

California State University, East Bay
Institutional Learning Outcomes Subcommittee
01 August 2014
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The Impact of Co-Curricular Programs on Critical Thinking: A Preliminary Analysis

Introduction

In spring 2014, the ILO Subcommittee of the Academic Senate conducted a study to (1) investigate the impact of co-curricular programs on students' critical thinking as part of the efforts at CSUEB to assess our critical thinking ILO and (2) get student input about how to improve support for these programs. A secondary purpose of the study was to determine whether the methodology used for the current study could be used or adapted as one approach for future ILO assessment efforts in co-curricular programs. This report provides a description of the study and a preliminary analysis of the results. A more complete analysis is forthcoming.

Involving Students in Assessment

Preliminary Findings about Co-Curricular Activities and Critical Thinking

All eight focus groups were striking in what they revealed about the amount of time and engagement required for participation in the co-curricular programs included in this study. Many of the students spent 20 or more hours per week to meet the requirements for their program. Because these students were involved in these intensive and sustained activities, it was not surprising that every focus group produced examples of critical thinking related to co-curricular participation.

We need to build up our employment, so we're thinking about moving all our agrarian people to the urban cities. Having taken a Marxist class and an environmental policy class, you realize you don't want to have your agrarian people moving over to the urban areas because, then I posed a question: How's the hunger issue in your country? Well, we don't really have any. Well, that's because you have an agrarian development there, and you don't want to take away from that. So

Purpose: To encourage participants to think about the effects of their co-curricular activity on them individually; to discover additional outcomes for further investigation in other ILO assessment cycles.

3. Critical thinking can be defined in a variety of ways. The Association of American Colleges and Universities defines critical thinking as “a habit of mind characterized by the comprehensive exploration of issues, ideas, artifacts and events before accepting or formulating an opinion or conclusion.” More informally, critical thinking can be described as deep, careful, creative thinking that is open minded and evidence based. Critical thinking is also involved in problem solving and in developing any complex ability such as teaching, tutoring, or mentoring others.

With these definitions of critical thinking in mind, think about your co-curricular activity. How has it helped you develop your critical thinking abilities?

[Probe: Can you give a specific example of when you were aware that your co-curricular activity had made you a stronger critical thinker?]

Purpose: To elicit examples of critical thinking resulting from co-curricular participation.

4. Think of an issue, problem, or challenge you have encountered when participating in your co-curricular activity. What is/was the issue, problem, or challenge? How have you addressed the issue, problem, or challenge?

Purpose: To elicit examples of critical thinking resulting from co-curricular participation with an MCID 8