

FROM HABITS OF MIND TO CRITICAL THINKING

FROM HABITS OF MIND TO CRITICAL THINKING: A STUDY
OF STUDENT LEARNING BEHAVIORS IN A UNIVERSITY
GREAT BOOKS GENERAL EDUCATION COURSE

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ABSTRACT

Accreditors and administrators have begun to focus on general education with an eye to improvement. One of the most valued, but difficult to assess, learning outcomes in general education is critical thinking. Critical thinking is thought to play a role in student engagement and positive student learning outcomes. This study examined students' acquisition of critical thinking skills in a required general education great books course at a large, mid-Atlantic, Research I university with a high transfer-in population. Student interviews, class observations and document analysis were employed in the study. Specific attention was paid to dialogic learning, as Vygotsky's theory of social learning and the theory of student engagement underpinned the study. This study found that critical thinking learning goals were not communicated to the students explicitly through the syllabus. Only 20 percent of the students in the class reported acquiring critical thinking skills. All of those students were female transfer students. Many students described the class as outside their primary educational interests. Those who acquired critical thinking skills were more likely to be active participants in the class, value professor-student conferences and have a strong academic support network. Social interaction contributed to students' acquisition of critical thinking skills in this class. Future assessment of critical thinking will depend on a clearer definition of the concept. General education programs and courses that link social interaction and the acquisition of critical thinking skills are worthy of further study.

I dedicate this to my husband

Larry J. Cionca.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This study examined if and how students learn critical thinking skills. The setting was the first semester of a two-semester great books course at a large, mid-Atlantic research university that for the purpose of this study, was called Midlantic University. All students were required to take this course as part of the general education curriculum and the course was recently redesigned with a focus on texts that impart critical thinking skills. In this study, specific attention was paid to dialogic learning, as Lev Vygotsky's theory of social learning underpins this study (1987). Student engagement theory allowed for an analysis of organizational and structural factors that affect curriculum and pedagogy.

Undergraduate education, particularly general education or the core curriculum as it is sometimes called, which students take in their first two years of college or university, has a conflicted role in the American research university. American higher education is a hybrid, with the Oxbridge model appended to that of the European research university. Many students have directed vocational interests and regard general education as a burden to be endured in order to get to what they consider the more interesting and valuable disciplinary work that takes place in the last two years of American undergraduate education. These tensions are likely to deepen as America moves from mass to universal higher education, as is now happening.

Accreditors and administrators now focus on general education with an eye toward improvement of student outcomes. One of the most valued outcomes of general education is critical thinking. Moreover, critical thinking may play a role in student engagement, which is correlated to student success and persistence. There is some argument over whether critical thinking can be taught, but in educational psychology it has been dissected into various behaviors, such as asking questions in class or revising work, which leads to deeper learning.

The Problem

Critical thinking, along with other important outcomes, has been identified as a key general education outcome by many accrediting bodies across America. Yet, a clear definition of it remains elusive. Moreover, as a concept it remains difficult to measure. Some argue that critical thinking cannot be separated from knowledge within a discipline, while others posit that it is a skill that develops in stages.

Those who subscribe to the developmental process of critical thinking hold that critical thinking skills can be advanced in the first two years of college, when many students take their general education courses. This study aimed to examine that hypothesis. For the most part, the general education curriculum is a program of study made up of courses that fulfill requirements in areas such as math and science, the social sciences and the humanities. They provide general content and instruction, as well as practice with learning behaviors that promote later success in the discipline as well as in a future professional life. Yet, at the college and university classroom level, we do not know how critical thinking skills are transmitted to students and how students take them

up when they are exposed to them. In other words, we have mandated outcomes, despite a relative paucity of understanding as to how students develop these critical thinking skills and then employ them in their studies.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this dissertation is to contribute toward an understanding, and thus, a clearer definition of critical thinking that can be applied to practice of teaching and learning in the college and university setting, particularly during the first two years of college or university when students take or are meant to take a general education curriculum. Certainly, theorists from other disciplines, notably philosophy and psychology, have developed definitions of critical thinking, but because the concept has such disparate origins and is used so broadly (Hale, 2009), its utility is limited in a pedagogical sense. It is difficult to teach, and even more difficult to assess, what cannot be clearly defined. As critical thinking is one of the major purposes and desired outcomes of a college or university education, development of a clear representation of its mechanics is fundamental.

Contributing to a greater understanding of how students learn is another important goal of this study. Much has been made of critical thinking in terms of analyzing outcomes, but little has been presented from the student perspective. Despite abundant empirical evidence, little is available from the student perspective. The literature does not speak to what critical thinking means to students or how they perceive its usefulness. Here, the objective was to describe an authentic student experience, as they manage the process of becoming fully engaged students and citizens, as well as prepared for the workplace.

In the 1970s, the theory of student engagement emerged. It was a simple idea that explained student persistence in terms of student involvement (Astin 1999b). The more socially and academically connected a student was to his or her college or university experience, the more likely he or she was to persist. This theory generated assessment measurements that could be further broken down into concepts and ranked. Critical thinking is one of those concepts.

This dissertation focuses on student voice and the student experience of learning to think critically. It presented and analyzed the student experience using the lens of cognitive learning theory. Context, particularly the structure of higher education and the unseen stresses that places on students, plays a role in higher education and that factor was analyzed as well using student engagement theory (Astin, 1985). Lev, Vygotsky's theory of learning (1987), particularly his analysis of the apprehension of scientific concepts, was employed as a framework to describe individual student learning.

Vygotsky's Theory of Learning

Vygotsky argued that learning is mediated through language, and because of that higher-order learning begins as shared experience. Before we understand what we know internally, he explained, we experience it through semiotically mediated social processes” (Wertsch, 1985, p. 61). We learn from within a holistic need to solve problems both as individuals and as a culture (Cole, 1996). There is a process of learning. In his seminal work, *Thinking and Speech* (Vygotsky, 1987) he described this process or the pathway to higher order thinking. First we know the world in disparate, disorganized piles of knowledge. Our understanding of it is solipsistic, with ourselves at the center of what we

presume is reality. Over time, syncretism takes place as connections and dependencies form in and around this knowledge, which Vygotsky called complexes. These dependencies and connections come from the outside world, and thereby our understanding of reality begins to mirror the larger cultural conception of reality (Wertsch, 1995). Finally, we engage in higher order knowledge creation in the form of concepts. The concepts come in two forms: spontaneous and scientific. Spontaneous concepts are derived from inductive reasoning that come from observations and experiences in life, whereas scientific concepts are born from deductive reasoning and involve abstract thinking (Wellings, 2003). The space between them is what Vygotsky called the zone of proximal development (Thinking and Speech, 1987). This was the space he argued, that when mediated by instruction, students are guided to higher order thinking. Jerome Bruner (1996) named the guided teaching process lead from spontaneous to scientific concepts *scaffolding*.

Rationale

Discussion of student learning has been dominated by concern about outcomes. We measure what students have learned. Mostly we measure to what degree they can apply the content in similar context or in a different context to demonstrate real understanding across domains (Arum and Roksa, 2011). The problem with outcomes, these tangible effects of education, is that students often forget much of the content that they have learned. Higher education's value is not just in what students learn, but rather in how it fosters curiosity and imparts learning methods that students can ultimately use to teach themselves throughout the rest of their lives. Critical thinking is such a skill.

Critical thinking remains poorly defined, hard to teach, and thus, difficult to measure. The purpose of this study was to understand if and how students learn to think critically. It is contested. This study gathered data that could help improve student instruction by acquiring more knowledge on the process of student learning. Accrediting bodies have begun to pressure institutions of higher learning to present more tangible proof of student learning and proof that the curriculum is interconnected, that the learning transfers from class to class (MSCHE, 2008). Moreover, the need for students-centered learning will become more acute as colleges and universities incorporate more distance and asynchronous learning technologies into their offerings. Finally, there are those who contend that there is little proof that general education teaches students any learning skills beyond those with which they entered the institution (Arum and Roksa, 2011). This study endeavored to provide some insight into whether or not learning, particularly critical thinking, takes place in a general education course, as well as the process by which it occurs.

Research Questions

There is a process by which students become critical thinkers. This is different from a set of behaviors that occur after the process has taken place, commonly called outcomes. The study aimed to track how students became critical thinkers, in order to allow instructors and curriculum developers a window into the student experience.

1. Do students recognize critical thinking as it is taught to them?
2. How do students absorb and manifest critical thinking skills in this course?

3. Once they have been exposed to critical thinking, do students use it in other contexts?

Delimitations of the Study

Typically, critical thinking has been studied quantitatively. For the most, part colleges and universities have used surveys, notably the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and the Cooperative Institutional Research Project (CIRP) to measure some of the behaviors associated with critical thinking; however, these results are used administratively and rarely reported to faculty. Surveys are a useful assessment method, because quantitative methods are quick to administer; however, these results can't answer *why* or *how* students develop critical thinking skills. Also, they are rarely considered direct evidence of student learning. At the moment, the dominant question is how to measure a qualitative experience quantitatively. Although many disciplines have contributed to a greater understanding of the concept, critical thinking remains notoriously difficult to measure.

Blooms taxonomy (Anderson, Krathwohl & Bloom, 2001) provides a useful starting point, but falls short, because the hierarchy of lower to higher order thinking is difficult to operationalize. Bloom's taxonomy starts with remembering and ends with creating. This rubric is helpful, but not specific. It does not make clear what students need to do in the classrooms and when they study on their own. The connection between what happens in the classroom – what the students read, what the students discuss –and how they make use of the knowledge later is not clear. This study, using case studies of

individual students, offered some insight into the why and how of critical thinking. It helped place these skills within the larger theory of student engagement.

Significance of the Study

This study adds to the body of research on the critical thinking skills. We know that it is good when students have critical thinking skills, and we know that it leads to greater student academic engagement when they use them, but we don't know why and how these skills are used. This is important for students who enter college or university without fully developed critical thinking skills and must acquire them on the spot. The value of the research lies in its contribution to the understanding of what successful students do. One goal in higher education is to create curriculum, content and pedagogy that fosters critical thinking in students who come to higher education inadequately prepared and less likely to persist. To that end, this study provides additional insight into the student experience of critical thinking skills acquisition.

The setting for the study was a 21st century great books sequence of two courses that took students through a year of important texts organized around eight themes: journeys, self & others, community, faith, science, power, money and environment/city. It is this university's required two-semester long course, and its stated mandate was to teach students to critically read challenging texts. The thinking behind the course design was that if a student can take command of the texts in this course, the student would acquire the skills to be able to read the wide variety of complex texts they would encounter in the future. According to Midlantic's website one of its goals was to "recognize abstractions, large ideas, and implications associated with difficult written texts as well as make arguments and connections across texts" (Midlantic Website, 2011).

This course, the people who teach it, and most importantly the students, were worthy of study because they work, teach and learn within a new kind of organizational structure in the university that is not based around a department and not populated by fully enfranchised faculty members. The course sits within a larger program that employs over 100 instructors, approximately half of whom are contingent faculty, and with as many as 7,000 students enrolled at any one time. This course provides a model for general education as a whole, because its goals and challenges were ubiquitous. Moreover, because of its size and reach, student success in the course may impact performance in other courses.

Students don't take up critical thinking skills in a vacuum. Assuming the validity of critical thinking goals as stated here, their acquisition increases student engagement, which in turn correlates to student persistence. A general education, great books course was a suitable place to conduct a study of critical thinking and student engagement, because it is a class mandated to impart these skills in combination with challenging content. The class's contribution to student persistence, that all important metric within student engagement, has been studied quantitatively. When taken in sequence, after first-year writing, students are more likely to graduate within six years (Great Books Program Director, Personal Interview, 07 February 2011).

Theoretical Base

Two theories form the basis of this study. Organizational issues were examined through the lens of student engagement theory, while Lev Vygotsky's social learning theory (1987) provided insight into individual student learning behaviors. In the 1970s, in an effort to understand why some students persisted, but even larger numbers of students

did not, the theory of student engagement emerged in higher education (Astin, 1999a). It was a simple idea that explained student retention in terms of student involvement (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1983). The theory explained that the more socially and academically involved students were in their college or university experience, the more likely they were to persist (Kuh, 2001-2002). From this theory assessment measurements were developed that could be further broken down into concepts and rated (Astin, 2006). This dissertation used the theory of student engagement to gain a better understanding of how critical thinking can impact long-term student success at the institutional level. It provides a framework within which the researcher can observe and catalog learning behaviors, and ultimately connect those behaviors to persistence and retention. Student engagement is a theory that describes what students do to succeed. At the student level, this study provides observations and analysis of the individual student experience using the lens of cognitive learning theory. Lev Vygotsky's theory of learning (1987), particularly his analysis of the apprehension of scientific concepts, was employed as a framework to describe individual student learning and how students take up and employ critical thinking skills. This is a theory that stresses the importance of language in learning, so it facilitates lexical analysis of study subjects. In effect, both theories provided a framework that helped place the student within larger institutional contexts and communities, where certain outcomes are highly prized. As Vygotsky's theory made abundantly clear, critical thinking is neither a theory nor even a fully developed concept; it is a construct.

General education, the diverse, core curriculum that most undergraduate students are required to study, is an area of conflict in higher education (AAC&U, 2000). In the

case of a large research university, which is the setting for this study, the organizational structure of the institution itself can work against the effective implementation of a general education curriculum. It is likely that this curriculum will be challenged as greater percentages of students enter higher education for the first time. Moreover, it seems that many stakeholders question the value of general education; state funders impugn the expense, administrators challenge its effectiveness, faculty puzzle over why it is not more highly valued, and students wonder about its purpose altogether.

General Education

From Mass to Universal Higher Education

In the United States, it is commonly held view that higher education is an obligation, if not a right. It wasn't always this way, but in the twentieth century we saw the transition to a system of higher education that provided higher education for all. This transition from elite to mass higher education was a gradual evolution. To this day vestiges of the old system remain, for example, in the way certain high schools feed into elite colleges and universities (Karen, 2002). Regardless, the creation of the land grant public university and the community colleges created a higher education system for most. In large part, twenty-first century undergraduates are the children of those who were informed and molded by this successful movement toward mass higher education that began after WWII (Trow, 1973). With this movement came a shift in attitude, despite voices such as those heard in "Pathways to Prosperity" that find fault with it (Harvard, Graduate School of Education, 2011). Limited access to higher education – in this case the four-year college or university degree – particularly when caused by a student's circumstance as opposed to her abilities, is increasingly seen as a sort of socioeconomic

abuse. The Lumina Foundation “advocates that 60% of Americans should have two or four year college degrees by 2025. (The current figure is 39%.)” (Wood, 2011, p. 208). Elite education, which is to say tertiary education that is limited to a small percentage of young people drawn from the upper classes, does not align with American democratic ideals even as it continues to exist. For this reason, no other country in the history of advanced civilizations has created such a diverse, multi-layered higher education system, nor one that has sent so many of its youth on to college and university. This was one of the major cultural shifts of the twentieth century.

Graduation rates remain stagnant, at approximately 60 percent in six years, and those rates must be improved if higher education is to successfully absorb larger numbers of non-traditional students (Carey, 2004). The twenty-first century is a dynamic time in higher education. We are moving from the age of mass education into the age of universal education (Trow 1973, 2000). The advent of the Internet in the mid-1990s is the technological development that allowed for this evolution. College and university attendance rates corroborate continue to increase even as there are fewer traditional college and university student. During the 14-year period from 1995 to 2009 total enrollment in degree-granting institutions increased 43 percent, and from 2009 to 2020 enrollment is projected to increase 13 percent, to 23 million, with a large part of that increase coming from 25-29 year olds (NCES, Projections, 2011). Sometimes referred to as the age of lifelong learning, our era of universal education involves a modular approach to educational attainment with students using higher education in a variety of ways to fit their needs throughout their lives. It is an un-prescribed approach for which the structure of American education, specifically the currency of the credit hour, allows.

Higher education's present age promises even greater demographic shifts. These demographic shifts will bring students to higher education who have had less exposure to critical thinking. We are moving from the age of mass education into the age of universal education (Trow, 1973; Trow, 2000). This began in the mid-1990s with the advent of the Internet; and it is this technological development which has allowed for the evolution. College and university attendance rates corroborate this shift, even as there are fewer traditional college and university students. During the 14-year period from 1995 to 2009 total enrollment in degree-granting institutions increased 43 percent, and from 2009 to 2020 enrollment is projected to increase 13 percent, to 23 million, with a large part of that increase coming from 25-29 year olds (NCES, Projections, 2011). Sometimes referred to as the age of lifelong learning, our era of universal education involves a modular approach to educational attainment with students using higher education in a variety of ways to fit their needs throughout their lives. Through a variety of initiatives, the Lumina Foundation advocates for the goal of 60 percent of Americans having two or four year college degrees by 2025, even though the current figure is only 39 percent (Wood, 2011, p. 208). These are more likely to be non-traditional students who come to colleges and universities under-prepared, and because of myriad responsibilities and exigencies, less able to involve themselves socially in the educational process. Despite construction on colleges and universities across the nation, physical capacity cannot be increased to the point where it can accommodate such a large increase in the number of students served without using distance learning, so much of that learning will take place online or through hybrid distance learning models. This has and will have an effect on academic engagement.

General Education: History

We can look to the history of higher education for many of our present day conflicts over curriculum – who is in charge, what should be taught, and most importantly, how that curriculum should be evaluated – and find that they have their roots in the split between general and liberal education. This fracturing took place in the 1920s as a reaction to the undergraduate elective system that had been first implemented at Harvard by its transformational, 40-year president Charles William Elliot (Veysey, 1965). Elliot sought to connect the faculty to the undergraduate student body by giving them a stake in the teaching and the curriculum. He encouraged faculty members to develop courses around their academic interests, and in so doing created the elective system (Rudolph, 1962). Simultaneously, the concept of academic freedom as the freedom to teach came to the fore. A transformational president, serving in this pivotal era from 1869-1909, he turned what was a parochial religious college into the world's greatest research university. For the first time, faculty members could propose courses within their discipline and aligned with their own specialization (Geiger, 2004). They taught undergraduates content that they determined to be of value. Thus in the American research university, unlike in its European progenitor, the intellectual passions of the research university professoriate were brought into greater alignment with undergraduate education (Rudolph, 1962). This proved to be important because it was from the intellectual passions of innovative faculty that many new disciplines emerged (Rudy and Brubacher, 1997).

When Charles W. Eliot became the president of Harvard, in 1869 he both implemented the elective system in its most radical form and became its chief

symbol and spokesman. The controversy that swirled for decades around Eliot's system of free electives concentrated on the issue of what a student could and should learn – on coherence, breadth, and depth of different plans of study. Yet, the importance of the elective system for the development of American higher education lies in what it allowed faculty to teach. Elective courses not only permitted new subjects to be taught but also freed traditional subjects like classics to be developed in more specialized and advanced forms. As this occurred, the objective of a college education shifted imperceptibly from that of imparting an established culture to that of instilling increasingly specialized knowledge (Geiger, 2004, p. 7).

That Eliot was this innovative is surprising considering the bias that existed toward progressive education, particularly in the conservative East (Cohen, 1998). In response, there was a reaction to the fragmentation of the curriculum from other corners of the Ivy League. Columbia University rejected the innovation. “In 1919 Columbia declared that there was a certain minimum intellectual and spiritual tradition that people must understand if they were to be called educated; the school built an integrated course in Western civilization” (Cohen, 1998, p. 144). This course exists today, in the form of courses with the title “Contemporary Society” or “Intellectual Heritage.” These are multidisciplinary courses that work to bolster the curriculum against specialized interests within the institution that seek to advance their own disciplinary interests (Latzer, 2004). The original push toward an integrated, cohesive general education curriculum started with these sorts of courses.

Unfortunately, because of this early faculty investment in curriculum design, there was, as general education moved through the twentieth century, a shift toward overly specialized knowledge. This was good for the development of the majors, less beneficial for students in need of basic academic literacy skills. To this day, general education programs tend to suffer from a highly fragmented curriculum, with little cohesive design around overarching general education goals and student outcomes. Faculty members' interests and research foci become the purpose. Moreover, when general education courses are teaching rather than learning focused, it makes student outcomes difficult to assess.

The tendency to pull students away from general education and into the majors is exacerbated by the organizational structure of most colleges and universities. For the most part, institutions of higher learning are made up of individual knowledge silos, as “in both research and teaching, faculty culture is fragmented into departmental or disciplinary enclaves” (Tagg, 2008). These individual departments or disciplines, particularly the hard sciences, exert tremendous pull on the general education curriculum, always working to turn general education courses into prerequisites within their majors; thus, general education courses can usher students (known as full time equivalents or FTEs) into a discipline or department. This is extremely valuable, as all departments depend on FTEs for funding. This then, can make the courses program rather than student focused. Again, this makes student outcomes difficult to assess.

