Students could choose from a short list of metaphors for their arguments for their papers. So, for instance, on one assignment they could choose to interpret one of the works we read in class by imagining the work to be a type of appliance, such as a coffee maker, dishwasher, stove, or vacuum. (One student interpreted a work as a light switch). To assist them in brainstorming about that particular metaphor, I asked them to think about which element is the strongest of the “machine” and to think about which element breaks down the most. Or, they could choose, among other suggestions, to interpret a work by imagining it as a memorable sound (not necessarily produced by a musical instrument). The Composition II student I discussed above (whose essay I recommended be transformed into a paper that she could present at EGSC’s Critical Thinking Conference) used the “memorable sound” metaphor as the foundation for her argument.

### **Did you encounter any unanticipated problems in teaching critical thinking?**

When it comes to the use of definitions, I’ve discovered that many students are not ready to use etymologies of terms, which is rather disappointing for me because an etymology of a term can sometimes not only become the prepared ground or base for a thesis, but it can, at times, even change one’s thinking about one’s world views. That sounds fantastic, but understanding the history of a word or words can connect us to ideas and/or to other cultures’ conceptions that we may have never considered before. Considering other perspectives assists in one’s critical thinking skills. I’ve learned that students tend to have a great deal of difficulty simply using a definition to support one of their reasons for an argument. They will often plop a definition into their paper with no introduction or explanation and will simply do it because it’s part of the assignment. Although they have to use some critical thinking when choosing their definition, they are not actually “thinking things through” when they follow an assignment only for the sake of following an assignment.

#### **➤ How did you respond to these problems?**

I created a strategy to encourage students to choose for their definition selection a definition that supports one of their reasons for their arguments. Students tend to gravitate toward the topic instead of to their reasoning when they are asked to choose a specific term to support their reasoning. So, for instance, if I provide a prompt that asks them to create an argument about the use of free will, they will want to define the concept of “free will” instead of, first, creating an argument about free will and, second, developing reasons to support that argument. So, in class workshopping/brainstorming sessions, I put, one at a time, students’ arguments on the board, and then, as a class, we develop supporting reasons for that argument, and I write those on the board. Once the words are on the board, I then ask the students which word would be the best word to define in order to support one of the reasons and, ultimately, the argument. That assists students in seeing that they need to find secondary sources to support the reasoning that they use in their written assignments. It makes them delve more deeply into the reasoning that they’re using, so it assists me when it comes to asking them if they really believe (or completely understand) what they have written, and it assists me in being able to show them when they contradict the very reasoning that they set up in their arguments. And, as a bonus, I do not receive a slew of papers where every student has defined the concept of “free will,” and students become more original in their thinking. When I see originality emerging in their written voices, that gives me hope. Sometimes, when students visit me in my office, I can delve a bit into the etymology of a term or terms that they are using in order to encourage them to think more thoughtfully about the words they are using to illustrate their thoughts.

**How did the introduction of critical thinking affect student learning in your courses?**

➤ **Qualitative and Quantitative assessment results:**

For my Composition II courses, I have been giving an assessment that gauges students' reading comprehension and their understanding of literary terminology in connection to interpretations of fiction. This past fall, the assessment results improved from those from the spring of 2013. The students' reading comprehension results, obtained during the most recent assessment, demonstrate a marked improvement overall in their ability to comprehend and interpret the assigned passage. Most significantly, more students apprehended the concept of irony and selected the statement most likely to be that which the author would agree is true; the number of students who understood these ideas grew from approximately 15-to-25 percent to 44-to-52 percent from the spring to the fall term. As a result, in relation to understanding how authors transform literal elements into figurative meaning and how authors use titles to convey meaning, the students demonstrated a strong comprehension, which shows that the students understood how to recognize meaning that extends beyond literal comprehension—a skill that requires the use of critical thinking.

**How will being a faculty champion for critical thinking impact your approach to teaching?**

I have been trying and will continue to try to develop assignments that stress the use of critical thinking. I have also been making it a point to inform students how I have designed certain assignments to improve their critical thinking skills. It helps when students see the purpose behind the assignments they are required to complete.

