QEP Executive Summary – Improving Students' Critical Thinking

The focus of the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) for St. Petersburg College (SPC) is *enhancing* student *learning by improving students' ability to think critically*. SPC involved a broad range of faculty, staff, and key stakeholders in considering various ideas for the QEP. After identifying critical thinking as the most important and urgent topic and reviewing definitions from the critical thinking literature, the Quality Enhancement Committee (QEC) formulated the following definition for critical thinking:

Critical thinking is the active and systematic process of communication, problem-solving, evaluation, analysis, synthesis, and reflection, both individually and in community, to foster understanding, support sound decision-making, and guide action.
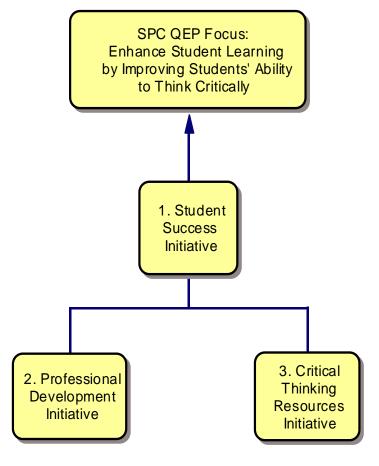
SPC conducted an in-depth review of strategies for instruction and institutional improvement to determine effective ways of improving students' critical thinking skills. As a result of this research, the College identified three key initiatives that faculty believe will have a favorable impact on students' learning by infusing critical thinking throughout the institution. Those initiatives are: Student Success, Professional Development, and Critical Thinking Resources. The comprehensive set of initiatives was developed around a common language to make current practices more effective and develop new instructional rubrics and strategies.

INITIATIVE 1. STUDENT SUCCESS INITIATIVE

The Student Success Initiative is the primary focus of the QEP, supported by professional development for faculty and resource materials that reflect and facilitate faculty research on integrating critical thinking activities in the classroom. This initiative will focus on implementation of classroom critical thinking activities, supported by key club and student leadership programs and tools that assess and document critical thinking, such as student ePortfolios. Students will be exposed to critical thinking throughout the College and will be offered opportunities to create, collect, and reflect on their own artifacts within their ePortfolios. A Collegewide assessment rubric template and discipline-specific assessments will be used by faculty to evaluate the students' critical thinking skills. Academic programs will be selected for implementation over five years, and lead faculty and staff will receive advanced professional development geared to their disciplines or field. Key student organizations will be included in the five-year rollout process.

SPC QEP Focus: Enhance Student Learning by Improving Students' Ability to Think Critically

1. Student Success Initiative

2. Professional Development Initiative

3. Critical Thinking Resources Initiative

INITIATIVE 2. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE

This initiative concentrates on offering professional development opportunities to faculty and staff at the College in order to impact students' critical thinking skills. The College will systematically train a small core of faculty members using a "train-the-trainer" approach, and then build on that existing base of knowledge and expertise. The initiative also will include seminars led by outside experts, development of in-house and on-line training, travel to conferences to learn new techniques, and using Academic Roundtables (ARTs) on the campus sites to explore and implement strategies. Faculty and staff will have access to a variety of professional development opportunities.

INITIATIVE 3. CRITICAL THINKING RESOURCES INITIATIVE

This initiative calls for the creation of an array of electronic resources, many of which will be available from a single gateway website. It also calls for identifying, organizing, linking to, and describing outside resources that can be used in the effort. In partnership with other SACS institutions, SPC will collect, create, and house a library of electronic critical thinking tools that can be used in online, traditional face-to-face, or blended classrooms, including Reusable Learning Objects (RLOs). RLOs are small segments of instruction, usually electronic, that can be used in multiple courses, and instructional portfolios of critical thinking activities created by faculty. Lastly, physical resources will be collected through this initiative and housed at Critical Thinking Resource Centers at each library.