For now, an uneasy truce has been reached around the idea of distribution requirements. “This provided curriculum with a rationale: students should take classes in the humanities, science and social science, mathematics, and fine arts so that they would

have a breadth of knowledge. It satisfied the academic departments as well; they could list several classes and allow students to choose from a menu. This form of curriculum distribution, that is, one or two classes from each of a set of loosely organized under broad titles, went into effect in most institutions and remained the dominant model” (Cohen, 1998, p. 144). Furthermore, this split coincides with sciences and social sciences vying for curricular dominance over the humanities in American higher education (Kliebard, 1988). Many of today’s curricular conflicts are battles over general education. Moreover, distribution requirements did not solve the problem of the endless proliferation of courses that lead to institutional mission creep. Distribution requirements lead to faculty and departmental satisfaction, because courses can be developed in any discipline to serve multiple masters, but until recently these courses were never aligned with student learning outcomes. Now, accreditors demand institutions integrate greater accountability criteria into general education course and program design. This is the problem at present.

The Tension between General and Vocational Education

The first two years of college or university can be one of the most important and transformational experiences in a student’s life. This occurs on both the academic and social levels. Generally, this is the time in a student’s academic career when they fulfill their general education requirements, which is to say when they are exposed to a wide variety of disciplines. It is a uniquely American adaptation to higher education that is meant not only to differentiate it from vocational education but to prepare students with higher order thinking and communication skills that will allow them to function at the highest levels no matter their chosen discipline. It is also meant to cultivate the

individual. General education advocates argue that a quality liberal education is meant to facilitate a student asking

Life's most fundamental questions: What is the meaning of life? What is my purpose in life? What do I think and feel about life, death, God, religion, love, art, music, history, literature, and science? What kinds of friends and associates do I want in my life? What kinds of peer groups do I want to associate with? (Astin 1999a, p. 98).

Thus, the purpose of general education goes beyond materialism. Implicit in this is the ideal of a free-thinking educated person who can function in an ever-evolving democracy. General education is supposed to foster citizens, not just train workers.

As a result, vocationalism is often seen as the enemy of liberal education. Liberal educators argue that there is more to college than a job. However, the contrary viewpoint has a longstanding and historical precedent. Charles Prosser, father of vocational education and author of the Smith-Hughes Act of 1917, authored legislation that meant to provide help to students who needed to get a job and keep it, primarily working class and immigrant youth (Hyslop-Margison, 2000). In contrast, progressive education theorists saw vocational education from the beginning as undemocratic, in that its narrow focus served to reproduce socioeconomic inequalities. Moreover, as an implemented policy it lacked the historical framework to put it into perspective. “Vocational education, they say, was hardly the product of democratic sentiment, but was pushed by businessmen and efficiency-minded educators interested in using the schools to control workers and stabilize the corporate industrial society that was emerging in the early twentieth century” (Kantor, 1986, p. 402). Ultimately, it turned attention toward the schools as the locus of a solution rather than toward the stratified economic structure of capitalism itself (Hyslop-

Margison, 2000). In short, it encouraged students to be too narrowly career-minded and valued education in purely economic terms.

Education and Labor

Just as the traditional student has different needs from the twenty-first century learner, the modern world of work requires a different set of skills from traditional education. There are some in education who seek to close their eyes to the relationship between education and labor, but throughout the 20th century, education was inextricably tied to labor (Kliebard, 2002). Indeed, one of the problems with K-12 education, is that it was organized around the factory structure in its beginnings (Van Duzer, 2006), and this structure is somewhat calcified despite the glaring needs of a post-industrial, information economy. Despite its flaws, the modern world of work offers us a different way of learning, which is continually challenged and recreated by technology. It is important for educators to recognize that all education, even liberal education, has some relationship to vocational ends. Students perceive college to be a positive experience and express higher satisfaction levels because it is tied to enhanced life opportunities (Knox, Lindsay & Kolb, 1992, p. 322). The relationship between education and labor is sibling.

Liberal education was meant to train elite students or students with the required set of abilities to enter the professional classes. General education in the age of mass education was mostly the adoption, both in terms of content and pedagogy, of traditional elite, liberal education. Just as with vocational education, it was not examined for its hidden curriculum and the ways that it stratified the student body and served pre-existing

class interests (Giroux, 2009). Primary learning was done through exegesis rather than hands-on learning, an approach that still dominates in general education.

Deeply embedded in the culture of schooling is the notion that students should read, listen to and absorb a large body of facts, concepts, procedures, theories, beliefs and works of art and science that have accumulated over the centuries. An educated person is one who understands and appreciates these great intellectual products of human history. This view of learning comes to us from liberal arts education. It is our highest ideal of a cultured person, and so has very high status as a goal of education (Kuh, 2001-2002, p. 25).

General Education Now

Student ambivalence toward general education reflects late twentieth and early twenty-first century realities that often go unanalyzed. There is a commonly held view among educators that students think that required general education courses are bitter medicine to be swallowed in order to get to the real knowledge that will come when they take courses in their major (AACU, 2012).

Conventional general education courses at many institutions are imposed on junior faculty or teaching assistants and unwilling students as a kind of penance they must do, the price they must pay as the cost of entry to something interesting. Playing out the unconscious script that most of us carry around, faculty and students alike speak of general education requirements as something to ‘get out of the way.’ That most general education courses desperately need to be redesigned is hardly controversial” (Tagg, 2008, p. 19).

This negative attitude toward general education may be more than just prodigal. Perhaps, students question the utility of this collective past wisdom when it is provided to them through an abstract learning model, dissociated from the world outside the institution and outside their lives, rather than for the value of the knowledge itself. Moreover, these descriptors do not fully explain student's recalcitrance when it comes to general education, and they limit our understanding of how to design student-centered curriculum that teaches students how to negotiate an ever changing world. John Dewey argued that modern education would be suited to the age when it moved beyond either/or conventions (*Democracy and Education*, 1916).

During the age of mass higher education, students put significant pressure on general education curricula. A 1996 study by the National Academy of Sciences of changes in the undergraduate curriculum in 50 leading American colleges and universities from 1914 to 1993 found that there has been a steady de-emphasis on a common core of knowledge, and thus a reduction in the number of basic, required courses that students must take (Trow, 2000). During this period "the average percentage of the overall graduation requirement composed by general education requirements dropped from 55 percent in 1914, to 46 percent in 1964, to 33 percent in 1993" (National Association of Scholars, 1999). General education needs to adapt if it is to remain viable in the 21st century.

General education is, in many ways, not designed for the regenerative student, her use of technology and the changing world of work. Only recently has it been examined and designed around learning outcomes. It is only lately, largely due to competition and outside pressure that colleges and universities have pushed to define what problem

solving and critical thinking looks like. For much of the modern era, what happened in school and what happened in the world seemed completely separate. Higher education is now tasked with overcoming a paradigm that guided it for most of human history. It is this transition from mass to universal higher education that 21st century colleges and universities will negotiate.

The goal is to move away from the liberal versus vocational debate toward truly integrative general education. The value of this cannot be understated. General education is fundamentally important to both future academic attainment and job success. Students, who have not developed the basic academic literacy that a solid general education should provide find it difficult, or are unable, to master the higher order problem solving and decision making skills that they will need as they pursue specialized study required by their majors (Tagg, 2008). How well students do in their majors impacts time to degree, as well as how well they do in their chosen careers.

The Student

It cannot be ignored that many students, particularly students attending public institutions of higher education and community colleges are career-minded. They attend college or university to increase their economic opportunities and secure a position in the middle class. Certainly, non-working, 18-22 year old students from elevated socio-economic circumstance will always seek an undergraduate education at elite, residential institutions of higher learning, but they are not the dominant group in numbers at public research universities or community colleges (NCES, 2011). In today's volatile economy, it makes sense for them to have a job at the end of the educational tunnel. Immediately,

this puts them in conflict with general education advocates who describe job-focused students in pejorative terms. This prejudice continues despite at least a centuries' worth of theory on the relationship between education and economics. Instructors are very different from the students in their relationship to the material they instruct.

It is this new typical student coming into contact with a higher education system in flux that causes conflict. The typical 21st century student is a commuter, female, approximately 24-years old, and working full or part-time (Center for Postsecondary and Economic Success, 2011). Education decisions are made by weighing time and money in against probable wages out. This blatant expression of materialistic values has been one of the most dramatic changes in student's attitudes toward higher education during the past three decades (Astin 1999a, p. 86). The typical student's educational interests are vocational in that she seeks education to improve her labor conditions. It is reasonable to argue that this educational purpose, this vocational approach to learning, is viewed negatively by many in higher education. She is described by what she is not, rather than by what she is: *non-traditional*. It would be more descriptive to call her regenerative. She recognizes that at various times throughout her life, she will need to return to higher education to retrain. Moreover, she expects to use technology to learn.

The kind of education that technology is more likely to foster is hands-on, activity-based, individualized learning. A regenerative learner welcomes this. Computers are highly interactive and provide the learner with a wide assortment of computer tools to accomplish meaningful tasks. "No generation is more at ease with online, collaborative technologies than today's young people— 'digital natives,' who have grown up in an immersive computing environment. Where a notebook and pen may have formed the tool

kit of prior generations, today's students come to class armed with smart phones, laptops and iPods." (Glenn, 2008, p. 1). Throughout most of their lives students interact with and use a variety of software that they teach themselves to use. This has perhaps the most profound implications for education and what marks millennial students as different kinds of learners from learners in previous generations. Hence, they are much more aligned with the 'learning by doing' view of education than with the 'assimilation of cultural knowledge' ("New Generation of Wired Multi-Taskers," 2007) view of education that permeates schooling and has done so since the beginning of the research university. Student-centered learning is a vastly different paradigm from that which pervades the culture of schooling now (Collins and Halverson, 2009). It is possible to integrate the cultural knowledge that is traditionally taught into more interactive, technology assisted learning environments, but it is a slow process. It is more likely that new learning technology will be designed around helping students in the design and construction of artifacts and in the analysis of complex problems and situations (p. 3), rather than just capturing lectures (San Diego et al, 2012). Discussion has been going on since the 1990s about different learning styles being the order of the day (Levine and Cureton, 1998); regardless, faculty adoption of technology and interactive learning is piecemeal and slow. Moreover, the focus on active learning impacts retention as it has been shown to be a positive influence on the students' social integration and commitment to the institution, ultimately reducing departure decisions (Braxton, Milem & Sullivan, 2000).

The Faculty

Faculty members experienced a difficult transition into mass education, and the progression into universal education promises even more upheaval, particularly as instruction moves online. Conflicts will increase insofar as faculty pit their interests against student interests. They must move away from content delivery toward student-centered learning. The transition has begun with the focus on outcomes, but as previously described precise definitions of those outcomes remain unclear. Therefore, successful, integrated application of those outcomes is slow. Furthermore, fully developed student-centered learning is hindered by old-fashioned pedagogy, less than supportive faculty and deans, spotty professional development, the increase in the use of adjunct faculty and a pervasive fear of assessment.

Beyond submitting their syllabi for final review and attending professional development workshops, individual faculty members develop their teaching practice in isolation from the institution. The institution rarely conducts research on the pedagogical effectiveness. “In research, faculty members employ standards of evidence and criteria of excellence that are collaboratively developed by a community of shared expertise. In teaching, the faculty rely on largely impressionistic and self-generated criteria of excellence that are seldom tested in genuinely collaborative work” (Tagg, 2008, p.19-20). Many faculty members who have used lecturing as their primary mode of content delivery are disinclined to change a teaching strategy that they feel works effectively. “Students are more likely to prefer concrete subjects and active methods of learning. By contrast, faculty are predisposed to abstract subjects and passive learning” (Levine and Curreton, 1998, p. 127). Some instructors are interested in integrating technology or new

pedagogical approaches, such as “flipping the classroom,” into their teaching (Berret, 2012), but innovation is not widespread due to the lack of a comprehensive professional development program or time constraints due to faculty members with part-time or non-tenure track status (Umbach, 2007). This is unfortunate, because faculty members are best qualified to know how to incorporate technology into their teaching (Baldwin, 1998). They are the content experts who understand best what and where technology can be used to facilitate learning. Ultimately, this is a barrier to student-focused teaching. It presents an institutional problem as well as having a negative impact on student satisfaction. In this turbulent environment, colleges and universities are tasked with reengineering their general education curricula.

Another group that can be antagonistic toward general education is senior faculty members and deans, specifically those professors teaching undergraduates at the junior and senior level, as well as graduate students. For the most part, these are tenure track or tenured faculty members and therefore command a great deal of power in the university. This power is amplified for deans. They, for budgetary and philosophical reasons, want to pull general education courses into their orbit, in a process called “curricular physics” (Dennis, Halbert & Phillips, 2010). Their goal is for general education courses to function as introductions to their disciplines and magnets for increasing the number of students who will go on to study in the major. There are large ontological and methodological differences between the disciplines, and they want to introduce students to these disciplinary ways of mind as soon as they can in the students’ academic careers (Lattuca and Stark, 1994). Their goal is always to increase the number of full-time equivalent students (FTEs) as this is the metric that determines the amount allocated to them in the

university's budget. It also determines the long-term viability of their discipline. After all, if the students don't want to study in the major, the major will disappear. An example of this occurred at SUNY Albany's, where French, German and Italian language departments were eliminated (Jaschik, 2010).

The increasing use of contingent faculty has an effect on the quality of undergraduate education. Tenured or tenure-track faculty members, that is to say the most qualified, rarely teach undergraduates or do so to a limited extent. The bulk of undergraduate teaching is done by adjunct instructors or non-tenure track faculty members. These people have the least amount of time to reflect on their practice and innovate in the classroom, although some of them do so nonetheless. Also, professional development of this segment of the professoriate is spotty and under-researched as far as its affects on the quality of undergraduate instruction (Umbach, 2007). This is understandable as it is hard to devote the time it takes to teach a large number of students well, particularly undergraduate, and also produce cutting edge research. Education is labor intensive. Still, there is no substitute for a highly educated, caring professor in a classroom with a small number of highly engaged students; a human being employing the Socratic Method still represents some of the best technology for teaching and learning. Moreover, a classroom full of students can't be shipped overseas to nations run by pro-business, anti-labor governments. So, higher education responded to this labor dilemma by hiring armies of part-time contingent faculty members, in what was essentially a kind "in-sourcing" (Thedwall, 2008). In so doing, institutions of higher education saved enormous amounts through overall salary reductions (Benjamin, 2003; Brand, 2002; Cross and Goldenberg, 2003). The number of adjunct faculty continues to replace full-

time professors. “Full-time tenured and tenure-track faculty at two- and four-year institutions decreased dramatically from 56.8 percent in 1975, to 41.1 percent in 1995 to 35.1 percent in 2003 (AAUP, 2006). Migrant academic laborers have been toiling on the margins of academia for the past 30 years. If past is any indicator of future, they are contingent faculty only in the sense that they can be hired and fired from semester to semester at the whim of the institution, but their continued group presence is all but certain.

Assessing General Education

Characteristics of Excellence: Eligibility Requirements and Standards for

Accreditation published by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education describes how general education should be integrated into the curriculum:

Institutions should identify and provide a recognizable core of general education that:

expresses the educational philosophy of the institution for each undergraduate degree program or cluster of degree programs;

incorporates essential knowledge, cognitive abilities, and an understanding of values and ethics;

enhances students’ intellectual growth; and

draws students into new areas of intellectual experience, expanding their cultural and global awareness and sensitivity, and preparing them to make enlightened judgments outside as well as within their academic specialty.

What are presented here as general education skills are not necessarily distinct and apart from each other. There is an inherent relationship among these skills. This inter-relatedness is evident in the concept of “information literacy,” which embraces all of the specific general education skills (2008).

These are broadly drawn. The MSCHE leaves it up to individual institutions to determine specifically how, and in accordance with their unique mission and goals, to incorporate these requirements into the various disciplinary curriculums.

General Education: A Better Definition

General education is misunderstood. It is not liberal education. Thus, it is not the curriculum that all students were taught at the inception of the American University, or as it existed at the time, the Ivy League. It is not a collection of great books courses that has adapted over time. Its goal was not and is not the transmission of a hallowed past to a reverent but passive cohort of students. It is not a standardized curriculum taught during the first two years of a student's college or university career. Moreover, that curriculum is no longer the main point, which is to say a kind of holy text and the professor as the translator of that text are not at the center of the educational process. The sage on the stage is an increasingly derided mode of course delivery. General education rejects the lecture hall, with all eyes on the professor. This is an outmoded and increasingly criticized 19th century educational delivery method. Twenty-first century general education must become student-centered.

The foundation for this approach emerged early in the 20th century. Instrumentalism, often included under the rubric of progressive education, developed in the 1930s out of what is perhaps the only truly indigenous American philosophical system: pragmatism. John Dewey, the fathers of American pragmatism, espoused the idea that democracy and education are inextricably linked (*Democracy and Education*, 1916). Although it suffered from piecemeal implementation, as both an ethical philosophy and

as a practical teaching method, it coincided with the expansion of the junior and community colleges and the build-up of the land grant universities. It was part of the manifestation of the late-nineteenth century drive toward increased access to higher education, as America launched itself full force into the industrial revolution (Trow, 1978). As such, it was a timely and essential part of the mass education movement. Dewey's goal was for education to prepare students to create a better – not just wealthier – America in which they would live and work. His was a synthesized educational method and model. Dewey did not have faith in an educational system that replicated existing, and sometimes exploitative economic structures, but he argued that rote learning alone was also inferior to experiential knowledge. He advocated for a curriculum that stressed hands-on, project-based learning. He argued for learning through work as opposed to learning to work. General education designers and practitioners planned to do this with an emphasis on active engagement and by using the curriculum in conjunction with the student's environment. In *Democracy and Education*, Dewey argued that there was room for an enlightened vocational education that would contribute to workers becoming agents of social control and their own masters (1916). His goal was to teach students critical thinking and problem solving and to create a better, more just society. He reframed the argument in terms of “whether intelligence is best exercised apart from or within activity which puts nature to human use, and whether individual culture is best secured under egoistic or social conditions” (Dewey, 1916, p. 320) rather than whether general or vocational education is the most useful. For early practitioners, as it was for Dewey, the purpose of general education was nothing short of democracy. These questions remain the central questions of the general education reform movement.

This nominal confusion between general education and liberal education is exacerbated by organizations that reverse the two definitions. For example, the American Association of Colleges and Universities, aware of the difficulties with the terms liberal and general education explains them on their website under the rubric of oft-confused terms. General education, which we know is the progressive educational curriculum that was developed in the early twentieth century, is described as merely, “the part of a liberal education curriculum shared by all students” (AACU, 2012). However, the AAC&U goes into much greater detail when describing liberal education:

Liberal Education is an approach to learning that empowers individuals and prepares them to deal with complexity, diversity, and change. It provides students with broad knowledge of the wider world (e.g., science, culture, and society) as well as in-depth study in a specific area of interest. A liberal education helps students develop a sense of social responsibility, as well as strong and transferable intellectual and practical skills such as communication, analytical and problem-solving skills, and a demonstrated ability to apply knowledge and skills in real-world settings. (AAC&U, 2012).

This is the definition that should have been provided for general education, but the terms are now used interchangeably to define each other. Thus, general education has an identity crisis. What the AAC&U provides is a diallelon or circular definition.

A replacement for the confusing term general/liberal education, which is now a hybrid concept, is the term *consilient education*. This term appeared in Edward O. Wilson’s book of the same name (1998). He used it to describe an interconnected and interactive system of knowledge that was based on a common set of laws and rules. He

proposed a unified system of knowledge; no more would knowledge in the material sciences be separate from knowledge in the social sciences or the arts. In the book, Wilson beseeches us to move toward disciplinary collaboration to solve the large, pressing problems that threaten our collective well-being. However, Wilson is a biologist, and perhaps due to the effect of disciplinary silos, those in the humanities, the disciplines with the greatest stake in general education, have yet to consider, let alone adopt his definition.

Largely adopted on an institution-by-institution basis, these criteria are moving toward greater standardization with LEAP. Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) is a set of learning outcomes that have been created as a template for institutions to revitalize their general education program. The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) created LEAP to be comprehensive. These outcomes go well beyond many colleges and universities stated general education outcomes.

LEAP outcomes are divided into three broad categories: knowledge which contains the content areas of science, social sciences, mathematics, humanities, arts; intellectual and practical skills which include written and oral communication, inquiry, critical and creative thinking, quantitative literacy, information literacy, teamwork and integration of learning; individual and social responsibility which covers civic responsibility and engagement, ethical reasoning, intercultural knowledge and actions, and propensity for lifelong learning (AAC&U, 2005). These outcomes serve multiple purposes. They are a response to demands for greater accountability by a wide variety of publics – parents, legislators, employers – and they can serve to anchor the faculty in the choppy waters of accreditation.

To outsiders these learning outcomes may seem vague, but this lack of definition is intentional. There are many definitions for and many examples of critical and creative thinking. The move toward the use of outcomes in higher education accreditation, rather than specific benchmarks or measurements, allows for the wide diversity of institutional types that, in turn, have a wide variety of institutional missions. Structural flexibility is a fundamental attribute of the American higher education system (Huisman, Meek and Wood, 2007), and accreditors work hard to do their job without at the same time reducing the potential for innovation. Thus, the use of learning outcomes serves to stimulate discussion within each institution as how to best assess that particular institution's students in relation to that particular institutions mission (Beno, 2004). Elite Ivy League institutions have very different missions (and admissions policies) from community colleges; nevertheless, with this open ended nomenclature, colleges and universities within both types of institutions can develop appropriate programs that achieve critical and creative thinking. Outcomes are designed to steer institutions away from a "compliance mentality" (p. 67) toward organic self-assessment and standards of excellence. In short, learning outcomes are guideposts not regulations. Still, with this much freedom to determine criteria, unclear definitions can cause problems.