**If you worked with a faculty mentor, who did you work with and how did the mentor assist you?**

Linda VonBergen has been directing me to various sites and texts and articles that have assisted me in teaching my classes with critical thinking in mind. For instance, students have difficulty expressing what they think on paper since they tend not to understand correct grammatical constructions. After Linda directed me to a site that provides grammar worksheets, I have, in turn, directed students to it. I provided a link to the site (Jose M. Blanco's site for Practice in Fixing Grammatical Errors) on my discussion blog site for my online course. Linda also directed me to a terrific article published this past September in *The Wall Street Journal* by Mark Goldblatt, entitled, "Welcome Back, My Ungrammatical Students." I posted the article on my D2L pages and discussed it with my students in my various classes. Although Goldblatt discusses grammar, the use of the article was most effective in altering students' attitudes not only about the importance of using grammar correctly, but also about the college experience. That sort of change of perspective is an example of one of my goals—to, as James Farrell expresses it, "discover new patterns of thinking and acting to create the world we want to live and work in."

**Content Browser**

Home

EGSC's Critical Thinking Rubric for Evaluating Written Work

EGSC's Critical Thinking Rubric for Evaluating Written Work

**Role Switch**

You are currently viewing this page as **Demo Student**.


**Note:** Once you navigate to another Course (or to My Home), you automatically return to your active role.

Current Role: Demo Student

FALL 2013

**World Literature II**

**Dr. Czerny**




*"Let your bookcases and your shelves be your gardens and your pleasure-grounds. Pluck the fruit that grows therein, gather the roses, the spices, and the myrrh."*

~ Judah Ibn Tibbon

**News**

There is no news to display.

**The Work of Critical Thinking**



"Whether it is in writing or reading, in analysis or evaluation, in the discipline as well as in your life outside school, critical thinking creates value. It takes effort, especially before you get used to it. But it has clear practical benefits that far exceed the effort. It will produce better answers, better grades, in more courses, in more professions, with ultimately less work, than any alternative. More than that, it gives insight that can make your life richer by bringing the elements, the standards, and the disciplines into learning to think things through."

-- Gerald M. Nosich, *Learning to Think Things Through*

**Critical Thinking**

*EGSC's Critical Thinking Standards for Written Work*

**Calendar**

**Events**

Today

No events

Upcoming

No events

**Updates**

There are no current updates for World Literature II Section U Fall 2013 CO

## Literary Adventures

"Second to the right, and straight on till morning." —J.M. Barrie

### Grading System for Posts

#### Grading System for Weekly Online Discussions (35 points per week)

Criteria	Poor (0-20 pts)	Fair (21-25 pts)	Good (26-30 pts)	Excellent (31-35 pts)
<b>Content and Creativity (Part A)</b>	Postings show little to no evidence of insight, understanding, or reflective thought about the topic.	Postings provide minimal insight, understanding and reflective thought about the topic.	Postings provide moderate insight, understanding, and reflective thought about the topic.	Postings provide comprehensive insight, understanding, and reflective thought about the topic by ... building a focused argument around a specific issue, or ... inquiring about a new related issue, or ... making an oppositional statement supported by logical reasoning.
<b>Content and Creativity (Part B)</b>	Postings present no specific viewpoint and provide little to no supporting, specific connections to the assigned readings for the week.	Postings present a specific viewpoint but lack specific connections to the assigned readings for the week.	Postings present a specific viewpoint that is substantiated by specific connections to the assigned readings through the use of supporting textual evidence.	Postings present a focused and cohesive viewpoint that is substantiated by effective supporting connections to the assigned readings that enhance the information



"A book must be an ice-axe to break the seas frozen inside our soul." —Franz Kafka

