Core General Education: CRITICAL THINKING AND WRITING (A3)

A. Goals
In Critical Thinking courses, students will understand logic and its relationship to language: courses include a series of integrated reading, writing, oral, and research assignments that engage students in complex issues requiring critical thinking and effective argumentation. Students will develop language that distinguishes fact and judgment; articulates elementary inductive and deductive processes; parses fact, assumption and conclusion; integrates rebuttal and qualification as appropriate. Students will develop the ability to analyze, criticize, and advocate complex ideas, reason inductively and deductively, research and rebut information and arguments, and reach well-supported factual conclusions and judgments.

B. Student Learning
Students will demonstrate, orally and in writing, proficiency in the Area A3 Learning Outcomes. Students will be able to:
1. locate and evaluate sources, through library research, and integrate research through appropriate citation and quotation.
2. present effective arguments that use a full range of legitimate rhetorical and logical strategies to articulate and explain their positions on complex issues in dialogue with other points of view.
3. effectively locate, interpret, evaluate, and synthesize evidence in a comprehensive way in support of one’s ideas.
4. Identify and critically evaluate the assumptions in and the context of an argument.
5. effectively distinguish and convey inductive and deductive patterns as appropriate, sequencing arguments and evidence logically to draw valid conclusions and articulate related outcomes (implications and consequences).

C. Content
Diversity: Students will engage in integrated reading, writing, and oral assignments to construct their own arguments on complex issues (such as diversity and ethnicity, class and social equity) that generate meaningful public debate.

Writing: Students will write a series of essays informed by research and articulating fully developed arguments about complex issues. Assignments emphasize those skills and activities in writing and thinking that produce 1) the persuasive argument, and 2) the critical essay, each of which demands analysis, interpretation, and evaluation. Writing assignments give students repeated practice in prewriting, organizing, writing, revising, and editing. This class requires a minimum of 6000 words, at least 4000 of which must be in revised final draft form. Assignments should include timed (or “in class”) writing as well as revised writing (out of class). How the 6000-word minimum will be met and distributed must be clearly indicated on the course greensheet.

Students will receive frequent evaluations of their writing from the instructor. In keeping with the core goal of A3—understanding the relationship between
language and logic—evaluative comments must be substantive, addressing both the logic of the argument and the quality and form of the writing. Comments should encourage and acknowledge student success as well as note problems and suggest ways to improve.

Writing assignments will be structured to explore the relationship between language and logic in composing arguments, and to develop strategies for incorporating critical thinking skills into the writing process. Instruction in writing will help students to recognize and produce language that:

- conveys complex ideas clearly, logically, persuasively
- states a clear position while taking into account other points of view, integrating both qualification and rebuttal as appropriate
- understands the kinds of argument and the kinds of evidence appropriate to each, and chooses both appropriately
- integrates research logically and ethically: analyzing, interpreting, synthesizing, and documenting information and ideas gleaned from reliable sources
- uses paragraph and essay form to effectively organize complex arguments into clear, readable logical sequences that are both coherent and persuasive
- controls word choice to develop prose that is readable, logical, and persuasive
- controls syntax, grammar, and punctuation to develop prose that is readable, logical, and clear

Oral: Students will also complete oral communication assignments. These assignments might include individual presentations; group presentations; group, team, or dyadic discussions; debates; and similar speaking events. Evaluative comments for these assignments, addressing issues of both content and presentation, must substantively remark on the logic of the argument as well as the presentation’s delivery.

Reading: Readings are an integral part of A3 courses. Readings include useful models of writing for academic, general, and specific audiences; readings are used consistently with the course goal of enhancing ability in written communication and reading. The majority of the reading is devoted to analytical, critical, and argumentative texts. Instructors will help students develop and refine strategies for reading challenging, college-level material.

Readings will represent a broad spectrum of opinions and ideas, writing styles, and cultural experiences. Students should be introduced to methods of argument analysis, both rhetorical and logical, that allow them to parse complex arguments and articulate their logical structure. These methods of analysis can include, for instance, stasis theory and Toulmin analysis, truth trees and Venn’s diagrams—any method formal and informal that encourages students to assess the validity of an argument and evaluate the relationship of the language to the argument’s logic, including:

- distinguish denotation from connotation, abstract from concrete, literal from inferential
• identify logical structures (such as warrants, evidence, qualification, rebuttal; enthymemes and syllogisms) and distinguish common logical fallacies
• recognize and evaluate assumptions underlying an argument
• draw and assess inferences and recognize distinctions among assumptions, facts, inferences and opinions
• distinguish the role of audience and context and purpose in shaping argumentation strategies
• evaluate rhetorical appeals to understand the role of emotion and ethos in relation to logic as part of effective argumentation

Research: Area A3 courses will include a library orientation conducted or approved by a trained librarian, to introduce the library and basic research strategies that students will need to complete upper division coursework, including locating materials, using them effectively (e.g., quoting, paraphrasing, summarizing), and citing them properly. A traditional research paper or a series of short essays informed by library research is required.

D. Support
- Class size: Enrollment shall be limited to 25 students.
- Grading: A-F. Completing this GE Area with a grade of C or better (C- not accepted) is a graduation requirement.
- Prerequisite: GE Areas A1 (Oral Communication) and A2 (Written Communication I, English 1A) with grades of C or better (C- not accepted).
- Instructor qualifications
  a. an understanding and appreciation of General Education;
  b. a doctorate (preferred but not required);
  c. college-level teaching experience or advanced (graduate) training in the subject matter of the course;
  d. a professional commitment to the learning needs of a diverse student body;
  e. a professional commitment to critical thinking instruction, as demonstrated by teaching experience, publications, or continuing professional education;
  f. a professional commitment to writing instruction, as demonstrated by teaching experience, publications, or continuing professional education;
  g. sections designed for foreign students require substantial formal training and experience in teaching speakers of other languages, in addition to above requirements; and
  h. teaching associates shall be allowed to teach a GE course only after training and under the close supervision of an expert in the field.

E. Assessment
- At a minimum, all writing shall be assessed for grammar, clarity, conciseness and coherence for all GE areas and courses. Writing Intensive GE areas have additional requirements specified in their Content Sections
- In accordance with the approved assessment plan, the course coordinator/department chair will submit GE Assessment Reports annually as required to maintain certification and will present summary results as a part of the Program Planning Self Study.