However, this lack of definition seems to be contagious among the accrediting bodies as well. Although Beno argues that accrediting bodies have integrated learning outcomes into their assessment models (2004), there is evidence to show that this has been a superficial effort: "The various regional accreditation bodies do not reflect this national consensus in their accreditation standards. The integrative work of the AAC&U is not particularly visible in the accreditation standards of the major accrediting bodies.

Each has its own definition of general education and separate sets of expected outcomes” (Yin and Volkvein, 2010, p. 81). This runs counter to CHEA recommendations around learning outcomes (Ewell, 2001).

Some progress has been made to clarify the definition because of the increased use of surveys since 2000. Much of this can be attributed to the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), which is widely used in undergraduate higher education for comparison against institutional norms nationwide. Theoretically grounded in student engagement theory (Astin 1999a) it was designed to replace higher education ranking systems used in the popular press, particularly the *U.S. News and World Report* rankings of colleges and universities, which gauges inputs rather than outcomes (Campbell and Cabrera, 2011). From this survey researchers working with the NSSE have created benchmarks that gage various aspects of the higher education experience, as well as consortial comparisons by institutional type. The active and collaborative learning benchmark looks at how actively involved a student is in their learning experience as well as how they go about solving problems. It asks questions such as how many times a student has worked with other students outside of a class on a class project, participated in a community-based project as part of a course and discussed ideas from readings or classes with people outside of class (NSSE Benchmarks, 2012). Seven of these sorts of questions comprise the active and collaborative learning benchmark. Similarly the Cooperative Institutional Research Project (CIRP) survey produced by the Higher Education Research Institute at the University of California, Los Angeles has developed a benchmark scale around critical thinking that they call habits of mind. The CIRP is a longitudinal survey that assesses students at the beginning of their freshman year and

again in the senior year, so it is particularly useful in establishing change over time. Habits of mind are learning behaviors associated with academic success such as independent exploration outside of class, seeking alternative solutions to a problem, and evaluating the reliability of information received (CIRP, 2011). At the moment, institutions participating in the surveys report the results to accreditors but do not use them for internal institutional change. Generally, instructors or even deans have little idea as to how their students rate their own critical thinking on the survey or how their education contributes to it (Astin, 2006).

The Theory of Student Engagement

Student engagement theory emerged in the midst of the age of mass higher education. First centered around the concept of student motivation (Astin 1999a), it evolved into the theory of student engagement, which posited that persistence, particularly persistence for first-year students, was related to how involved students were in their educational experience (Astin 1999a). Student motivation lent itself to emic descriptions, while student engagement was etic, allowing examination of the student experience within larger educational ecologies. Developed as a counter-theory to the dichotomous educational paradigms of the day—the subject matter theory favored by faculty (content is most important), the resource theory favored by administrators (money spent on student development matters most) and the individualized-eclectic theory favored by researchers (content and curriculum must be tailored to individual student needs through electives)—it provided a theoretical link between the three (Astin 1999a, p. 517). Moreover, the concept of motivation is difficult to quantify, so student engagement provided researchers with a way to study and measure a specific set of behaviors. At the

same time, it allowed administrators to measure policies as effective based on whether they increased or decreased student engagement (Astin 1999a, p. 520).

Because of the demographic shifts caused by the move from mass to universal higher education, the present-day goal of higher education is to provide a higher education environment that will allow non-traditional students to develop the skills they need to persist to graduation. To that end, the behaviors of students who are successful in college and university, particularly when compared to students who are less successful, offer insight into ways that institutions can increase student involvement and thereby increase positive student outcomes. A deeper understanding of critical thinking is a small but important piece of that educational puzzle.

The Developmental Work of Young Adults

Adult learning theory informs how we understand college and university students. Early in the development of learning theory, Houle described a typology to organize adult learners into three categories; goal-oriented, activity-oriented, and learning oriented (1961, 1987). His theory of andragogy established the simple idea that adult learning is contextual (Merriam, 2001). Adult learners consciously take up educational projects in response to their world.

The stakes are particularly high for young adult learners who must build an educational foundation on which their adult life will rest. The task of young adulthood is comprised of three distinct psychosocial tasks: establishing independence, identity formation, and creating intimacy or at least the foundation for intimate relationships (Merriam & Caffarella, 1984). These psychosocial tasks are such an overwhelming focus

for young adults that content or skills outside of this enterprise may be perceived by the student as having some kind of extrinsic worth, but little practical value for the work they must do to succeed at that stage in their development (Clydesdale, 2011). This has implications for how content is received and assimilated by these learners. Vocationally focused or goal-oriented young adults may actively resist curriculum that doesn't conform to their needs. The prevailing wisdom is that "Most stage one adults are not especially in need of or interested in avocational programming, liberal education (such as Great Books discussion groups), or education for adult roles and responsibilities that are not imminent" (Darkenwald, 1984), but this is not be the case. Yet it is necessary, if they are to develop into fully realized, independent adults and move from someone acting from operant conditioning toward a more authentic individuated self, with specific values and goals in mind, then the student must exhibit certain facilitating behaviors (Mezirow, 1994). Young adult learners have three responsibilities in this regard. Students must be willing to collaborate, even if that means working with those with whom they do not share similar viewpoints; they must be willing to question their own beliefs and assumptions, before they question the beliefs and assumptions of others; finally, they must be willing to participate actively as transformative learning into a dialogic process (Mezirow, 1997). If they are to fully develop, young learners must begin to make meaning of their lives and their purpose beyond the formulas that they have uncritically received while growing up (Magolda, Abes & Torres, 2009).

Critical thinking requires learning ways of knowing that are qualitative and hard to measure; thus, the value of critical thinking can be unclear to young adults. For example, the ability to work well in a group or understanding how an author uses

metaphor to communicate an idea can seem pointless to a young adult learner who doesn't know how to situate these skills within their larger goals. This is particularly true if that young adult learner doesn't have the requisite social or textual analysis skills respectively. Still, transformational learning experiences often take place in classes where students are expected to master both qualitative abilities and practical skills. Thus, a more applied approach for the teaching critical thinking has been proposed in educational psychology (Halpern, 1999). This method includes a dispositional component, where instructors get students to see the value of critical thinking, modeling critical thinking behaviors, applying critical thinking skills across disciplines and context, and metacognitive monitoring, which helps students understand how they know what they know (Halpern, 1998).

Critical Thinking

The debate over the definition of critical thinking began over 25 years ago with some contending that reasoning ability and argument analysis are not critical thinking, as true critical thinking requires disciplinary expertise (McPeck, 1984), and others working to provide a working definition which is neither too specific nor too vague and allows for implementation (Ennis, 1989; Ennis, 1993). While many define critical thinking as the information gathering, questioning and reflective social practices that lead to self-generated epistemologies (Weiler, 2005), cognitive psychologists argue that critical thinking is problem solving, evaluating and decision-making (Williams, 1999). Moreover, the former group tend to hold that critical thinking cannot be taught on its own as a skill separate from disciplinary content (Hammer & Green, 2010). Daniel Willingham (2008) contends that students do not problem solve creatively outside of

disciplinary knowledge as content and critical thinking go hand-in-hand. For example, problem solving, a particularly valuable skill, depends on the problem solver to create an accurate representation of the problem, and that model depends on analogic thinking (Novick, 1988; Novick & Sherman, 2008). In the area of problem solving, research has demonstrated that it is difficult for people to transfer expertise; for instance, students can solve a word problem but are unable to solve a problem with the same underlying structure using math (Novick and Holyoak, 1991). Clearly, however, people do not become critical thinkers within their discipline overnight. Researchers concede that, at least, critical thinking begins as a set of meta-cognitive strategies, exposure to which increases the effectiveness of their use over time (Willingham, 2008).

Education researchers argue that these thinking indicators, which CIRP has labeled habits of mind, can be acquired through a developmental approach and doing so increases the likelihood of successful student outcomes (Ahuna, Tinnesz, & VanZile-Tamsen, 2011). These behaviors are divided into three levels: metastrategic, metacognitive and epistemological (Kuhn, 1999), which can be understood in the phrases *knowing how*, *knowing that* and *how do I know*, respectively. Much of the research in cognitive psychology has focused on the metacognitive and epistemological levels. The metastrategic is the focus of this study, particularly as it affects the early years of higher education (Pithers & Sodden, 2000). Useful to educational practitioner, this developmental approach allows instructors and curriculum developers the opportunity to create favorable environments for critical thinking as it makes clear what aspects of critical thinking should be taught (Kuhn & Dean, 2004). When environments that employ this developmental model are created and tested, results are promising. One study of

seven and eight year olds who were exposed to a dialogic learning model in a “Teaching Children Philosophy” program showed improved argumentation skills and increased understanding of subjectivity (Walker, Wartenberg & Winner, 2012).

This study supports a developmental theory of critical thinking. This theory submits that self-directed learning occurs in all of the previously mentioned three stages, including metastrategic. The behaviors combined in the habits of mind composite represent examples of metastrategic learning behaviors, although more student-level research is needed to support this claim.

Critical thinking is the behavior that ultimately facilitates students’ self-teaching beyond their formal education and it is the behavior that allows them to become life-long learners (Kurfiss, 1988). There is evidence that student engagement and critical thinking are linked. Like other concepts which emerged simultaneously, such as collaborative learning (Beachboard et al., 2011) or a curricular management (Lee & Ash, 2010), student engagement was positively linked to critical thinking and grades (Carini, Kuh, & Klein, 2006). Although, defined differently in different disciplines, whether as a cognitive ability and or as the skill-set that provides the logical thinking and quality decision-making all college graduates should possess (Crenshaw, Hale, & Harper, 2011), generally critical thinking is hailed by higher education’s defenders as the sine qua non of the college or university experience. Some consider it that intangible element of a college or university education that makes higher education worthwhile. Irrespective of its numerous and for the most part vague definitions, critical thinking has become a high stakes accreditation outcome with colleges and universities under significant pressure to produce tangible proof of gains in this area (Douglas, Thomson & Zhao, 2012).

Numerous surveys such as the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and the Cooperative Institutional Research Project (CIRP) present critical thinking as tangible and measurable, even if its heterogeneous nature makes it hard to understand and harder still to foster.

What follows is an analysis of previous studies of critical thinking that fall into two categories. In the first category, researchers examine the students. Researchers look at student activities and behaviors; in other words, they examine what students do to foster or diminish critical thinking skills. This analysis is then tied to student predictors, such as race, class and SAT scores. In the second type of study, larger institutional structures and policies are studied to determine their effect on the development of critical thinking.

Research on Students

Thus, higher education's claims to promote student learning in the long run must be based on evidence that colleges and universities affect those learning skills that are likely to be enduring. It seems reasonable to suggest that critical thinking ability is one such enduring skill, that it is a central element in lifelong learning, and that it is an appropriate (if not essential) skill for colleges and universities to develop among students (Terenzini, Springer, Pascarella and Nora, 1995).

Much of the research on students has not identified one strong predictor for the increase in critical thinking skills. When the effects of in- and out-of-class experiences on critical thinking scores have been studied, both types of experiences produce gains, after controlling for pre-college characteristics (Terenzini, Springer, Pascarella, & Nora, 1995). More importantly, both types of experiences, social as well as academic, exert a synergetic effect on critical thinking. Students' academic self-concept and outcomes expectations were found to correlate with the kind of learning method they adopt,

whether it is deep, strategic or surface learning (Rodriguez, 2009). This, in turn, affects their acquisition of critical thinking skills, as these skills are most closely tied to deeper, reflective learning. The type and amount of courses a student takes affects his or her acquisition of critical thinking skills as well (Reason, Terenzini, & Domingo, 2006). Taking more economics or accounting classes, for example, is predictive of a student scoring higher on the quantitative section of the graduate record exam. Taking more humanities courses is predictive of qualitative reasoning skills. These studies show that student actions are important and show that critical thinking is not merely a meta-cognitive state, but is derived from a set of behaviors that lead to positive academic outcomes. This corroborates Astin's concept of increased time on task correlating to positive academic results (1999).

Connecting to Outcomes

Nevertheless, these studies are narrowly focused. For the most part, they examine one small aspect of the acquisition of critical thinking skills without looking at the relationship between behaviors associated with critical thinking and more general markers of student persistence, such as grade point average or graduation rates. If persistence is addressed, it is often in the context of decreasing first- to second-year attrition rates (Tinto, 1988). Transfer students persistence is rarely, if ever, examined.

Research on Institutional Effects

Some useful research has been done connecting student behavior and organizational structures. In this second category, researchers focus primarily on institutional effects on critical thinking. Larger structures and policies are analyzed. When researchers studied a large Northeastern university that had developed a dedicated critical thinking course aimed at teaching students study habits and strategies to improve outcomes across the curriculum, researchers found that successful completion of that critical thinking course was positively correlated with increased persistence to the second, third and fourth years (Ahuna, Tinnesz, & VanZile-Tamsen, 2011). A positive peer climate, that is an institution with a preponderance of students with high critical thinking scores, has been analyzed (Hegadorn et al., 1999) and found to influence first-year students, even after the researchers controlled for institutional selectivity. On the other hand, some studies found peer climate to have no statistically significant effect on the development of students' critical thinking skills after controlling for institutional selectivity (Pascarella, 1989). Thus, research has moved toward pretest/post test models that use specifically designed critical thinking exams to gauge reasoning skills. One study has showed the affects of taking online classes on critical thinking development, using the California Critical Thinking Skills Test (Terry & Ervin, 2012). In this study, the number of online classes taken was found to have only a small effect, while transfer from a community college was found to have a statistically significant, negative correlation with the desired result.

Considering Institutional Realities

In this category of research, studies tend to focus on areas of change that would require large institutional shifts and in some cases a prohibitive financial investment. Altering an institution's transfer policy or the makeup of the student body cannot occur quickly, if at all, without widespread stakeholder buy-in. Transfer agreements between institutions are difficult contracts to negotiate and tend to be longstanding. Altering them alters the culture of an institution (Bender, 1990). Thus, researchers who look at how organizational structures and institutional cultures contribute to students' critical thinking development must bear institutional realities in mind. Otherwise, research becomes merely an academic exercise.

Studies that examine broader institutional issues tend to ignore the way in which institutional changes affected the acquisition of critical thinking skills, changed the students' academic self-concept and altered their long-term relationship with their institution. These studies report correlations but do not examine the mechanisms that occur at the student level to make the result possible. It is these mechanisms that must be understood within a given context. In order to increase successful academic outcomes, institutions must create environments where non-traditional and at-risk students take up these behaviors.

Overview of The Journal of General Education

The Journal of General Education is a quarterly publication that focuses on colleges and universities that employ a general education curriculum or plan to do so. It is published under the auspices of University of Pennsylvania Press. The articles are written for the faculty, administrators and policy makers. Because of its varied audience, the journal has an assessment focus with many articles addressing the need to quantify student success for the various publics that an institution might serve. Many articles focus on the need to measure critical thinking, which has become a universally agreed upon goal of the new more comprehensive, outcome driven general education. Some of the most useful articles are case studies of existing general education programs. Some examine the restructuring of already existing general education programs and the ways that general education course outcomes and critical thinking should integrate with other courses and overall student success. The nature of good pedagogy and the implementation of innovative, student-centered pedagogical techniques is often a subject as well. In this journal, assessment is the overarching concern; many articles attempt to quantify success or failure.

What these articles, drawn from 2007 to 2010 issues of the journal, lack is a foundational understanding of educational psychology or grounding in a learning theory of any kind. Certainly, many of the articles reference a general sense of the social nature of education or that there are pedagogical situations where students may be more or less ready to learn something, but no explanation of or original source for these ideas is mentioned. The research and wisdom that emerged from 20th century educational psychology is completely ignored. It is as if they create the idea of learning as a social

construct out of whole cloth. Nevertheless, similarities to Vygotsky's social learning theory are striking.

Of the articles sampled from *The Journal of General Education*, not one of them references Vygotsky. The authors of the articles in this journal tend to reference contemporary authors and researchers who focus on the subject of general education specifically, not the thinkers that introduced concepts about how learning takes place. Rarely are cross disciplinary connections made. And while many of these articles speak to the nature of general education programs that are moving to what is termed a more "student-centered" educational environment, they do not provide a clear definition of what student centered means. Many general education programs are described as being in a state of flux. Thus, there is a sense of reinventing the wheel with each article. Either no theoretical home base is provided or a different one is provided for each article.

The history of and, in fact, the present debate about general education is commonly framed in the following way:

There are generally three main models of general education that all engage with the four main tensions of general education and its reform: knowledge, learning, faculty, and content. The first of the three main models is the Great Books Model, which posits that the best mode of providing for intellectual breadth and student development is through a historical review of the most seminal works rather than learning the latest cutting-edge research within the disciplines. The second model, which Newton terms the Scholarly Discourse Model, takes the opposite approach in the belief that a general introduction drawn from several disciplines and the latest thinking within them is the best anchor for students' intellectual breadth and development. The third model discussed by Newton is the Effective Citizen Model. According to this third model, students are best served by intellectual bases in areas that will serve them well in the twenty-first century rather than nostalgic looks back or disciplinary fragmentation. In each, the desired outcomes, goals, and roles of general education are slightly different (Bourke, Bray and Horton, 2009).

These three models are essentially arguments about what instructors should teach, not arguments about how and if students learn; thus, the debate often turns on the idea of best curriculum rather than the best pedagogy. These more policy-minded authors seek to validate curriculum vis-à-vis institutional mission rather than student outcomes (p. 235), and tend to mimic top ranked institutions for general education models. The problem with this approach is that highly motivated students tend to do better than more disenfranchised students no matter what the model (White, Pinnegar and Esplin, 2010). When researchers do focus on students to understand if training and knowledge within certain disciplines, also known as domain-specific epistemologies, transfers to other domains (Mazer, Hunt & Kuznekoff, 2007), the larger general education system or structure is not examined in that process.

The Question of Critical Thinking

There is consensus that critical thinking is valuable; after all, who would argue that college students shouldn't be able to apply the higher order thinking skills they learn, but there is little consensus about *how* it is learned. The common question asked across many of the articles in *The Journal of General Education* is whether or not the critical thinking skills learned in one course will transfer to other courses and ultimately to more effective problem solving and greater overall student success. In *The Journal of General Education*, critical thinking is often operationalized as studies of student disposition or attitude toward learning and knowledge (Lampert, 2007; Mazer et al, 2008; Tsui, 2007). For many authors, critical thinking is portrayed as the very ethos of general education, with courses judged as successes or failures according to how well they transmit these skills. Yet, despite its importance the articles sampled here show that a clear working

definition of critical thinking has not emerged. Sometimes the concept of critical thinking is generalized. One article describes critical thinking by the characteristics of truth-seeking, maturity and open-mindedness (Lambert, 2007), which has the potential to be a starting point for analysis and experimentation. When critical thinking is more generally described, studies tend to show that this much valued transfer did not take place (Marra and Palmer, 2008). Perhaps because of that, what has been devised is a conglomerate explanation that broadens critical thinking to apply to more situations. This explanation breaks down all of the component tasks that comprise successful critical thinking:

Critical thinking is typically thought to involve an individual's ability to do the following: identify central issues and assumptions in an argument, recognize important relationships, make correct inferences from the data, deduce conclusions from information or data provided, interpret whether conclusions are warranted based on given data, and evaluate evidence of authority (Tsui, 2007).

Here the authors fall victim to the flawed thinking we might call Vygotsky's analysis as decomposition as described in chapter one of *Thinking and Speech* (1987). "The essential feature of this form of analysis is that its products are of a different nature than the whole form from which they were derived. The elements lack the characteristics inherent in the whole and they possess properties that it did not possess" (41). In doing this, *The Journal of General Education* authors and researchers are reduced in their capacity to truly assist faculty members and administrators in examining or transforming general education courses, programs or professional development. There is no goal to aim toward, no fixed, universally accepted ideal around which data acquisition or experiments can be designed.

Thus, higher education's claims to promoting student learning in the long run must be based on evidence that colleges and universities affect those learning skills that are likely to be enduring. It seems reasonable to suggest that critical thinking ability is one such enduring skill, that it is a central element in lifelong learning, and that it is an appropriate (if not essential) skill for colleges and universities to develop among students (Springer, Terenzini & Pascarella, 1995). All regional accreditors make statements about general education, but they leave specific general education outcomes up to each individual institution (Yin and Wolkwein, 2010). This is one of the reasons critical thinking is so loosely defined, and the reason for the disconnect between the way accreditors assess critical thinking and the way it needs to be operationalized in colleges and universities themselves. Finally, it is unclear that students value critical thinking as a goal of higher education or even know how it is articulated in the curriculum.