#### Categories

- No categories

#### Handy Links

- D2L: Log In
- drczerny.com
- EGSC Homepage
- Printable Monthly Calendars

#### Perusing Purdue University

- The Purdue Owl

#### Perusing the University of Guelph

- Concept Mapping
- Reading and Studying Texts
- Time Management

#### Grammar Refreshers

Grammar Worksheets (Practice Fixing Grammatical Errors by Clicking on the Worksheets on Jose M. Blanco's Site)

#### Calendar

December 2013

				presented.
<p><b>Content and Creativity (Part C)</b> Weight for this criterion (Parts A, B, and C together): 20% of total score</p>	Postings do not stimulate dialogue and commentary and provide either deliberate or unwitting parroting of others' points.	Postings are brief, unimaginative, and reflect minimal effort to provide original thought.	Postings are generally well written with some attempts made to express original, critical thought.	Postings are creatively and fluently written and demonstrate critical thinking and original thought.
<p><b>Voice and Audience (Original Expression of Critical Opinion and Consideration of Audience)</b> Weight for this criterion: 20% of total score</p>	Postings do not reflect an awareness of the audience, it is difficult to identify the author's voice, and word choice does not bring the topic to life.	Postings are written in a style that does not fully consider the audience, the author's voice is difficult to identify, and little attempt is made to use effective word choices that bring the topic to life.	Postings are written in a style that demonstrates some attempts to stimulate dialogue and commentary. An attempt is made to use a consistent voice, as well as word choices that attempt to bring the topic to life.	Postings are written in a style that is appealing and that stimulates appropriate dialogue and commentary. A consistent voice is evident throughout each posting through the use of expressive and carefully selected word choices that bring the topic to life.
<p><b>Quality of Writing, Proofreading, and Presentation of Titles and Quotations</b> Weight for this criterion: 20% of total score</p>	Written responses contain numerous grammatical, spelling, punctuation, title, or quotation errors. The style of writing does not facilitate effective communication.	Written responses include some grammatical, spelling, punctuation, title, or quotation errors that distract the reader.	Written responses are largely free of grammatical, spelling, punctuation, title, or quotation errors. The style of writing generally facilitates communication.	Written responses are free of grammatical, spelling, punctuation, title, or quotation errors. The style of writing facilitates communication.
<p><b>Posting Quantity and Timeliness</b> Weight for this criterion: 20% of total score</p>	A reply posting is only provided, and/or posting is not submitted within the required time frame.	An original posting is only provided, and/or the development of thought and connections in that post is inadequate or not sufficient.	The minimum number of postings (original post and a reply) is met, and the development of thought and connections within each post is mostly adequate or sufficient.	The minimum number of postings (original post and a reply) has been met, and the development of thought and connections within each post is thorough and complete.

M	T	W	T	F	S	S
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					

Great Reads!



Search

Search for:

<b>Discussion Protocols</b> Weight for this criterion: 20% of total score	25% or less of the online protocols* are followed.	Up to 50% of the online protocols* are followed.	Up to 75% of the online protocols* are followed.	All online protocols* are followed.
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**\*Protocols:** Five protocols must be observed and practiced in online/ELC discussions: 1) Aggressive language, which consists of swearing, slander, insults, defamation, and/or threats, is unacceptable, and any use of aggressive language will not be tolerated or allowed in online discussions. 2) The use of slang or sloppy language (such as "Hey!" or "Anyhoo") or the use of abbreviations (such as L.O.L. or B.T.W.) is inappropriate in academic discussions. 3) Proper, tasteful diction (word choice that avoids either providing or quoting words that are clearly profane or intolerant of others) and tasteful images, as well as the proper capitalization of words (such as "I" and the correct usage of capitalization in sentences), and the correct use of apostrophes, punctuation, and quotation marks are required in academic postings. 4) Students must submit postings and replies on time to the "Literary Adventures" Edublogs site, according to specified guidelines. 5) If images or other media that are not the property of the student are used, the attribution information (title and original link) must be pasted into the caption box within the Upload/Insert Media option.

[Grades for postings will be provided on D2L. ~Dr. C]

[Archives](#)

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