Accreditors assess academic engagement, a concept based on the simple theory that the more involved a student is in their studies the more likely they are to persist to graduation (Astin 1999a). Moreover, academic engagement can be broken down into a series of behaviors and proclivities that are easily surveyed through instruments such as NSSE, which categorizes student learning into the benchmarks of active and collaborative learning, level of academic challenge, and student faculty interaction. Within those benchmarks students are asked to quantify learning activities such as how many times they discussed an idea from the reading or the class with a faculty member outside of class and the number of written reports that they wrote between five and nineteen pages (NSSE, 2012). Despite a plethora of such quantitative measures contained

in these benchmarks, they do not explain what these activities mean to the students or how they construct deep knowledge through these behaviors.

The authors articulate the various behaviors that can be associated with critical thinking but there is no widespread agreement as to the definition. Moreover, within this process of moving toward a clearer definition there have been attempts to expand it by broadening the concept to *critical being* (Creme, 1999), but this is not helpful. Some useful qualitative studies revolve around faculty reports of their own experiences and their perceptions of student learning (Hill and Christian, 2012), (Wang and Hurley, 2012), (Howell-Carter, Neiman-Gonder, Goodstone and Robertson, 2011) but student perceptions of their own learning process remain opaque. It begs the question, how do students define critical thinking, if the definition within the field is unclear for administrator and faculty? Moreover, critical thinking is dual natured, having both productive and receptive characteristics (Buffamenti, David and Morris, 2006). Capturing its dichotomous nature made it ideal for a qualitative study. Educational theorists explain that critical thinking cannot be defined too closely, in order to allow for diverse institutions to define it according to their particular institutional mission. But this supposes that each institution defines critical thinking in radically different ways and what matters most is the mandate of each particular institution's mission. Moreover, as more students enter higher education and many students transfer from institution to institution, particularly community college students, more consistency in the use and understanding of the term is needed.

Faculty who are engaged in assessment of critical thinking report that students perform better in the class when the concept of critical thinking is made explicit,

particularly in rubric form (Lee and Ash, 2010). Instructors also see increased levels of student engagement in the form of class participation when learning goals are clear. They also “reported anecdotally on promising changes in student behavior (better attendance, increased participation and more positive effect, increased student self-confidence, better quality student work)” (Lee and Ash, 2010). Assessments work best that are learning tools, not just teaching measures (Buffamenti, David and Morse, 2006). Students are better able to learn to think critically when instructors unpack what critical thinking means and make those criteria part of grading, feedback and overall student assessment (Morozov, 2011). Moreover, as one of the most significant predictors of student persistence from the first to the second as well as student learning is the amount of faculty interaction a student experiences (Keup and Barefoot, 2005), it is notable that so little research has been done on factors that contribute to faculty to student interaction.

Little is known about where students begin on their intellectual journey in colleges and universities. At best instructors guess as to the critical thinking skills and study habits of their students. Many students arrive at college or university with a largely positivist approach to knowledge and are then thrown into classes where it is assumed that they will be able to think critically (Hammer and Green, 2011). There is evidence from small scale studies that curriculum does not take students’ experiences, cognitive abilities or prior knowledge into account (Wass, Harland and Mercer, 2011). Moreover, critical thinking gains that take place in college or university have as much to do with students’ extra-curricular and classroom experiences as it does with the courses that they take (Springer, Terenzini & Pascarella 1995).

A Working Definition of Critical Thinking

The following definition provides a reasonable starting point:

Critical thinking is that mode of thinking - about any subject, content, or problem - in which the thinker improves the quality of his or her thinking by skillfully analyzing, assessing, and reconstructing it. Critical thinking is self-directed, self-disciplined, self-monitored, and self-corrective thinking. It presupposes assent to rigorous standards of excellence and mindful command of their use. It entails effective communication and problem-solving abilities, as well as a commitment to overcome our native egocentrism and sociocentrism (www.criticalthinking.org, 2013).

This paper argues that critical thinking is the ability to change your own mind. It is the mode of thinking that allows the student to alter and improve her way of knowing and behaving, so that she can achieve a level of understanding or a desired goal. But it is also context driven and highly adaptive. Thus, it takes into others into account. While it is content dependent, it is also dispositional, in that the proclivity toward critical thinking begins at the earliest stages of learning and all through our educational careers, whether novice or expert (Fahim & Masouleh, 2012). It employs executive function skills in that it has a purpose and is outcome directed (Barkley 2012). Critical thinkers become the authors of their own identity and turn into the agents of their own epistemological development. Finally, critical thinking is not solipsistic. “Through dialogue with others, which is reflective, we create the conditions for critical reflective learning” (Brockbank & McGill, 1998). Critical thinking not only focuses on the self – as the definition provided at the beginning of this section states – at its more advanced stages it is also group-directed and group corrective.

It is through interactions with others that critical thinking develops in the individual. Thus, critical thinking can be highly social (AlKandari, 2012). Self-directed

thought is more apparent in the initial stages of critical thinking. Higher levels of reflective judgment and executive function begin with the conscious awareness that the group exists as separate from the individual, and that there are requirements for entry or continued membership in the group. When the individual recognizes that one's goals cannot be achieved without assistance from, one has achieved the next level of critical thinking. Finally, when one recognizes that one has a stake and responsibility for the larger goals of the group, beyond one's own selfish desires, one reaches the next level of critical thinking.

Fundamental to critical thinking and to many other theories of epistemological development is the crossroads stage (Baxter Magolda, 2007, 2008, 2009; Belensky, 1997; Easter & Schommer-Atkins, 2006; King & Kitchener, 2004; Perry, 1970). As the name would imply, this stage occurs in the middle and marks a shift from dependence on external authority as the arbiter of truth to the latter stages of self-authorship and independent evaluation. Sometimes, this stage is one of dissonance, where the knower realizes that authority figures do not have all the answers, and thus, it is often accompanied by intellectual skepticism and confusion. Nevertheless, this crossroads stage can be a generative, if challenging, step in the individual's evolution toward critical thinking (King & Kitchener, 2004). When an individual encounters other people and other groups, with inconsonant frames of reference and ways of knowing, it can be the catalyst for movement into this stage of critical thinking development (King, Magolda & Masse, 2011; Pascarella et al, 2014). Exposure to different groups can be all important.

Conclusion

There are many factors working against successful implementation of a general education curriculum, not the least of which are the instructors and students themselves. The structure of the research university, put in place by historical necessity, does not facilitate the prioritization of general education within the institution. Yet, greater numbers of underprepared, non-traditional students will soon make their way into higher education, and commensurate with this shift the need for the explicit teaching of learning skills and student based pedagogy will increase.

As one the most important learning skills, critical thinking provides an interesting study around which to examine these tensions. Of the many learning outcomes mandated by higher education's accrediting bodies, critical thinking may be the hardest to teach, even though it is closely associated with positive student engagement and lifelong learning. Moreover, it is extremely difficult to measure.

CHAPTER 3

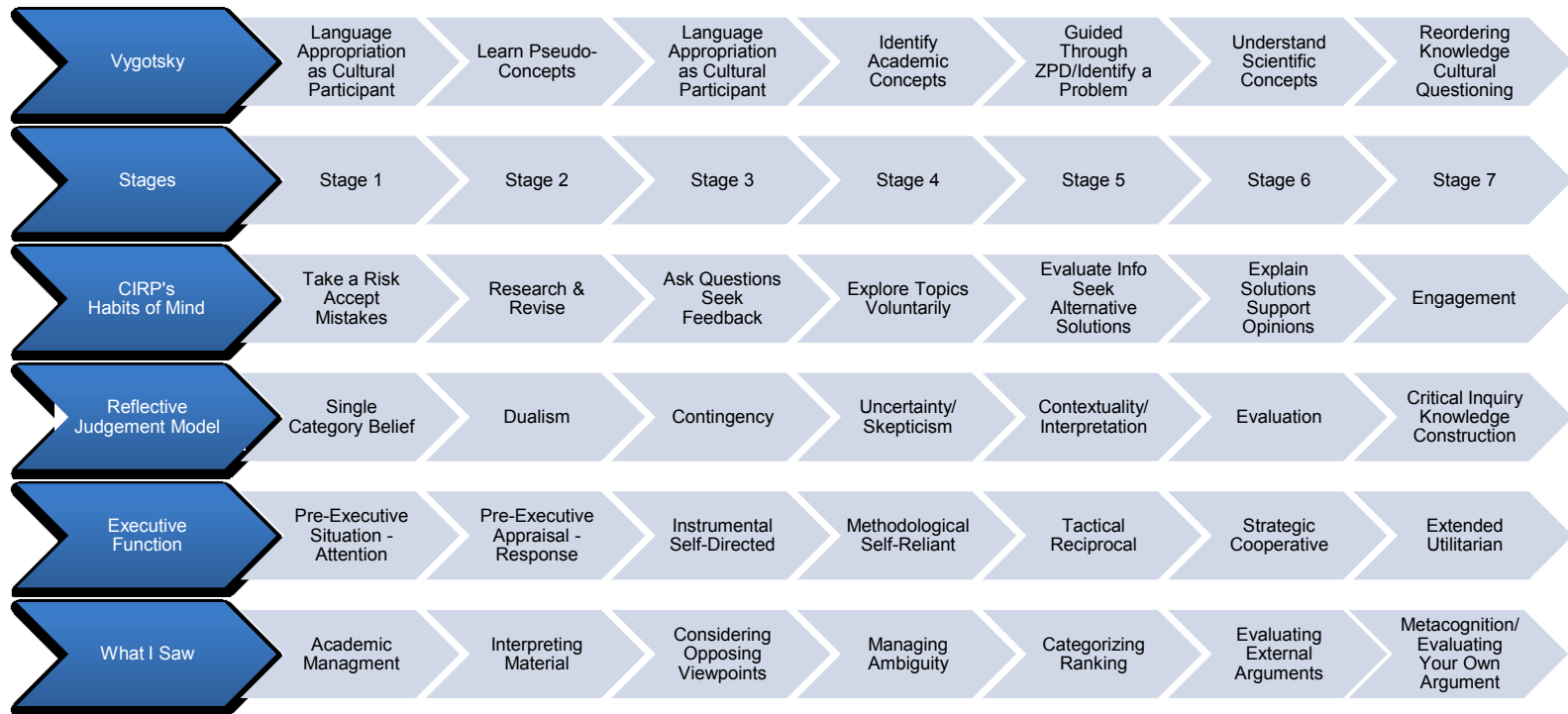
METHODOLOGY

Assumptions and Rationale

The focus on *habits of mind* referenced in the interview questions (see Appendix A) provided a springboard for this qualitative study; however, the goal was to move beyond cataloging a set of behaviors and examine how and why students engage in these behaviors. Another focus was student's perceptions of their own learning process. This study examined the ways that students use critical thinking skills to construct knowledge. One objective was to develop a better definition of critical thinking.

Why do some students engage in positive learning behaviors and others do not? One of the goals of general education, after all, is to provide curriculum and instruction that offers students, whatever their level or proficiency, a chance to acquire learning skills in conjunction with disciplinary and cultural content. This combination of competency *and* knowledge sits at the heart of general education. Quantitative methods, while good for falsifying theories and testing assumptions, can be blunt instruments. In this study, a more narrative approach lent itself to understanding the underlying reasons why students do or do not take up critical thinking skills and behaviors. For answers as to the why students engage (or don't), I asked the students themselves. This study sought to understand student perception of how they created and utilized knowledge. Moreover, this study assumed that knowledge was not transmitted to students in a one-way fashion in the class.

Table 1: GB100 Research Study – Critical Thinking Scale



Vygotsky

It is important to remember that Vygotsky's doctrine of scientific concepts is not a stage theory of cognitive development through the lifespan. Rather, the apprehension of scientific concepts is recursive throughout the learning process. Vygotsky is explicit about this. He explains "the development of the psychological foundations for instruction in basic subjects does not precede instruction but unfolds in a continuous interaction with the contributions of instruction" (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 184). It is this continuous interaction that matters. Moreover, Vygotsky doesn't explicitly limit the acquisition of scientific concepts to a particular developmental time in anyone's life. That gives this theory greater heft as it can be applied to any developmental stage. For the most part, Vygotsky studied children and adolescents, but close study of his theory offers the possibility that a student can move from spontaneous to academic to scientific concepts throughout life and at any stage of life. Learning is constant, and can therefore be applied to young adult learners, as it is here. For this reason, the process of taking on scientific concepts is shown before the stage theories on the critical thinking scale. Placing Vygotsky's process of knowledge acquisition on the scale provides a taxonomy of learning that can then be compared to learning development.

Habits of Mind

The behaviors combined in the Cooperative Institutional Research Project habits of mind composite (2011) represent examples of metastrategic learning behaviors.

The Reflective Judgment Model

Kitchener and King argue that there is a process to epistemological development (2004). Their stage theory uses levels to show how students understand and evaluate information. They do not place meta-cognition at the zenith of epistemological development.

Stage 1: Single-category belief is typically seen in children. In this stage the knower accepts what they are told is the truth. Ambiguity is not understood.

Stage 2: The stage of dualism is characterized by the dichotomy of simple right and wrong. The knower looks to authority for answers. Ambiguity is not considered.

Stage 3: Knowers in the stage of contingency hold that when authority doesn't hold the truth, even if they do in most cases, the truth will eventually be known. Since evidence is incomplete in these cases, personal impressions and feelings are used to determine the rightness or wrongness of an answer.

Stage 4: Due to uncertainty and the realization that authorities cannot be relied upon for answers, this stage of uncertainty is characterized by confusion. Here the student cannot validate knowledge externally and has no method for evaluating competing claims, so skepticism dominates. Knowledge is seen as idiosyncratic.

Stage 5: In this stage knowledge becomes contextual and the student begins to interpret evidence; however, evaluating competing interpretations or answers remains difficult.

Stage 6: Here the student understands that knowledge is contextual and open to interpretation. She begins to evaluate and understand that some answers are better

than others. This stage is characterized by comparing evidence and information across contexts.

Stage 7: Even though knowledge is uncertain and subject to interpretation best or better solutions can be determined through comparison and evaluation.

Executive Function

Barkley defines executive function as the ability to set long term goals and manage the incremental steps along the way necessary to achieving those goals (2012). Executive function is important in managing emotional and social behavior as much of our goal oriented behavior is dependent on other people and takes place in group environments.

Stage 1 & 2: The first two stages are pre-executive levels and involve routine primary neuropsychological functioning and operant conditioning.

Stage 3: People who have achieved the instrumental and self-directed level of executive function have self-awareness and can moderate and inhibit themselves. They have a conscious awareness of their own emotional and motivational states as well as non-verbal and verbal working memory. At this level people begin to evaluate themselves and their behavior

Stage 4: At the methodological and self-reliant level people devise methods to attain their goals and understand that they must manage their time in order to achieve near-term goals. Thus this level is characterized by increased self-organization, self-management, self-restraint, and self-regulation. At this level people exhibit social independence, but can also engage in social parasitism and social self-defense.

Stage 5: When people reach the tactical/reciprocal level they are able to employ methods that allow them to reach mid-term goals. This is a more collaborative level characterized by greater social interdependence, group interaction, and the behaviors necessary for social exchange and economic behavior.

Stage 6: Individuals and societies are at the strategic/cooperative level when they use strategies to achieve long-term goals. This mean setting aside short term interests and acting cooperatively with others for shared benefits.

Stage 7: Tlevel is shown through the development of ethical systems that facilitate achieving long term goals by putting the long term goals of others ahead of one's short term goals.

Stages of Critical Thinking Observed in GB100

Stage 1: Academic Management – This is the name for the administrative skills required to function at a basic level in the college classroom. It includes logistical management skills such as regular attendance, arriving to class on time, procuring the required textbooks and reading the required sections of the texts before class so as to be prepared for class discussion and submitting completed assignments on time, particularly the blog posts, which provided a detailed record of their interactions with the text.

Stage 2: Interpreting Material – This behavior emerged in the blog posts, particularly as students moved from recounting the plot of the text they were studying to analyzing it and relating it to other texts as well as their own lives. As the semester progressed many students became more comfortable evaluating the

material, in the sense of whether or not they agreed with the implications of the text.

Stage 3: Considering Opposing Viewpoints – Many of the students said that hearing a variety of viewpoints made the class discussions enjoyable. I often heard them say, “Everyone is entitled to their own opinion.” They also expressed appreciation for instruction that facilitated in-class interaction and did not impose an answer or particular perspective on the text or issues that the text raised, but rather allowed them to be exposed to a variety of viewpoints.

Stage 4: Tolerating Ambiguity – They did not hesitate to voice doubt about what they read. Students who expressed appreciation for hearing a variety of viewpoints on a given topic would often follow-up with approbation that there was no right answer, but also concern that it was hard to determine what the right answer might be.

Stage 5: Categorizing and Ranking – At this stage, students began to order concepts and ideas in terms of better and worse, more and less likely according to criteria. Very few students got to the level where they applied criteria, whether biased or unbiased, to an idea to test it for validity and reliability.

Stage 6: Evaluating Argument – Few students exhibited the desire to evaluate an argument in terms of right and wrong or more or less valid. No students expressed the idea that some arguments are better than others, based on certain criteria.

Stage 7: Evaluating Your Own Argument – No students evaluated their own arguments or previously held views in light of new ideas that emerged either from the text or from the in-class discussions.

The Pilot Study

My role as researcher began when I conducted a pilot study of the curriculum and pedagogy within this course, for a paper entitled *A Great Books Course: Teaching challenging texts*. In framing this pilot study, I examined explicit course goals. The research question that guided the pilot study was how do course instructors teach students to critically read challenging texts and manage difficult content? This pilot study proved to be of pivotal importance as it was through this preliminary research that I encountered and got to know Professor J, whose class became the focal point for this study.

I began my research by spending time in the Great Books common room, observing the more formal interactions such as faculty workshops, student study groups and instructor-student conferences. The study took place over the course of two-and-a-half months, and I spent approximately four to six hours per week observing and interviewing faculty members. Over time, I identified instructors who were open to discussing their pedagogical practice. I was able to interview them (at first informally, and then as trust was built for more formal recorded interviews) and in two cases observe them teach in their classrooms. This representative group afforded an outline of the critical issues instructors face as instructors of this challenging course. Through the research, I developed an understanding of the course content as well as various approaches to delivering that content.

Role of the Researcher

I knew GB100 well, because earlier in my career I had taught the course. I stopped teaching the course just before the program was redesigned to integrate the teaching of great books with more modern texts from a wider variety of authors. My experience teaching the course introduced me to a wide variety of students, many of them working class and the first in their families to go to college. I had many gratifying experiences with students who confided that initially they had been skeptical of the value of the course, but over time had come to view it as their favorite. I suspected that the course functioned best when the content and the form, for example the in-class exercises and the assignments (see Appendix B), dovetailed with the texts to promote positive learning habits. It was a positive experience that led to my interest in education as a career. Still, I was never sure if the students who had responded positively to the course were the students already in possession of the skills necessary to do well or were the ones who had a positive reaction to my particular teaching approach. I wanted to study the students in a more systematic way from a more impartial position. My background informed my analysis. I came to my research question because of my interest in general education, particularly how to understand and assess its value. I was interested in the organizational and instructional challenges of general education programs. Thus, I was not without bias when I entered the site. As Lincoln and Guba explain, research within the constructivist approach is rarely value neutral, as the investigator and the investigation are linked (1994). The role of dispassionate researcher was not a reality in this study, because I engaged with the students as they constructed the concept. I was not an impartial observer in the research relationship.

I wondered how, and if, any of the problems that existed in the previous version of the program, mainly the Western and male focus of the texts and the poor pedagogical practice, had been resolved in its transition to a course that taught classic texts alongside more works by women and people of color. In my previous experience in the Great Books common room, instructors were much more interested in debating big ideas than devising ways to improve their assignments and lesson plans; pedigree mattered more than pedagogy. I suspected that many of them followed the typical dichotomous thinking and tended to see value in the job and in themselves as transmitters of our great humanities tradition rather than college instructors with a job to do vis-à-vis the students. I encountered that researching the Great Books course, but I also found many instructors who cared as much about their students as they cared about the texts. Throughout the semester, many of those instructors hosted professional development workshops and shared assignments to facilitate the making of those important connections.

I had specific goals in mind when I conducted this pilot study. I focused on the curriculum and pedagogy, which is to say that I looked at the way certain instructors taught the course and how they integrated the texts into their teaching. One thing that the every professor I spoke with emphasized is that the texts present particular difficulties for the students and those difficulties are perennial. Many of the instructors found some of the texts difficult to teach. However, the heuristic text is at the core of Great Books and that is why they were included in the course. The texts are filled with large ideas and these ideas can be uncomfortable for the students. This discomfort can lead to learning breakthroughs (Mezirow, 1997).

I met Professor. J. while conducting the pilot study. With more than 10 years teaching in the program, he had an excellent grasp of Great Books' mission as the general education reading program. He explained that his discipline background in literature helped him understand how the texts informed each other. He asserted that if a student can master the Great Books texts, that student can read anything. Moreover, I could see in his interactions that he didn't merely teach the subject, he taught students. He said that that he saw himself in service to student learning. He defined inter-textual connections as the guiding concept for his pedagogy (Professor J., Personal Interview, 16 February, 2011). Reading and understanding one of these universal books (as another instructor, Professor H., called them during a workshop) is supposed to provide insight into all of the other books. They are not to be read in isolation. Certainly, the books are challenging books, difficult even for the instructors at times, but they teach the students to make inter-textual connections. So, what the best instructors do, and what I saw Professor J. doing, is make use of the thematic structure and have the texts talk to each other, even if those books seemed worlds apart.

Great Books can be understood by studying the relationships that are forged within it; at its best the course creates connections. It is in making larger humanistic connections that many instructors succeed. To be effective, instructors must connect with their students, facilitate the students making connections between the texts and their own lives, as well as demonstrate the connections between the texts and the wider world. He explained:

Those connections extend beyond the texts and the reading lists, and extend to student's other reading experiences in other courses. And then the texts help them to see the kind of the intellectual products around them

in the world, as part of that landscape that they are constantly examining and trying to make sense of. We are practicing with the texts in the class. We're really asking students to deploy these skills of critical thinking and critical examination beyond just the reading list that's right in front of them (Professor J., Personal Interview, 09 February 2013).

Prioritizing student voice has value. A study that analyzes it may provide a perspective on students who come to the course with less than solid critical thinking skills. I felt that observing one of his classes would be a good way to see if and how students acquire critical thinking skills in Great Books. After much discussion with Professor J., he consented to allow me to observe one section of Great Books throughout the semester on a weekly basis.

Because this research seeks to understand student's construction of critical thinking, this research took a constructivist approach (Lincoln and Guba, 1994). Classroom observations, student interviews and document analysis were part of the process to determine if and how students engage in critical thinking. As critical thinking is a term used mostly by education professionals, it was unlikely that students would have a gestalt understanding of the concept of critical thinking before they sat down to be interviewed. This reflected a gap in the research that this study attempted to illuminate. There is a paucity of research on how students define learning outcomes in general and critical thinking in particular. In my prior experience as an instructor of Great Books, students had said "I would like to learn how other people think about things and why they think that way" or "I would like to learn to better support my opinions and how other people support their opinions," when I have asked them what they hope to gain from the course. While these responses certainly fell under the aegis of critical thinking, they were only component parts of it.

Population and Sample

As a purposive sample, this research drew from 25 study subjects (all of the students in the class) taking one general education great books class at a large, mid-Atlantic, Research I university. This class was chosen because the professor agreed to allow the class to be studied. The sample was typical, in that the 25 students were evenly split between transfer and traditional, first-year students. Midlantic University serves approximately 35,000 students, with a large transfer-in and first-generation population. The majority of students are required to take this great books course in their sophomore year. The Great Books program offers two important courses in Midlantic's general education curriculum. At any time, approximately 7000 students are enrolled in the courses. Midlantic has a diverse student body, and this course's enrollment reflects that diversity.

It is important to note that Midlantic recommends that students take Great Books in the second semester of the freshman year of the university's academic sequence, after the students have taken a prerequisite writing course. Nevertheless, students don't always follow that order. Many transfer students receive credit for the first-year class they took at another institution. Thus, it is likely that many of these students have the study skills necessary to succeed and can explain how they employ them in managing the course, but some may not.

As all of the 25 students in the class were interviewed, I was able to survey students from a wide variety of academic majors as well as different backgrounds. Case studies were developed around those students. Particular attention was paid to how students employed a variety of academic approaches in their learning.

Table 2: GB100 Research Study – Student Demographics

| GB100 Research Study - Student Demographics | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|------------|------------|--------|-----------|--------------|------------|----------|-----|-------------|------|
| Name | Interview | Discussant | Trans. | No Trans. | Sex | Age | Race | SES | Major | Year |
| Marilyn | 28-Mar-13 | 2nd line | T | | F | 19 | C | LM | PSYCH | SO |
| Porter | 26-Feb-13 | 2nd line | | NoT | M | 19 | C | M | BIO/BUS | SO |
| Jessica | 5-Mar-13 | 1st line | | NoT | F | 18 | C | M | UND | FR |
| Jake | 28-Mar-13 | 3rd line | | NoT | M | 19 | C | M | UND | FR |
| Laura | 26-Mar-13 | 1st line | T | | F | 19 | C | M | FINE ART | SO |
| Mark | 9-Apr-13 | 3rd line | T | | M | 21 | C | UM | CRIM JUST | JU |
| Patricia | 19-Mar-13 | 2nd line | T | | F | 54 | AA | LM | SOC | JU |
| Kelly | 5-Feb-13 | 1st line | | NoT | F | 18 | C | M | MEDIA | FR |
| Mo | 23-Mar-13 | 3rd line | | NoT | M | 18 | Arabic | M | BIO/CHEM | SO |
| Emma | 18-Apr-13 | 4th line | | NoT | F | 18 | C | LM | ADV | FR |
| George | 12-Feb-13 | 4th line | | NoT | M | 18 | S. Asian | UM | BUS | FR |
| Brittany | 21-Feb-13 | 2nd line | T | | F | 20 | C | M | THERAP REC. | JU |
| Suzie | 7-Mar-13 | 2nd line | T | | F | 19 | C | LM | MKTG. | SO |
| Jennifer | 28-Mar-13 | 1st line | | NoT | F | 18 | C | M | BUS | FR |
| Jeremy | 7-Mar-13 | 3rd line | T | | M | 21 | C | UM | BUS | SO |
| Carrie | 7-Feb-2013 | 4th line | T | | F | 19 | C | LM | MKTG. | SO |
| Richie | 11-Apr-13 | 4th line | T | | M | 22 | C | L | SPORT MGMT. | JU |
| Mary | 13-Feb-13 | 2nd line | T | | F | 22 | C | M | ELEM. ED. | JU |
| Jack | 16-Apr-13 | 3rd line | T | | M | 21 | C | L | MKTG. | JU |
| Janet | 28-Feb-13 | 3rd line | T | | F | 19 | AA | M | HEALTH INFO | SO |
| Marsha | 24-Apr-13 | 1st line | T | | F | 21 | C | LM | ADV | JU |
| Rebecca | 27-Feb-13 | 4th line | | NoT | F | 18 | C | M | ACT/STAT | FR |
| Theresa | 4-Apr-13 | 2nd line | | NoT | F | 20 | C | M | COMM/PR | FR |
| Mitchell | 21-Mar-13 | 1st line | | NoT | M | 19 | C | M | LAND. ARCH. | FR |
| Barbie | 4-Apr-13 | 3rd line | | NoT | F | 18 | C | M | BUS | FR |
| | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | 12 | 13 | 16/F, 9/M | 20.72/Mean | | | | |

Data Collection

Three sources of data were used in this study: student interviews, classroom observations, and student blog posts. The most important of these three were the student interviews. As I was able to interview all the students in the class, as well as Professor J., I was able to get a detailed picture of the class. Interviews were conducted at the beginning and end of the semester. They were audio recorded. These interviews buttressed classroom observations that took place twice weekly throughout the semester. The observations focused on student-teacher interaction, but also on student-to-student interactions. Finally, weekly student blogs were examined in the study. These documents were used to substantiate interview subject's reports of the learning behaviors they used in the class discussions and their experiences overall. These qualitative research methods fostered a narrative response from the students and served to capture an authentic student perspective on the subject of critical thinking.

I observed the students in situ twice a week, for 80 minutes each time, for the entire semester. Critical thinking, the central concept being examined, is dialogic at the metastrategic level. It first takes place in a community. Thus, normal classroom activity was recorded to see how student-to-professor and student-to-student interactions impacted critical thinking. As my observations coincided with student interviews, the students came to know me and that I was studying their learning process. This certainly had an effect on their interview responses. Moreover, Professor J. would acknowledge me at particular moments in class discussion when he wanted me to corroborate a fact or idea. This concerned me as I feared it may have made the students think of me as in partnership with Professor J. in some way, and thus unwilling to hear any criticisms or

negative comments they might have about the class and their learning process. For this reason, I tried to physically marginalize myself in the room by staying outside of the teaching circle.

The classroom was arranged around a large conference table, with the teacher's place indicated only by a computer monitor. This room design was conducive to a seamless interplay of dialog, with students taking turns without raising their hand. I sat in a chair at the edge of the room, so as not to distract the students or Professor J. I hoped that my constant presence would render me a fixture of the class, but students commented to me that they noticed me diligently taking notes, so they were aware of my presence. Nevertheless, progressing through the interview process, speaking to each student at the beginning of the semester and then at the end, I came to realize the integrity of the students and their willingness to speak candidly during the interviews, no matter their level of satisfaction with the class.

Survey Design

The interview protocol (see Appendix A) was developed from habits of mind identified and used in the Cooperative Research Institutional Program survey of student engagement at the Higher Education Research Institute at the University of California, Los Angeles. These habits of mind have a great deal of external validity. They were created by using Item Response Theory (IRT), a statistical technique used to combine individual survey items, and validated through an iterative factor analytic technique. IRT assumes that some items will more directly measure a construct than others, and thus, different weights are given to each item before calculating the sum (Sharkness &

DeAngelo, 2011). Items that directly tap the construct are given more weight. The specific steps used to create the composite variables included exploratory factor analyses for item selection and for checking the local independence and unidimensionality of each construct, discrimination and threshold parameter estimations (using MULTILOG), and rescaling all scores to have a mean of 50 and standard deviation of 10 (Sharkness, DeAngelo, & Pryor, 2010). As one of the fundamental assumptions of IRT, local independence suggests that the interrelations among items in a scale are a result of the fact they are measuring the same underlying construct. That is, if the construct is controlled for, then the items are unrelated to each other. Similarly, unidimensionality suggests that one latent variable “underlies the probability of responses to all items in a scale” (Ruiz et al, 2010). The habits of mind measured by the Cooperative Institutional Research Project are:

- Seek feedback on your academic work?
- Seek solutions to problems and explain them to others?
- Ask questions in class?
- Explore topics on your own, even though it is not required for a class?
- Support your opinions with a logical argument?
- Revise your papers to improve your writing?
- Look up scientific research articles and resources?
- Evaluate the quality or reliability of information you received?
- Seek alternative solutions to a problem?
- Accept mistakes as part of the learning process?
- Take a risk because you feel you have more to gain?

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed in three stages using the concept of critical thinking, Vygotsky's social learning theory and the theory of student engagement. The three stages can be thought of as the comparative analysis phase, the interactionist analysis phase and the categorical analysis phase.

In the first phase, comparative analysis was used to weigh data gathered during this study against the habits of mind that are commonly considered to be manifestations of critical thinking. The data was then examined to see how students describe if and how they learn and what behaviors they manifest in the service of that learning. Particular attention was paid to how students describe the integration of these behaviors into their learning beyond this course. Here, the goal was to see if the students' descriptions of their actions matched the learning behaviors that I saw in the class. In the second phase, the data was examined to discern social patterns and meaning. Conveniently, Great Books offered ready-made themes that allow the researcher examination of how students affiliated with the learning community and also how they distinguished themselves from others in that community. As the focus will be the dyad and the community – how people interact in the process of learning – this analysis will tie in Vygotsky's theory of social learning. Vygotsky argued that concepts such as critical thinking begin socially as constructs, and over time, with the help of an instructor, become full blown concepts, integrated into the personal, individual consciousness of the learner (1987). In the third phase, the theory of student engagement provided a framework to analyze how students perceive these behaviors and relationships influencing their long-term educational prospects. This final phase of analysis allowed the data to be reconciled within the larger

issues in higher education, such as application of learning across the curriculum, as well as social and academic engagement. In this phase of analysis individual student learning was examined within larger institutional realities.

Method of Verification

While habits of mind have a great deal of external validity, external validity for this qualitative study was limited. This was case study research of students in general education class at a large, urban, research university taking a Great Books course. Thus, any findings will be limited to students in institutions of a similar Carnegie classification taking a similar general education course. The results of this study cannot be generalized to the larger population of undergraduate students. Nevertheless, the study offered some insight into the journey that students take to become critical thinkers, and that insight might be worthy of further research. The purpose of the study was to identify critical thinking behaviors that could be linked to persistence and positive student outcomes.

Ethical Issues

All students in the class were asked and given the opportunity to participate in the study. All of the students in the class consented to participate and all signed informed consent forms. Those students who gave informed consent to participate in the study were identified by a false name or 'nickname.' No student was identified by his or her real name. In all cases, students who gave informed consent for the interview process and described in the classroom interactions were made as anonymous as possible in the study. When a student-subject dropped the class or left the institution altogether, the student-

subject was withdrawn from the study. In accordance with FERPA, the study did not disclose subjects' protected academic information.

Outcome of the Study

At the moment the bulk of the research on critical thinking focuses on its mechanics or how it works, which is to say proximate causation. This study attempted to get closer to an understanding of ultimate causation, which is to say the root causes of critical thinking or why it exists in the first place. Vygotsky's theory of social learning (1987) had not been used to unpack critical thinking in this way, and the hope was that it would offer some insight into students' learning process through its linguistic orientation. Moreover, as this was qualitative research that drew from the student's own stories of how they have come to learn, it lent itself to narrative analysis. It directed me to focus on the language that the students used with particular attention. It lent itself to understanding students as they move from a set of behaviors that involve asking questions in class or rewriting papers – the complex – to understanding how these actions allowed them learn and create knowledge for themselves – the concept.

This analysis was nested within the larger theory of student engagement, which had been studied both qualitatively and quantitatively for 40 years, and therefore substantiated by a significant body of research. This is a powerful theory because of its elegant simplicity, but also because it forces the researcher to return to the important questions of persistence and graduation. It directed the research focus toward student outcomes, and thus directed research toward practical rather than merely academic goals.

Ultimately, this research attempted to better understand student success and failure. Although conversation cannot be neatly extracted from the student's other

characteristics it was this conversation that became the basis for this analysis. Students' coded chunks of conversation were the unit of analysis. The hope remains that this research will have value as we move toward a pedagogical model that places students at the center of the learning process. The ultimate purpose is to help institutions to construct better professional development programs around pedagogy and teacher effectiveness, help instructors to develop better courses, and help faculty members to design better curriculum.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Goals

This study aimed to look at individual student learning within one Great Books class, which for the purpose of this study has been named GB100. The class is embedded within a Great Books program, which determines the texts used in the curriculum. Thus, the knowledge and habits of mind that the professors relay to the students is influenced by a fairly prescribed academic context as well as their disciplinary training. This study first provides an overview of the Great Books program, with interviews and observations of instructors in the program, then a look at the how courses are structured. Finally, GB100 was examined.

Ultimately, this study focused on foregrounding the learning experiences of each of the students. I describe the pedagogical approach of the instructor, but only to illustrate the kind of learning technique that was facilitated by the teaching. The goal of this study was to utilize a broad-to-narrow focus to describe and analyze how critical thinking skills, as defined by the institution, are taken up by the students.

Themes

The learning experience that the students described was different from what I had expected when I began the research. Certainly, the students described learning analytical skills with a particular focus on analytical reading. Their experiences with close reading, their experiences as a student participant in GB100, their interactions with the professor

and with each other, critical thinking, academic management skills, the students' willingness to engage as self-directed learners and the students' growth as self-reflective individuals became the important themes of this research study.

This study, first, provides an overview of the Great Books program and the methods and goals of its instructors; then I provide an overview of GB100. Research on the students is presented in a broad-to-narrow-to-broad-focus. First, I describe overarching patterns in the student population and in their participation in the class. Participation holds a great deal of weight here, because it is so clearly a manifestation of student engagement. This is followed by individual biographies of each of the students in the class, with pertinent details highlighted to illuminate the descriptions of class discussions that follow. These offer further insight into the students' level of engagement in the class. Finally, the data is analyzed around the themes of academic relationships, academic management skills, self-directed learning, and self-reflection or metacognition.

These were neither the themes around which I had planned my study, nor the ones around which I had originally organized the interview protocol. The interview questions had come from the concept of habits of mind, which had emerged from 50 years of research on student c Cooperative Institutional Research Project and the National Survey of Student Engagement.

The students valued the course if they could take from it ways of knowing and learning habits that spoke to their goals and ambitions. As one professor explained to me, "The students are task-oriented" (Professor J., Personal Interview, 11 February 2011). If they could not see how the course provided them with useful skills, they tended to like

the course less. This is not to say that they didn't learn. There is evidence in this study of student learning even among students who express a distinct antipathy toward the course; however, learning was greater, if a student valued the course and saw it as connected to other courses. The students expressed a focus on setting and achieving goals rather than acquiring the thinking skills and dispositions. So, while the theory of student engagement and habits of mind guided the design of the study, issues around the development of executive function emerged from the data itself.

The students told me that they were much more concerned with achieving their personal and professional ambitions than they were with merely learning for learning's sake. I could see that students without this teleological focus found it more difficult to imagine how Great Books learning and thinking skills (more abstract, less applied) could be exploited in other areas of their academic and professional lives. I observed that they were more interested in what they were learning when they could relate what they were learning to their own goals,

The Great Books Program

Although this study looks at student learning in a great books general education class, with the students' coded chunks of dialog as the unit of analysis, it is important to understand the course itself, and the program in which it lives. The Great Books program takes students through a year of important texts, divided into two courses, organized around eight themes. The course is required for all students. Rarely are students allowed to substitute credits from courses at other institutions in its stead. Its stated mandate is to teach students critical thinking. According to Midlantic's website:

Within GenEd, students who think critically recognize an object of investigation, frame questions about it, and interrogate assumptions—explicit or implicit. Critical thinking includes the evaluation of evidence, analysis and synthesis of multiple sources, and reflection on varied perspectives. Critical thinking generates a well-developed investigation that incorporates supporting and countering claims. A student engaged in critical thinking produces an informed account, a hypothesis for further study, or the solution to a problem (Midlantic University Website, 01 Aug 2013).

The essential structure of the course is knowledge in the service of critical thinking. No specific learning technique or method is prescribed to do this, although professors choose from a preselected list of course texts.

This program and most particularly the people who teach it are worthy of study in their own right, although data from faculty observations and interviews comprised only a small proportion of research done for this study. I felt that a greater understanding of them and their perceptions of the context in which they work would enrich my understanding of how the students learn.

This program is a new kind of organizational structure in the university, and new kinds of organizational structures are rare in institutions of higher education. It is an academic structure outside of the traditional ones provided by either the Oxbridge or the German research university models. The Great Books program is not under the auspices of any particular department. Two factors converged in the late 1970s and early 1980s to create the program. One of its original purposes was to absorb instructors from a wide variety of disciplines who, during a late 70s financial crisis, would have otherwise experienced faculty termination, and the other is that many faculty members believed that students needed a more rigorous introduction to the humanities, social science and science on which upper-level instructors could build (Previous Program Director,

Personal Interview, 07 February 2013). It is a large program that employs over 100 instructors with as many as 7,000 students enrolled in any given semester. Because of its size and reach, success in this program reverberates through the curriculum.

In developing the initial framework for my study, I initially looked to explicit course goals; thus, the research question that guided my initial foray was how do Great Books instructors teach Midlantic University students to critically read challenging texts? Before I could understand how the students learned in the course, I wanted to better understand the values and the methods of those who teach.

Site Description

The Great Books program is unusual not only in its organizational structure – no one has tenure but the director of the program – but it also has a special physical configuration. Tucked away on the second floor of one of Midlantic’s cinderblock towers is a warren of offices and rooms that make up the Great Books program. There are offices for full-time faculty and administrators, but a large amount of informal pedagogical activity takes place in a large common space that serves as the physical heart of the program. In essence, the central point of this program is a kind of intellectual commons, where students and faculty gather formally and informally. All sorts of people, including students, regularly sit, observe and write in this space, and it functions as an apt metaphor for the ideals and goals of the program.

This approximately 40x40 foot common space is filled not only with tables and chairs (large and small) for student conferences and faculty meetings, but it is also equipped with comfortable couches, a kitchen in an adjoining room, a spring water dispenser, a large television, reference texts on shelves, and even a small upright piano.

In an institution where space is at a premium, it is unregulated common space in that no one person has a desk there or presides over the comings and goings of students and faculty. Sometimes, more formal gatherings occur; faculty meetings and get-togethers take place there as well student-teacher conferences. The unusual thing that happens around the Great Books program is not just that instructors interact with students; although that is always interesting, it is also that instructors interact with each other. As would be expected, the instructors share practical topics such as teaching techniques and in-class activities, but they also ask questions of each other as thinkers, debate and argue about the content that they teach. Moreover, these interactions are noteworthy because they happen between full-time lecturers and adjuncts. This intellectual commons allows for interactions across status levels.

The Great Books Course

The Great Books course spans two semesters or 28 weeks. It's thematically rather than chronologically organized. The course was restructured in 2011 to allow for integration of modern texts written by women and people of color. The four themes in Great Books I are journeys, self and other, community and faith/ways of knowing; in Great Books II they are power, money, science and city/environment (Great Books Website, 01 August 2013).

The course requires that each instructor must use a prescribed foundation text and then supplement that text from a short menu of secondary sanctioned texts. The choice of the secondary text allows the instructor to assert creative choice within the course that in turn influences assignment design, which is a another place for the instructor to be more

creative, or at least intentional. For example, a common choice pairs *Gilgamesh* with *The Travels of Lewis and Clark*, since both are about adventure travel and discovery. The list of secondary texts is much more wide-ranging, and its adoption is the curricular leap that turned the Western civilization course into the Great Books course. This structure, allowing more contemporary, esoteric texts is relatively new, was implemented in 2007 for the first time. Since then, instructors chose accompanying texts with an eye to their disciplinary strengths and for their potential to encourage connections across all of the course texts:

That's the great advantage of Great Books. It takes advantage of the notion that it could be six other texts, it could be eight other books that will give students this experience of difficulty, of big ideas and things that clash (Professor J., Personal Interview, 11 February 2011).

Whatever the secondary text, the students must read both texts in their entirety, in order to meet course goals. This presents one of the major challenges in the course, both for instructors and for students:

Sometimes it seems like we pretend to teach and they pretend to learn. That's why I put in quizzes. Even so I found there were students who had trouble with the reading, even with quizzes. With some of those students I got to speak more about reading strategies and how they read. Many of the students have trouble with stories that aren't narrative, that are more theoretical or abstract texts (Professor S. Personal Interview, 16 March 2011).

For the most part, Great Books instructors are rarely supervised or observed. There is only one director to oversee 2 tenured faculty, 48 lecturers and 50 adjunct instructors (Great Books Program Director, Personal Interview, 28 March 2011). No formal evaluation system exists beyond the student evaluations; although, a voluntary assessment program was begun with instructors offering analysis of their informal writing assignments. This assessment project ended in 2011.

Connecting Students to the University

Great Books has a relationship to Midlantic's overall retention goals. A small sample of students was studied to see how taking Great Books, in sequence after first-year writing, affected short- and long-term outcomes:

The evidence is – we have the initial data from measurement and research – we have evidence from a longitudinal study, and what we are seeing is greater performance for those students who take it in sequence, especially in terms of GPA overall, both in these courses and in their other courses. (Program Director, Personal Interview, 28 March 2013).

The general education program states that at the end of the Great Books two-semester long sequence a student will be able to:

Read in its entirety an unfamiliar and problematic written text (theoretically, historically, or culturally challenging);

Recognize abstractions, large ideas, and implications associated with difficult written texts;

Make connections across disciplines, history and cultural boundaries;

Construct positions, arguments, and interpretations through textual analysis and evaluation; and

Produce thoughtful writing that reflects persuasive position and the conventions of academic discourse. (Midlantic University General Education Website, 05 September 2013).

When questioned, not all of the Great Books faculty members understood that the office of general education views Great Books sequence as a general education reading course. While the program's faculty administrators understood the goals, the twelve adjuncts and faculty members that I informally surveyed in the common room did not answer that teaching students to be better readers was a course goal. The Great Books faculty administrators say that if a student can master the Great Books texts, that student can read anything. Still, many of the other instructors didn't understand my research

question, which for this pilot study was how do Great Books instructors teach students to be better readers. They seem puzzled and responded with something like, “Aren’t they supposed to know how to do that already? (Professor D, Personal Interview, 09 February 2011). Or, they answered, “Didn’t they learn that in high school? (Professor J., Personal Interview, 11 February 2011). Some instructors saw themselves in service first and foremost to the big ideas in the text or to their disciplinary ways of knowing, rather than their students. There was an attempt, with the Great Books restructuring, to focus the course on student learning:

There was a time in the past when the old program looked more content-centered. I found it not helpful to teaching. Not a lot of it was about anything that you would bring in the classroom, it was all about showing off to your colleagues. After you spend an hour-and-a-half in that meeting, and leave and ask “when I pick up Plato in my class, am I really going to bring anything in there that’s going to help students get to those big ideas? That’s part of my frustration with that. I just don’t think you can have a meaningful conversation about big ideas unless you talk about how people are going to access those ideas (Great Books Program Director, Personal Interview, 28 March 2011).

Moreover, placing the text first may not be the best way to teach students to read critically, because it may favor students who come to the course with solid critical reading and writing skills. The level of academic preparedness varies greatly as every Midlantic student is required to take the course:

The diversity of the student, the diversity of their goals, the reasons why they’re here, the diversity of their achievement level before they get to me, means that there is a diversity of different ways that they read. Some of them come in and hunker down. ‘You said read *The Iliad*, so I read the whole thing. I really do understand it.’ Others say, ‘I was going to wait to see what you said about book eight before I really bore down.’ And some say ‘I’m never going to read the Iliad, because I understood the class discussion.’ Then there is a tiny minority that you don’t get any of that from. They’re not going to read the book, they don’t care what is

happening in the class, and they are not going to make a serious attempt to write about it. (Professor J., Personal Interview, 11 February 2011).

So, I began to look at Great Books by studying the relationships that are forged within it. One stated course goal is for the student to learn how to make inter-textual connections, but I suspected it was in connecting these humanistic ideas to the students own lives and goals that the instructors succeed or fail. The program director told me that to be effective instructors must connect with their students, facilitate the students making connections between the texts and the student's own lives as well as demonstrate the connections between the texts and the wider world (Professor J., Personal Interview, 11 February 2013). Inter-textual connection, in the broadest sense where the world is a text, was a term defined for me by the program director, when he explained the course goals:

They (the instructors) have to try to get students to be aware of the possibility of connections at each step. Those connections extend beyond the texts and the reading list and extend to students' other reading lists to see other intellectual products out in the world that they are examining and trying to make sense of. We are practicing these skills in the class, but we want the students to deploy these skills of critical thinking and critical examination beyond the reading list that is in front of them. By the time they leave the course they won't need the professor to instruct them to do this. (Program Director, Personal Interview, 28 March 2011).

I wanted to see how various instructors approached this task. As luck would have it during the time I conducted my research, the program had put together a faculty development seminar on the topic of teaching through inter-textual connections. I thought it would be an ideal place to find instructors willing to talk about their experiences adjusting to this goal. The workshop had been organized by Professor R., an active and friendly faculty member who could often be found in the common room willing to discuss texts. It was designed around two presenters, representing the old and the new from the Great Books faculty, Professor H. a 20-year teaching veteran and a doctor of

theology, and Professor S. with a newly minted doctorate in anthropology.

Professor H. went first. He described integrating the texts through a portfolio assignment that required the student to join a community service project, which Professor H. had organized with the assistance of the university office of community relations. This assignment required the students to use the texts to analyze their experience in the community. After his talk, he explained how the new thematic approach facilitated making connections:

Reading and understanding one of these books, I like to call them universal books, is supposed to provide insight into all of the other books. They are not to be read in isolation. Certainly, the books are challenging books, difficult even for the instructors at times, but they teach the students how to read and understand the other books. We have to try to have the texts talk to each other, even if those books seem worlds apart. (Professor H., Personal Interview, 03 March 2011).

How Instructors Connect With Their Students

Some instructors keep an eye on the real, if unspoken, purpose of the course. The assessment coordinator for the course was a long time Great Books instructor with his eye squarely on course goals. In an impromptu interview in the common room, I asked if the course teaches beyond the texts. He repeated what the program director had told me: “I’m not sure, but we know that Great Books does a good job of teaching people to be college students and succeed in other general education classes” (Professor J., Personal Interview, 18 February 2011). This is the real, if tacit, undergirding of Great Books. The reading and critical thinking skills acquired in this class are designed to facilitate student academic success and ultimately increase student graduation rates. The skills they learn are supposed to transfer across the curriculum.

This led to questions about assignment design, as assignments make course goals and expectations of the students explicit and useful. For all his understanding of the diversity of the students in his class and their task orientation, Professor J.'s Gilgamesh assignment was somewhat opaque, requiring the students to discuss certain themes from the book, without clearly defining what would comprise a proper discussion. This was not limited to Professor J. Professor D., a relatively new, but approachable instructor in the program who curated a movie program for students and faculty, seemed to genuinely care about his students. Nevertheless, he was unable to articulate a clear teaching method. During a long interview Professor D. responded to the question on assignment design by saying, "I like to think that I'm usefully confusing them about things they know about themselves and about the world." This response made me wonder as if I was somehow missing out on a subtle but valuable way of teaching, but in the end I couldn't make sense of confusing the students. Fortunately, I was able to observe his technique in the classroom.

Teaching Kafka's *Metamorphosis* on an unseasonably stuffy, early morning to a group of 25 students he employed a question and answer format asking students to identify sub-textual themes in the story. Often he would ask a question to no avail, with the students remained silent and unresponsive, flipping through the pages in search of an answer, hunched over their desks. They would avoid eye contact when he asked a question. Moreover, the subtext of the story is a scathing criticism of commerce and capitalism, something the students may be unfamiliar with or even feel is inappropriate to voice. While his class was interesting for me, it is questionable whether the students

gleaned much from this attempt at dialog. I suspect that this is because he asked them to identify the subtext without first teaching them how to do sub-textual analysis.

Professor B., an adjunct of many years, was very concerned with students learning useful skills was. He had seen the program go through multiple iterations and was unfazed when I asked him questions about recent curricular transition to Great Books. He explained that he knew what worked regardless of the book the class was reading. “Most of the students need to learn to make arguments. They can learn this using many different texts,” he said. He taught the students to read through face-to-face assignment feedback sessions. I observed that he spent up to six hours a week counseling students. I observed him in the common room more than any other instructor or adjunct. He was in the common room every time I was there. Seated at a small circular table, he conferenced with student after student, patiently waiting even when they were late or didn’t make their appointments. His goal was to gently persuade the student away from simple summary toward a closer reading that would allow for argument in their assignments. He would encourage, but clearly state his course requirements. “You write well, but I want you to use more a text-based analytical approach,” he said to a student. I commonly heard him say that essays would work better if a student quoted from the text more or showed the reader what was happening in the text. This was a common theme in his conferences. Professor B. said that he wanted his assignments to be teaching tools, not just summative evaluations. In those conferences, students confided in Professor B. and talked about not only the assignment, but better ways to participate in class. Some even talked about their personal lives.

Others employed a more directed pedagogical method. Professor S., a recently hired adjunct said, “I was warned when I started that a lot of the students don’t do the reading. I understand that Great Books is not their first priority, but I don’t like to play those sorts of games” (Professor S., Personal Interview, 16 March 2011). She explained that her goal was to counteract the students’ disinclination to interact with the texts on their own. She did this, even though she likened it to the way she had been taught in more traditional anthropology courses. Perhaps to counter this practice, she also described the way she worked with Thomas More’s *Utopia* using group work to have students identify More’s argument and then present it as if they were teaching the class. As an anthropologist she made the course about people, integrating more modern texts into each unit for a total of three books around that particular subject. “Maybe it’s my training, but my logic is, if I can connect the course to the needs of people, I will be able to connect students to explore the larger themes of the course” (Professor S. Personal Interview, 16 March 2011). Professor I., an ESL instructor in the program, chooses a similar approach. She had her students design their own assignments. “I don’t think my students could learn to read, if they didn’t know what they were reading for” (Professor I. Personal Interview, 14 March 2011).

In my earlier interview, I had probed Professor D. further about his teaching philosophy. He had launched into a description of the Socratic Method and the process of enquiry as a method of helping the students uncover truths they already know. He said:

I don’t teach. I don’t teach anything. All Socrates claims to do, even though it does seem like teaching sometimes, is make you realize what you already know... I’m asking students to think about what they do know from their own experiences and evaluate or think through those things

using some of the frameworks that we discuss in class” (Professor D., Personal Interview, 09 February 2013).

He explained that he wanted his students to connect their own thinking process and frame of reference to the ways of knowing presented in the texts.

How Instructors Help Students Connect Great Books to Their Own Lives

Still, the more interesting inter-textual connection may be the ones the students make to the “text” of their own life. Often the professors tried to draw comparisons from the world that the students live in now to inform reading of the text. Professor A. an instructor with a multidisciplinary background who has been teaching the course for a few years, describes this simply as learning to ask questions:

That’s a skill that they do learn in Great Books – to connect a question that a text raises to their own questions. Does that make it interesting? It’s a critical skill. It teaches them that the text is not an object over there. Rather, it is something that can be part of their lives and be incorporated into their own life world... Much of it really comes down to critical thinking. Because many of these students 18 or 19 don’t have any idea of what questions they can ask of the world. Many kids confront reality with the attitude ‘it is what it is,’ which means that ‘I don’t have to think about it’ (Professor A., Personal Interview, 10 March 2011).

If students can question a text and connect it to world around them, her thinking is that they can begin to question that world. Professor A. asserted that identifying a problem is the first step to solving it. “Doesn’t true mastery of a discipline require that the student learn to ask questions about it” (Professor A., Personal Interview, 10 March 2011)?

Professor S. used another technique to connect the books and the course to the student’s own lives. She brought in texts outside of the sanctioned list to teach each of the units. For example, around the theme of resistance she teaches *The Iliad*, *the Declaration*

of Independence, and “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” along with Greta Paule’s *Dishing it Out: Power and Resistance Among Waitresses in a New Jersey Restaurant*. She clarified that she draws from her own disciplinary strengths (anthropology), but she also wants to give the students texts that are more immediately recognizable and therefore relatable to their own lives. She used modern, familiar texts, where themes are easier to discern, to help unpack the more recondite texts.

Professor K., a long time instructor in the program used classroom activities to unpack the texts. During our interview, she described having the students free-write in class and characterize themselves as a house (Professor K., Personal Interview, 7 March 2011). She then uses Freud’s dream analysis technique from *The Introductory Lectures* to teach the students to analyze the symbols in their descriptions:

I encourage the students to walk through the house paying close attention to particular items and what they might mean. I have them be Freud as well as read Freud. This is particularly valuable for students who are not strong readers. Students who are visual or kinesthetic learners get a lot out of it. I see the light bulb go on (Professor K., Personal Interview, 7 March 2011).

Technology was brought into the course, particularly for use in informal writing assignments. Professor K. incorporated Twitter for the first time during the semester that I conducted my pilot study and had been using blogs for a few years. Simultaneously coinciding with the time of my study, the assessment committee had chosen to gather and analyze student blog posts as a way to examine how well students learn to read in the program. However, certain realizations about student and faculty skills occurred to the members of the committee during a meeting I was able to observe early in my pilot study. Technological adaptations, such as having students blog about the reading, may not have

been the best assessment tool. Not everyone understood how to evaluate this kind of informal writing as a student assignment. During the meeting, Professor F., a long time lecturer and member of the assessment committee asked, “What is a blog? (Assessment Meeting Observation, 05 April 2013). The assessment committee members acknowledged that training instructors in blog writing might be in order.

How Great Books Instructors Connect Students to the Wider World

Instructors make the most use of their disciplinary training when it comes to the big picture and making connections to the outside world. This is also where instructors seem to glean the most creative satisfaction from the course. Many of them reported that this was the part of Great Books that was the most enjoyable.

Some professors, such as Professor D., employ a kind of time travel technique, where they compress history to illuminate similarities and differences with our own time. Professor D. said, “I have a lot of things where they have to pull the authors or the characters out of the text and put them in other contexts or in dialog with other thinkers or characters or texts that they wouldn’t meet, sort of from different time periods” (Professor D. Personal Interview, 09 February 2013) He dubbed this *compressing time*. He described having students compare and contrast ideas with similar thematic underpinnings as they develop through history.

Other instructors take it beyond the individual character to the community. Professor H. described a community service capstone project where he asked the students to visit and analyze a city civic association within the contexts of the units on science and technology, economics and money, politics, and of course the city and environment. He

explained that his goal was to teach the course around a common theme, which in this case he identified as “finding a home in the world” (Professor H., Workshop Observation, 15 March 2011). That theme then informed all the units of the course and allowed him to create an assignment that allowed for inter-textual connections beyond each individual student’s experience to the student’s larger community. Professor S. echoed this:

We speak of things within certain frameworks, speaking of things in terms of resistance, speaking of things in terms of inequality. These give them certain ways of playing with the world that they can play with and do other things with. We have some sort of framework that we’re working within. I do want my students to be applying things to their own social worlds and not have all this stuff be very abstract and in the realm of books. I want them to see how it applies. (Professor S., Personal Interview, 16 March 2011).

However, it is in the reactions of the students in independent peer-tutor groups I observed the value of the course. In these groups, students work together to understand what they read and find meaning in the texts. Over the course of my study in the Great Books common room, I was able to watch J., the student peer tutor, work with a small group of regular students in a study group. At the beginning of my study, I observed the awkward and difficult group interactions, with J. playing the part of professor. Over time, the group cohered into a much friendlier, interactive group of equals. J. still took the lead, but the students too began to have fun with the text. Tzu’s *The Art of War* was a particularly well-liked example. Watching the group one sunny day on their usual corner couches of the common room, I could see their enthusiasm and appreciation for the wisdom of the text:

J.: What is the *The Art of War* really about?

1st Male Student: It’s about winning wars.

J.: I don’t think it is. *The Art of War* is really about avoiding war.

2nd Male Student: Then why is that the title?

J.: The greatest military strategists are unseen. You don't even know they are there. That's how they are great. They don't seek glory. Peace is the goal.

1st Male Student: So it's about strategy.

J.: Yes (Common Room Tutoring Session Observation, 24 March 2011).

The Great Books curriculum provides the map with the instructors functioning as guides. J. went so far as to say, "That's what is great about Great Books. They show you different perspectives and let you choose your own" (Common Room Tutoring Session Observation, 17 April 2011). During this session J. helped the students make inter-textual connections to other books, such as *The Iliad* and the *Dao De Jing*. I sensed that something more was going on. In this prosocial exchange, I observed the students taking up ideas as tools to help them understand the world.

In another context, Professor K. used the classroom to bring in the larger world. When I observed her class, I watched as she had students relate passages on crime in Du Bois' *The Souls of Black Folk* to the 'stop-and-frisk' policies of the Philadelphia police in the present day (Classroom Observation, 29 March 2011). Professor K. described her class as "decentralized" (Personal Interview, 7 March 2011), but upon observation what this turned out to be was a safe place for people to express relevant ideas without raising their hand or checking in with her for approval. She had created a dialogic learning environment where participation was expected.

Every professor I spoke with emphasized his or her belief that the texts present particular difficulties for the students and those difficulties are perennial. Rarely are students able to read the texts in their entirety, even though this is a program goal:

If we stick the purist stance that they are supposed to read the entire text, it doesn't ever pan out. It's a recipe for disaster. They are not going to do it and I already know this. So I split them up into groups and ask them to

read specific sections of the text. ((Professor K., Personal Interview, 7 March 2011).

The challenging text is at the core of the Great Books program and drives the selection of the texts. According to the program director, the Great Books program was specifically designed to build on skills and learning acquired in Midlantic's first-year writing program. The books teach the students themselves; they are chosen for their heuristic value. However, the chance of a student ever picking up a book such as *Gilgamesh*, a commonly used text in the course, for fun or for entertainment is highly unlikely.

Because the texts are difficult, many of the students need help with reading:

For some of the more difficult texts it's just a matter of being able to understand what is going on in the text. That's where group work comes in handy. We're just starting Utopia and the beginning is really hard for students to figure out. I put them in groups so that they can figure it out together (Professor S. Personal Interview, 16 March 2011).

The way the instructor interacts with the texts and the students, and if they add value to the process beyond being an evaluator that assigns a grade to the student's effort, was a fundamental purpose of my research with faculty members. I framed my inquiry to better understand how the instructors facilitate, incentivize or check that students have read the texts assigned.

Through this interview process, I was able to speak with Professor J. a number of times. When I expanded the study with the goal of capturing student perceptions of learning in Great Books, I asked Professor J., if I could observe his class. He consented.

Overview of the Class

Once I understood the learning issues as the instructors saw them, I shifted the focus of my research to GB100 for the purpose of this study. This shift in perspective

required the development of new research questions around how the students learned to think critically in Great Books, and what it meant to them if they did. Those questions were:

1. Do students recognize critical thinking as it is taught to them?
2. How do students absorb and manifest critical thinking skills in this course?
3. Once they have been exposed to critical thinking, do students use it in other contexts?

The Learning Environment

Student participation in GB100 was greatly affected by the configuration of the room. The classroom was arranged around a large round table that allowed every student to be seen by Professor J., except for those students sitting immediately to the instructor's left or right. The teacher's place at the table was indicated only by a large computer monitor, as opposed to the professor standing behind a podium above the seated students at the front of the room. This room design was much more conducive to a seamless interplay of dialog, with students taking turns without raising their hand, but I did not observe this level of free-flowing discourse until midway through the semester. Initially, the classroom geography promoted a back-and-forth, intransitive pattern to the discourse, where students would respond to Professor J.'s questions, Professor J. would comment on the response and ask another question of the students, they would respond, and so on. The students benefitted by being able to establish direct eye contact with Professor J., but it also hindered them from engaging in cross-talk with each other or any kind of surreptitious commentary, which can allow students to express dissent to each other

without challenging authority, and thus build camaraderie. Initially, if the students wanted to question the material or disagree with Professor J., they had to go through him. This changed when Professor J. required that the students do a group assignment during class but without his supervision. The groups were allowed to meet anywhere on campus. One group opted to meet in the otherwise empty classroom, which gave me the opportunity to observe them complete the assignment.

Before the next class, I noticed a distinct increase in informal interactions among the students waiting in the hallway. Prior to working together on the group assignments, the students waiting for class to begin in the hallway had passed the time by staring off into space or bobbing their heads to music playing through their earphones. But after the group-work, many of the students greeted each other, pulled out their earphones and talked. The interactions were largely easygoing, but students also chatted about the reading that was due for GB100 that day, and the requirements for an upcoming assignment. They began to utilize these social interactions to help with their academic management. Even so students did not report that they made friends or colleagues through the class, so while the interaction was highly dialogic, because of the intense focus on close reading and discussion, for most of the semester it was not pro-social or encouraging of student-to-student interaction.

Professor J. began training the students in close textual analysis from the beginning of the semester. This was in keeping with the stated course goals which outlined the use of rhetorical techniques to develop and improve the students' thinking abilities. Their class was designed around the following texts read in the following order:

The Epic of Gilgamesh

Bartolomeu de Las Casas, *A Short Description of The Destruction of the Indies*

Gloria Anzaldua, *Borderlands/La Frontera*

Sigmund Freud, *The Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*

Plato, *The Trials of Socrates*

Genesis, *The Bible*

The Daodejing of Laozi

Course Goals

The course goals, as defined in the syllabus were as follows:

You will be able to read difficult texts, recognize positions taken and rhetoric used, identify continuities and discontinuities across texts, and make connections to other material and experiences outside these readings. As writers, you will be able to create meaningful college-level prose that engages with and/or questions these source texts. I hope for you to realize this development for yourselves because a skill is most valuable when you can recognize it (Course Outcomes, Course Syllabus, Spring 2013).

When asked during the interview about the stated course outcomes, all of the students, except for three, indicated that becoming a better reader was the goal of GB100. They said that they knew this by the way Professor J. had designed the assignments (see Appendix B) and the learning strategies he had focused on in class, even if they could not recite verbatim the stated learning outcomes.

Course Content and Critical Thinking

The content of the course is comprised of fundamental critical thinking documents. In the aggregate, they are known as great books or the canon. Individually, each document is valued because it presents an important scientific concept (Vygotsky, 1987) that required Western societies to question assumptions, norms and values. It is in these concepts that the value of the texts lies. When these books appeared they forced a reexamination that led to social, economic and artistic change and progress on many

levels. Thus, it is thought that through exposure to these fundamental scientific concepts students' thinking will develop in positive ways. As form mirrors content, the fundamental activity of the course is the questioning of these concepts as they are relayed to the students. After all, they are important enough as cultural heritage that an entire university program is devoted to their transmission from one generation to the next.

Classroom Demographics

The 25 students researched for this study were evenly split among students who liked the class and judged it as valuable and those who did not. Thirteen students reported that they had learned in GB100 and twelve reported that they did not. The students who liked GB100 could all be categorized as self-directed learners. They were clear about their academic goals, as well as their vocational goals, and were thus better able to fit more abstract critical thinking skills into their intellectual toolkit.

- Nine of the students were male; 16 of the students were female.
- Twelve students were transfer; 13 were traditional students.
- Twenty-one students were white, two African American, one Arabic and one South Asian.
- Two students identified themselves as having grown up in poverty; six students identified themselves as working class, 14 identified themselves as middle-class, two identified themselves as upper middle-class.
- The mean age of the students was 20.72 years.
- Nine students reported that the class was not valuable to them. Four of those students were male, five female.

I identified a core group of six students, or first-line discussants, who were the most active in building the classroom culture. Five of the six first-line discussants were female, and four out six were traditional. These were the students who spoke up every single class. There was no requirement to speak in class, beyond the grading scheme which allocated 20 percent of the grade to seminar skills. The syllabus did not explain how classroom participation figured into the total score. Moreover, Professor J. rarely called on students who did not show interest in the discussion, even though it was a seminar class. This core group of active participants were the most likely to engage Professor J. whether they understand the content or not. They asked questions. Moreover, they conferred with each other regularly during discussion about classroom logistics by asking questions such as “What page are we on?” or “What does he want us to do in this exercise? Over time, I saw these students habituate Professor J., through the use of eye contact and body language, to calling on them before the other students in the class.

The second-line discussants spoke up in class when called upon, but were less likely to voluntarily speak unless they had read and understood the texts thoroughly. Five of the seven second-line discussants were transfer students, and six of them were female. They were less likely to ask questions than the first-line discussants. They would follow the discussion with their eyes, but were less likely to make eye contact with the Professor J., particularly when he asked a question. When that happened they would look down. If Professor J. did call on one of them to answer a question, they would often ask for clarification. I observed that they were capable of active participation. Occasionally they exhibited real interest in the discussion, but only when they understood the text well. Their confidence in the class seemed contingent on their confidence with the material.

Third line discussants kept their heads down, literally. Four out of the six third-line discussants were transfer students, and five of them were male. I never observed them offering commentary or asking questions about any of the texts voluntarily. They would respond with peremptory answers, when called upon. They rarely made eye contact. Often they interacted with technological devices, such as laptop computers and cell phones, in lieu of looking at the other classroom participants or Professor J. Very occasionally, they would speak up, but only when the discussion was particularly lively or interesting, and the class discussion had become more informal and jocular.

Fourth-line discussants spoke the least in class. Two of the five fourth-line discussants were transfer, and two of them were male. I did not observe them making eye contact with Professor J., although they did follow the discussion among the students. I never observed them interacting with devices during class.

Please see the student demographics chart in chapter three for a detailed comparison.

Student Participation

I began my inquiry into the concept of habits of mind by observing GB100. As the theory of student engagement posits that the more involved a student is in their education, whether academically or socially, the more likely they are to persist to graduation, observing student participation was an obvious place to begin. I wanted to see who spoke in class and who did not and if there was a pattern to this. At the outset of the semester, I found the class discussion stilted, with Professor J. asking questions that garnered mostly silence; however, as the semester went on and the students reported

increased comfort with each other and with Professor J., a more lively debate dominated. Over time I observed that a class culture developed. At the beginning of the semester, students sat isolated in the seats, but by the middle of the semester, they leaned in to confer with each other, if they had lost their place in the discussion, and sometimes for clarification on difficult or controversial topics. The class culture centered around the activities of reading and closely analyzing the text. Because of the importance of pro-social activities in increasing student engagement, it was of particular importance that this was a shared task.

Professor J. rarely lectured. Occasionally, he would introduce a text at length, but for the most part his teaching method was distinctly Socratic. He started with general inquiry, then guiding the students to understanding through increasingly specific questions:

I do like the way that our discussions are guided in this class. I think that's important for a professor. Leaving it up to us to come up with conclusions, but guiding the discussion so that we came up with conclusions. I have a couple of classes that are not challenging and this is one of the classes that involves critical thinking and discussing open-ended questions. I enjoy that (Marsha, Personal interview, 24 April 2013).

This dialogic format invited some students to participate, sometimes engaging with each other in a question and answer dialog without Professor J. as the intermediary. The students who described GB100 as valuable consistently reported the discussion format as fundamental to their learning process. Connecting the course goals to this discussion format, Marilyn, a highly engaged, first-year psychology major who participated sporadically, was nevertheless able to identify the underlying goal of the course:

I kind of think that this is a critical thinking kind of class, because it is so discussion-based. You have to do the readings in order to participate and have that comprehension of what you're reading. I think Professor J. asks good questions to get us thinking, but kind of in a fun way. I don't know what the textbook definition of this course is, but I think it is that you have to think on your toes (Marilyn, Personal Interview, 28 March 2013).

Vygotsky argued that learning is mediated through language, and because of that higher-order learning begins as shared experience. Before we understand what we know internally, he explained, "we experience it through semiotically mediated social processes" (Wertsch, 1985, p. 61):

I like our class discussion and how we interpret the story in all these different ways, and how everyone has their own opinions, and nothing is necessarily right or wrong, it's just different angles of looking at the text. I like when things are left open for discussion... It's kind of interesting to see the different way people look at it. Somebody might think something means something completely different than what you read it as. Then you can say, oh, I guess I see where you are coming from and that could completely change how you think about it (Carrie, Personal Interview, 7 February, 2013).

Many students reported that the discussion was the most valuable part of GB100 for them and that they enjoyed hearing the multiplicity of perspectives and considering differing viewpoints. It drew them to the class:

I don't have a problem coming to it because it's discussion and it helps me understand the readings better, getting Professor J.'s take on it, my classmate's, throwing my ideas out there to see what Professor J. thinks about that has helped me a lot (Marilyn, Personal interview, 28 March 2013).

Many of the students described the process of listening to different opinions and comparing those opinions to their own as valuable. They welcomed the opportunity to consider opposing viewpoints. "You want to have different perspectives and different information about all sorts of topics, not just the one of your major" (Suzie, Personal

interview, 05 March 2013). Many students appreciated that for some of the topics discussed there was a significant amount of ambiguity:

I think that they bring up enough good points and explain them well enough that I don't really have to. I wouldn't say necessarily I disagree, because I think for the most part all of their points, they back them up well. They have evidence and proof, so I can't say flat out that I disagree with you. But..., there might be a different take on it, but I don't think their ideas are wrong. In this class, I don't know if there is a right or wrong, a black or a white (Marilyn, Personal interview, 28 March 2013).

The students valued the way the Professor J. created a learning environment that encouraged them to tolerate ambiguity:

One of the main things is to create a comfortable environment where people feel comfortable to share their thoughts. I guess people can be wrong but to accept different perspectives. That's the main thing" (Theresa, Personal Interview, 04 April 2013).

These first-line discussants came to the class with the predilection to participate.

Some of these students were extroverts, such as Jessica: "If I have a question, if it's something I don't understand, I'm not afraid to ask it, no matter how many people I annoy (Personal Interview, 05 March 2013), or Mitchell: When he says something that intrigues or my mind I comment (Personal Interview, 21 March 2013). These students learned well through dialog and interaction:

I'm active. I participate. Yeah. I think you get into a class what you put in. You might not be graded for raising your hand but you get more out of it, as opposed to just sitting there and just being there (Jennifer, Personal interview, 28 March 2013).

And others felt that their contribution mattered to their classmates as well as their own learning experience:

I speak enough where people respect and know my opinion, but not so much that my voice is annoying in class. I pay attention. I do best in

English and reading classes because they are so opinionated... Student voice should be heard (Kelly, Personal interview, 05 February 2013).

And:

When I feel I have a unique thought that no one else is going to think of. Or, when I feel strongly about something and I just want to put it out there (Laura, Personal Interview, 26 March 2013).

When interviewed all of the students described class participation as their responsibility and as a behavior that facilitates learning. Yet even if they fully understood its heuristic value, many students were not able to fully engage in the class because they were not prepared:

Me? Opening up the books would have prompted me to participate in class and actually actively discuss with other students and the professor. It just didn't happen because I didn't read anything (Jake, Personal interview, 28 March 2013).

I would characterize Jake as a loafer. Although intelligent, he was a student who did not come to class prepared and participated only when called upon. I sat behind Jake's seat at the roundtable, and I often saw him catching up on the reading due for that day during class. There were three such students in GB100. Two of the three students admitted that they had not purchased the required texts. The other one admitted to using *Spark Notes* in lieu of reading the required texts. The other fourteen students fell somewhere on the class participation continuum or somewhere between never talking and always having something to offer in class.

During class discussion, men participated much less often than women and also reported that class was not as valuable to them overall. Two male students in this group provided a provocative answer when asked why they did not find GB100 valuable. They remarked that they did not see the purpose in analyzing the texts too deeply. "I'm not a

big fan of looking too deep into meaning when you are reading a book. What does this mean? What does this mean? I find it tedious, I guess” (Richie, Personal Interview, 11 April 2013). As close reading of text and discussion as to meaning – in short, textual analysis is one of the stated course outcomes – those who do not want to learn these skills had a harder time engaging in the class. This was not the case with all the male students. Another young man reported that it was precisely this predilection not to analyze too deeply that the class had helped him overcome:

It was a lot of digging deep into the text and discussing more than I would have, if I had just read it. It’s good to have other people think about it, especially with Professor J. He discussed it and made us think about what he thought about it. I saw a lot of things I would not have been able to see, if I had just read it on my own (Porter, Personal interview, 29 April 2013).

I was particularly interested to see if students asked questions in class and more generally how students evaluated the quality or reliability of information they received. These two habits of mind show a student’s direct interest in the topic but also correlate to a student’s overall proclivity toward self-directed learning. The first-line discussants were mostly likely to question the material and Professor J.’s interpretation of it:

I participate in class. Sometimes I will debate with somebody, if they make a point. I can build off of that point and ask them a question about that (Marsha, Personal Interview, 24 April 2013).

In the interviews all seven active participants expressed that they came to Great Books with a predisposition to question in general. Among the more reluctant participants, I saw students responding to Professor J.’s prompts, but contributing to the direction of the discussion was much less frequent. They rarely asked questions.

Despite valuing the open discussion format, many students were disinclined to openly challenge authority. Even though students acknowledged that Professor J. would

regularly encourage the students to disagree with him, Marilyn reported that she did not think she had ever openly done so. Despite her high level of engagement and comfort speaking up in class, even Jessica, an avid talker, acknowledged there were limits to how much she would challenge authority:

I don't disagree with Professor J., because I don't know the text as well as he does. He's read it countless times and I've read it once, barely (Jessica, Personal interview, 3 March 2013).

By the same token, most of the students, particularly the shy students, were hesitant to disagree with their peers:

I'm not really comfortable doing it in class... I could have said I don't agree. I feel like there is a tension when someone says they don't agree. I don't want to make tension (Brittany, Personal interview, 20 February 2013).

Some students were unsure of themselves intellectually:

I don't know if I'm disagreeing with what he says or thinking of it in a different way. At times I disagree with other students, but I just think everyone has their own opinion" (Carrie, Personal interview, 07 February 2013).

Emma, an advertising major who never spoke in class simply stated that if she were inclined to disagree she would keep it to herself (Personal interview, 18 April 2013). She was one of many. Eighteen out of the 25 students answered that they would not openly disagree in class. Rather than healthy debate the students associated it with confrontation and conflict.

Discussion was prioritized in this study because of the nature of the class. Great Books is a seminar; as such, it is designed to encourage dialog. This feature **is** integral to the design of the course, and is the reason why the class was capped at 27 students.

Smaller classes tend to facilitate discussion (Kidd, 1952). Learning is inherently dialogic in great books.

I arrived at a definition of critical thinking by observing the students in GB100. A number of them were in stage three, where impressions and emotions rule. Some of these students moved into stage four, but I saw only glimpse of students moving into stage five and then only at the end of the semester. I observed students in dialog with other members of the class, establishing group rules and coming to understand the requirements and how one must adapt one's behavior to meet the expectations of the group (Erikson, 2004). Critical thinking in this class was first seen as academic management, which is to say the foundation for skills needed to function successfully in a college classroom. The behaviors that followed were increasingly social, starting with interacting with the text, which is to say the ideas of one other person quite removed from their cultural experience, to interacting with people with ideas markedly different from their own. The student who used higher levels of critical thinking used evaluation methods to take in new ideas and gage them for validity and reliability.

Moreover, the texts themselves are in conversation with each other in both obvious and ambiguous ways. Because of its geographic and historical focus on genocide, Las Casas' *Destruction of the Indies* illuminates Anzaldua's presentation of identity and cultural oppression in *Borderlands/La Frontera*. Plato's *Dialogs*, specifically "Euthyphro" lend insight into readings of *Genesis*, as both discuss the limits of faith and its relationship to right and wrong. The books are dialogic in unexpected ways as well: Freud's *Introductory Lectures* seem to change the reading of all the other texts in the class and the *Daodejing* seems to talk to itself.

Constructivism holds that “individuals create their own new understandings, based upon the interaction of what they already know and believe, and the phenomena or ideas with which they come into contact” (Richardson 1997, p. 3). The social systems in which a learner is embedded will dominate much of her learning, as “no human thought is immune to the ideologizing influence of its social context” (Berger and Luckman, 1966, p. 21). Examining the importance of context in the learning process, shows that students apprehend the system of learning and adopt their own coping strategies, often against their own instincts and best interests (Marton, 2007; Pines and West, 1986; Saljo, 1987).

The quality of discussion is multidimensional. The content of the discussion (what is discussed) is important, but so is the way in which the discussants engage with each other (how it is discussed). The latter is as important as the former. These methods of engagement can be thought of as discussion skills. These are generally referred to as dispositions and can be thought of proclivities that lean an individual toward ways of thinking. One purpose of this study was to better understand how students recognize and describe these dispositions toward discussion. Assessment only of the content of discussions highlights the importance of the acquisition of knowledge and performance attained by individual students and may ignore the development of skills such as those required for interaction and negotiation (McLuckie and Topping 2004; Boud and Falchikov 2006). Great Books is designed as a discussion seminar that takes on large social ideas. Talking to other people, particularly people with a different frame of reference, can change minds. Students move into maturity as they move from duality and believing that authority holds all the answers to constructing knowledge for themselves.

One of the most important steps is to begin to contextualize knowledge and determine meaning beyond received information. One of the best ways to do that is to talk to people who are different from ourselves.

What follows are brief profiles of the 25 students in GB100. They are presented in the order of the stages of critical thinking at which they began the semester (see chart on p. 59).

Interpreting Material

Carrie

Carrie, 19, is a Caucasian business and marketing major, but her true passion is music. She wants to combine media studies with her business major in a career in the music business, and during the semester met with various professors in an attempt to customize her major around that goal. At the time of our interview, she had an internship at a recording studio. She is actively involved in the city's music scene, going to concerts every week and regularly downloading new music. She was a source of information on interesting, new, local bands for the other students in GB100. As a commuter, she had trouble making friends and she failed her prerequisite mathematics class. She still lives with her parents, commuting ½ hour from home northwest of the city, and has had the same set of friends through middle and high school. Her mother went to college, but her father did not, and he is adamant that she get a college degree. She works between 15 and 20 hours at a local drugstore as well. Here she describes her thoughts on the relationship between education and future employment:

I liked interning at Milkboy. It's the thought of having a job waiting for you when you get out of school. Education is important. My dad pushes

me to do better. My dad dropped out of school. He has a job and he hates it, whereas my mom went to Temple. My dad's main thing is to get a job. They both think education is important (Carrie, Personal Interview, 07 February 2013).

The Interview

As a traditional student, she took GB100 in her second semester at Midlantic, after having taken the prerequisite writing course in her first semester. She almost never participated in class and reserved judgment on the books. She stated that she enjoyed listening to the in-class discussion nevertheless.

Yet, her academic management skills were not highly developed. Carrie had attendance problems; she missed five classes that I observed. She almost never spoke in class. During the prior semester, she had failed her prerequisite mathematics class, because of the fast pace and approach of the teacher,

He would put problems on the test that were really different from what we did in class. You have to understand the concept to the point that you can rewrite in a way that you do understand it, and I don't think I did well with that (Carrie, Personal Interview, 07 February 2013).

She took responsibility for the failure, but attributed it in part to the quality of her education prior to coming to Midlantic, "When I got to college I was really surprised because our school didn't do a lot to prepare us" (Carrie, Personal Interview, 07 February 2013).

In-class Observation

Carrie was reticent in class. She rarely conferred with fellow classmates and I never saw her raise her hand to ask a question of the professor. This was contrary to her impressions of the class discourse:

I like our class discussion and how we interpret the story in all these different ways, and how everyone has their own opinions, and nothing is necessarily right or wrong, it's just different angles of looking at the text. I like when things are left open for discussion. I prefer a cliff hanger. It's kind of interesting to see the different way people look at it. Somebody might think something means something completely different than what you read it as. Then you can say, oh, I guess I see where you are coming from and that could completely change how you think about it (Carrie, Personal Interview, 07 February 2013).

Carrie was curious about other students' perspectives and expressed an openness to altering her own perceptions and views on the text. This valuing of others views indicates movement into stage three.

Blog Posts

Throughout the semester, this curiosity about alternative viewpoints was reflected in Carrie's blog posts. Increasingly she came to understand the importance of context on knowledge creation as she developed insight into divergent cultural realities:

In reading the beginning of Las Casas text, I was very surprised at the disturbing details that were provided. I never really took the time to think about what happened in our country. When we think about holidays such as Columbus Day or Thanksgiving, we think of good things. We often think of happy times, of the Indians and the settlers coming together to celebrate the coming of the New World. When we think of figures such as Christopher Columbus, we think of him as a hero. As someone who supposedly discovered the place in which we live today. He has gone down in history as a respected person who derives praise, not as the real monster that he actually was. The torture the Indian people endured is absolutely unforgiveable and I feel almost embarrassed to think of the way this land was actually acquired (Carrie, Blog Post, 15 February 2013).

and used the blog assignments to make interesting cultural comparisons:

In class, we recently analyzed different Spanish terms used in *Borderlands*. I find it interesting to examine another culture and compare it to our own. Although there may be many similarities to be found between two cultures, there is a world of difference in between, as well. One instance in the text that stuck out to me was La Virgen de Guadalupe. I think that she closely resembles the Virgin Mary, yet there are obvious

differences between them. La Virgen de Guadalupe leans towards Paganism versus Christianity. She unites people of different races, religions, and languages. I also found it interesting that the Chicano people have three mothers, not just one. La gente de Guadalupe is one of them, but the other two seem to be sinners. La Chingada is the raped mother who the people have abandoned. She is considered a whore and she sold out her people to the Spaniards. The third mother is La Llorona. She seeks her lost children and is a combination of Guadalupe and La Chingada. However, her children are not really lost, she drowned them. It seems strange to us, but I suppose that is just what these people were taught in their religion. I personally believe that all religion was just sort of made up, so it's interesting to see the differences between different beliefs across the world (Carrie, Blog Post, 7 March 2013).

Finally, she progresses to an appreciation of cultural variation and different frames of reference, and characterizes them as all equal. This is an indication of movement from stage two to stage three on the critical thinking scale.

Emma

At the beginning of the semester, Emma, 18 and Caucasian, was the most fervid of all the students in expressing her dislike for GB100. Although a freshman in the advertising program, she declared that the course offered no transferable skills to her major.

The Interview

I never once saw her speak in class, she expressed her dislike for the texts in the blogs and she told it to me during the interview:

I have no motivation to read, because the books are so uninteresting. I probably wouldn't like reading anything, but I guess if it was different types, if they were more interesting, I would read them. The books are hard to understand. A lot of them use a different language and it's just hard to understand them a lot of the time (Emma, Personal Interview, 18 April 2013).

Emma was neutral as to the value the prerequisite writing class she taken at Midlantic. She expressed enthusiasm for the classes she took in her major, but she could not see the connection between Great Books and any potential future interests:

I don't know if this is what it is supposed to be, but I think it is just to become better at critical reading, to understand what you are reading better. For my major, I don't think I need that (Emma, Personal Interview, 18 April 2013).

Even at the end of the semester she still maintained a disinclination toward the class:

My perceptions are the same. I wasn't really looking forward to the class and I didn't really enjoy it. I feel the same way. I don't think the class helped me develop any useful skills. I didn't really try that hard (Emma, Personal Interview, 5 June 2013),

But her antipathy had softened somewhat, as she conceded that she had learned in the class, even if she did not consider the skills useful:

The point of the class was to help support your critical reading skills, so I guessed it helped with that. I don't think I was that horrible of a reader, critical reading, than I was before. I guess the class helped... I guess just talking about what we read and what happened in the book and the meaning behind it. I liked the way it was set up, how everyone was in a circle like that (Emma, Personal Interview, 5 June 2013).

In-class Observation

I was not able to observe Emma participate in the class discussion, as she explained: "I never participate ever. A lot of the time I don't have anything to say about what we are talking about. Also, I'm really shy, so I don't like participating (Emma, Personal Interview, 18 April 2013).

Blog Posts

Emma was unwilling to consider a viewpoint in opposition to the one she brought with her to university. Here she makes an argument for intelligent design, even though creationism and evolution were not the focus of the class discussion:

In Thursday's class we discussed the first few chapters of the Book of Genesis in *The Bible*. Growing up, I read this book and it was something I always believed to be true. In chapter 2, verse 7 it says, "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." There are a couple of things about this one verse that I wanted to discuss. First is the way God is referred to as "Lord God" instead of just God as he was referred to in the first chapter of Genesis. I feel this is important because it's showing how everything that he has created and done makes him even more of a prominent power in Genesis after the first chapter. After the first chapter, the reader realizes that God means business and calling him Lord God represents that. Another aspect of this verse is how man was created from the dust of the ground. For those who don't believe in God, the first forms of life were created from a speck of dust, and then evolution happened and humans came to be. It's kind of the same idea I feel, that man was created by God from a speck of dust, and the first forms of life came about by a speck of dust. My main issue is I don't see how such intricate parts of a human being, like an eye for example, could just come from a speck of dust that managed to become a life form. I don't see how something so detailed could be made unless there was a higher power. So while these two different ideas are similar, forms of life forming from the dust, one of them just doesn't make sense to me (Emma, Blog Post, 12 April 2013).

Thus, Emma began with the semester with a strong dualist notion of right and wrong and a resistance to the metacognitive skills the course promotes. She admitted to making some progress from stage two to stage three over the course of the semester, but remained resistant to substantive development on the critical thinking scale.

George

George is 18 and Asian. He went to a private, preparatory high school in Indiana that he described as the best school in the state. He grew up in a rural area, but his

parents, both doctors, bought a condominium in Indianapolis so that he could attend this school. He described himself as well-prepared for college and for Great Books, having read *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* in AP English class his freshman year in high school. He described himself as in the habit of revising his writing.

The Interview

Studying business and on the soccer team, George described himself as a sports guy instead of a reader, but explained that he had an affinity for Great Books:

I like it. It's not bad at all. I hear from a lot of people that Great Books is really bad, but I don't mind it. I was kind of surprised by Gilgamesh. I thought I wasn't going to like it just because it was so old and I wouldn't understand it, but I understood it fairly well. We'll have to wait and see about this next book. I took six years of Spanish in high school, so I learned about the Spanish Inquisition and that stuff, so I have a general background. I'm not sure what it's all about. From the looks of it, it's a general background of what happened. It's a historical narrative of what happened in the Indies. I've never been a reader who digs deep in the text, but he seems like that kind of guy, so I guess I'm learning that from Professor J., to dig deep into the text and look at individual words, not just the big picture. (George, Personal Interview, 12 February 2013).

Like most traditional students he took Midlantic's prerequisite writing class. He rarely spoke up in class, but did respond when called upon.

In-class Observation

George was a quiet student. He avoided participating in the large class discussion, going so far as to not raise his hand when Professor J. asked if any students in the class knew Spanish. During our interview George had said, "I took six years of Spanish in high school, so I learned about the Spanish Inquisition and that stuff, so I have a general background" (George, Personal Interview, 12 February 2013). However, I did have the chance to see him interact with two other male students – Jake and Mo – in an in-class,

small group exercise. He did not take the leadership role in the small group, but he worked to keep the group on track according to Professor J.'s instructions. This was important because Jake had not done the required reading, and Mo wanted to be more creative than the instructions specified and use sources outside the text for answers. Repeatedly, George returned the group to the text, directing the group to important passages. In so doing, he demonstrated that he understood Professor J.'s purpose. Mid way through the exercise, Professor J. explained that the assignment was designed to train the students that "the text is king" (Professor J., Class Observation, 05 February, 2013). Moreover, George was one of the only students to say that he had discussed the class in more social settings, "One of my suite mates is taking Great Books too. He's in a different section. He's reading the same books. We just randomly talked about it a couple of times. It was just interesting" (George, Personal Interview, 12 February 2013).

Blog Posts

In his blog posts, George was willing to attempt to understand his own mind better. Here he comments on coming to understand the Freud's theory of the unconscious:

This week in class we began talking about the complicated studies of Freud. In class today we began going deep into the idea of dreams and what their purpose is and how we and Freud sees them. In class we had some examples of how our dreams and sub conscious are protecting us from harm. I thought this idea was interesting because I have never really thought that the reason we forget our dreams is because our mind is trying to protect us from harm. But as we discussed in class Freud would not see it as that, but he would see it being even more complicated. Freud believes that we "do not know that he knows it and for that reason thinks he does not know it." I believe that he is trying to say that we do not know what our dreams are about because we don't know what our sub-conscious does and that we believe that our dreams have no meaning. This is a complicated subject but also an interesting one. I am interested in what

more we are going to learn and examine with Freud's studies (George, Blog Post, 21 March 2013).

He also used the blog posts to examine received knowledge from a fresh perspective, even if that knowledge is considered sacrosanct:

In class on Thursday, we began discussing the book of Genesis in the Bible. The first few chapters we read are interesting. Growing up a Christian and going to Catholic school for over seven years, I only looked into the religious aspect of the Bible, but not the literature aspect of it. In class we began talking about how the book of Genesis is like a story with characters and a conflict, the conflict being Adam and Eve eating the fruit from the forbidden tree. I could see this very clearly, but then we got into a discussion of how gender plays a big role in the first few chapters of Genesis. The woman is seen as being inferior to the man in different ways. Eve was created after Adam, and Eve was blamed for being the reason they ate the forbidden fruit. "And the man said, The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat. And the LORD God said unto the woman, What is this that thou hast done? And the woman said, the serpent beguiled me, and I did eat." This quotation shows how Adam blames Eve for eating the fruit and that it is her fault, and the Lord God also seems as if he is blaming Eve as well. We can attribute this type of gender superiority to the time period and how women were not treated or seen as equals to men for many years. I found this interesting since I had never looked that deep into the text of Genesis before, even though I am Christian and went to Catholic school for many years (George, Blog Post, 12 April 2013).

George was open to the class and had been prepared for it by other classes similar in design and focus in the private high school he had attended. He progresses from stage two to stage three by moving from interpreting the material to considering a different viewpoint.

Janet

Janet, 19 and African American, is a commuter student who had grown up in a segregated, working class neighborhood 15 blocks from Midlantic. She had gone to the city's high school for the performing arts, focusing on music. She still played the clarinet

for pleasure, but her academic focus had turned to science. Like her older sister before her, she studied medical coding at Midlantic.

Janet was fastidious in her study habits; she kept up with the reading, took careful notes, and never missed an assignment deadline. I rarely saw her speak up in class, but I did see her approach Professor J. regularly after class for detailed explanations of the assignments.

The Interview

She had transferred back to Midlantic after her first year at a small college in Virginia. She felt that Midlantic offered a more rigorous curriculum:

At my first school, the academics weren't as challenging. Everything was so easy to me there. I barely had to study. When I transferred to the university last semester, I saw a whole new aspect, a whole new range of people. My study habits had to open back up and they've gotten so much better. I feel like me making the move to Midlantic was one of the best things I could have done, because I'm learning a whole lot more. (Janet, Personal Interview, 28 February 2013).

She was also extremely social. She was one of the few students to report that she had formed academic friendships with students in the class for purposes of reading each other's papers and preparing for tests.

In-class Observation

Yet, Janet rarely participated in class discussion. In all of my class observations I saw her speak only once about the text, and that was in response to Professor J.'s request for Freud's definition of hypnosis. For the most part, her comments, whether in class or afterward, had to do with details on the assignments, blog posts and general preparation for the tests. In keeping with her highly developed academic management skills, she

made sure to communicate with Professor J. about what was due and when. So, while she described herself as valuing the class discussions and the multiple perspectives on offer, she did not fully engage with the class in a fundamental way.

Blog Posts

In the blog posts, Janet drew from received knowledge to compare *Gilgamesh* to the biblical tale of Cain and Abel:

Cain and Abel is the story about the two sons of Adam and Eve. While comparing this chapter to a previous reading of *Gilgamesh* allowed me to realize that the stories are somewhat similar to each other. Cain would be seen as *Gilgamesh* and Abel would be seen as *Enkidu*. Each of the brothers in both stories had strong love hate relationships towards one another but they are both brought out differently in each of the stories. Cain and *Gilgamesh* are similar to me because they are like the head brothers in charge in the beginning of both stories, while Abel and *Enkidu* come into play later eventually dying from different causes. *Gilgamesh* and *Enkidu* started off as enemies and later become brothers being pretty much inseparable from each other. While Cain and Abel were blood brothers who somewhat got along eventually growing to completely dislike each other. Cain was very evil toward his brother; he murdered him with no shame and felt no guilt while doing it. *Enkidu* died after the battle and *Gilgamesh* felt like it was partially his fault so he had to live with that on his conscious forever. After being accused of murdering his brother Cain would be hidden from the presence and become a restless wanderer on earth. He no longer had a purpose to live. *Gilgamesh* felt lost without *Enkidu* his adopted brother he had no choice but to live on because he had a purpose and that was still to remain King. While comparing each of the stories I seen so many different qualities that I would have never thought they would have in common (Janet, Blog Post, 16 April 2013),

While the comparison allows her to see more in *Gilgamesh* than she might have without the comparison, she doesn't analyze either story that deeply or go beyond the received meaning of the tale. In the next example, Janet describes how class discussion helped her understand a completely foreign text:

The discussion in class today revolved around how emptiness and doing less is a key part in understanding the Dao. In chapter 11 on page 11, the

text reads that “by adding and removing clay we form a vessel. But only by relying on what is not there, do we have use of the vessel.” Being raised in a culture where I was taught that the harder you work and more you do, the more likely you are to achieve, I found it hard to grasp the concept of “one does less each day in the pursuit of the Way” (48), and the idea of emptiness. We considered the importance of emptiness in a water bottle, and the theory then clicked; what is not there gives meaning to what is there. If the water bottle was not empty, it could not hold water which is the basis from where a water bottle derives its purpose. We then brought the text into perspective when we performed the in-class exercise of “finding the Dao.” I realized that objects like open doors, air vents, the unlocked window, air draft—all things that day to day go unnoticed and would be considered empty and not meaningful, all played an important role in the hall. “But only by relying on what is not there, do we have use of the room. What is not there is the basis for use” (11). Reading this today and putting the theory of the Dao in relativity was truly eye opening (Janet, Blog Post, 23 April 2013).

Again, Janet relies on the knowledge generated in the class discussion to provide the meaning of the text. The blogs show Janet using the class to become skilled at interpretation of text as well as considering opposing viewpoints during class discussion. She moves from stage two into stage three.

Jessica

Two of the other students in GB100 described Jessica, 18 and Caucasian, as the smartest student in the class. Perhaps this was because she could be a fearless participant who didn't hesitate to ask questions in class. Over the course of the semester Jessica moved from stage two to stage three on the critical thinking scale in most categories. She began the semester researching and revising but over time began to asking questions. She moved from interpreting material to considering opposing viewpoints and toward being more instrumental and self-directed. This was also true for the reflection judgment model, where she moved from dualism to contingency.

The Interview

At the beginning of the semester, she was undeclared as to major and unsure of her future, with varied interests. In our interview she described flirting with majors as disparate as digital animation or education as potential majors. Nevertheless, she was not lazy, having loaded up her academic schedule with six general education requirement classes. At the end of the semester she told me that she had decided on engineering because, “There are more jobs” (Jessica, Personal Follow-up Interview, 23 April 2013). Thus, she showed evidence of becoming increasingly goal directed by the end of the semester.

She told me that she sometimes had trouble keeping up with the reading, but that that class was broadening nonetheless. One of the reasons for this was the variety of viewpoints to which the class exposed her. Here she expresses tolerance for ambiguity:

In this class I’m a bit more laid back, which is different from last semester. In my English class, I was always the one asking question. I’ve always been that type of student. If I don’t understand something, I’m not afraid to ask about it. In my Spanish class I feel like I know a bit more. I don’t think that anyone is necessarily smarter, because we all think differently and the way we interpret something you never know. (Jessica, Personal Interview, 05 March 2013).

I observed that she was an active class participant, if she had done the required reading and more of a silent observer when she had not. Toward the end of the semester her she participated less than she had at the beginning.

In-class Observation

Jessica’s questions enlivened class discussion, but could be obdurate in her resistance to concepts that challenged her worldview. During a class discussion on the Daodejing, she expressed skepticism regarding the text’s fundamental concept of non-

action. She argued, “We think right or wrong, left or right, and this text is about both existing at once,” then later rebutting Professor J., “The second you decide to act it becomes an action. Didn’t we say that in chapter two?” and finally opposing the idea outright, “But isn’t the choice not to act an action?” This discussion showed her discomfort with an idea that was beyond her understanding of the truth.

Blog Posts

This movement toward contingent thinking was amplified further in her blog post on *The Daodejing*:

But when we got back to class, and Dr. Pratt asked if we had used the Way of the Dao in order to find the Dao, I was immediately confused. I just hadn’t thought to use the Way of the Dao in order to do this assignment. I actively looked for the motion, the movement, the space, and the spatial metaphors, which is the opposite of the teaching of the Dao. This made me realize how difficult it is not to act, to live through nonaction and passivity. Sometimes it’s nice to let the chips fall where they may, but other times you need to actively seek out and work for what you want. I finally understand some of the Dao’s teachings, but I don’t think that I believe in them. While it can be helpful to live through non-action, it just seems to me that by not acting you’re not living at all. You’re just being (Jessica, Blog Post, 26 April 2013).

Jessica’s intelligence made her confident; however, this confidence seemed to interfere with her opening herself to ideas outside of her frame of reference. Although only a disposition, it interfered with the development of her critical thinking skills. She did not seem to progress in her thinking beyond where she entered the class, which is to say considering interpretation of the material as the main learning activity.

Laura

Laura, 19 and Caucasian, had transferred from a small art college in the city’s downtown to the art program at Midlantic. She had had social conflicts with the other

female students in her program at that college and felt that the best thing to do was go to a bigger institution. She liked Midlantic's art program, particularly her professors. She did not like the commute from her home, about half-an-hour away, and could not be as involved with school or meet with her professors as much as she wanted.

The Interview

She described wanting the class to be more open but expressed discomfort at not being provided with authoritative answers during class discussions. For that reason she did not like Great Books. She was the only student, out of the 25 students I interviewed for this study, to find fault with Professor J.'s instruction:

Sometimes I get sort of torn between what I want to say and what Professor J. is looking for in an answer. It seems specific about what he's looking for. I'm not sure if he listens to what we say totally. He does listen to it, but it doesn't seem like it changes his question at all. He still goes in with the same question looking for that one answer. Everybody gives their answer first and then he gives the answer that it should be. I would like it more open, especially in a course with such a big goal, because I don't understand what we are supposed to be learning (Laura, Personal Interview, 26 March 2013).

Thus, I determined her to be at stage three in the reflective judgment model. However, by other criteria on the critical thinking scale she held at stage two. I saw this when Laura told me about her textual analysis methods. She described using an annotation process and then used her emotions to interpret meaning within the text.

It might be corny, but I like talking to the text... We write responses in the margins. Not in the book. Maybe I'll have a little paper over here and write little notes or say aloud 'what is this,' if I am alone. I feel like it helps me remember the content of the book because I'm responding to it. I remember that response that I had. I'm an emotional response so I remember my experiences through emotion, so when I respond to a text, I remember the content more, instead of just reading it, taking it in and trying to memorize it (Laura, Personal Interview, 26 March 2013).

Further evidence of her being in stage two was that Laura was unclear as to her goals, and just beginning to develop higher level executive function skills. She had not yet determined which of the fine arts she would focus on, and she was uncertain as to her prospects after school:

My plans after college are either to stay at home and work a bunch of part-time jobs to try to pay off my loans or maybe move to New York and try and get started, which, I don't know, makes me really antsy. The art world is in New York (Laura, Personal Interview, 26 March 2013).

In-class Observation

At the end of the semester, Laura did show some progress moving into stage three of the reflective judgment model. She was most active in the discussion where *The Daodejing* was the focus. Here she contributes to a discussion about the difficulty in identifying and naming:

Professor J.: What is it about naming?

Jessica: Things have different names, like saying 'clicker' instead of 'remote control.'

Professor J.: But naming is something different.

Mary: Naming gives things an identity."

Professor J.: What else does naming give you? Does your own name fix your identity?

Laura: The name is superficial. It is not what it really is. It's temporary. You are not speaking what it really is.

Professor J. to Jennifer: Does that help?

Jennifer: Yeah.

Marsha: It reminds me of that painting, 'This is Not a Pipe.'

Professor J.: Is the picture the same as the thing?

Brittany (looking up from her laptop), I just looked at the picture.

Professor J.: Let's look at "A way that can be followed is not constant." Look at the footnote on page 85.

Jessica: 'The Way' is capitalized, so we know it is important.

Jennifer: We don't have a precise translation.

Professor J.: But, we have possibilities.

Jennifer: It means the path or the teaching.

Janet: Our path is always changing.

Professor J.: Do you want to think of your path as fluid? Did you register for class next semester? Do you have a major?

Janet: Yes.

Professor J.: So your path is constant. Nameless and named, how do they complement each other?

Jennifer: They seem to contradict each other.

Laura: You can't have names without namelessness.

Professor J.: The opposite must also exist. Contradictions.

Laura: A contrast.

Thus, I see Laura moving into a greater awareness of contingency in her understanding of right and wrong.

Blog Posts

Discussing Euthyphro today was interesting. It made me think a lot about how strongly we, as individuals, hold our values. A lot of people do not hold specific values because they are unsure what they believe. I know I'm one of these people. I'm like this when I talk about religion. I don't identify with any specific religious group because I don't know what I believe. I think this is what Socrates is trying to get around as he searches for one true meaning of pious. The problem is that there is no set answer for what may be morally right or wrong. Morals are highly subjective. This is why Socrates won't find his answer asking others what they know to be pious. He has to reflect upon his own values to uncover his own meaning. At the same time, I think Socrates knows that there is no single answer to what pious is. Euthyphro seems to think it is anything that pleases the gods, or could be defined as holy. But even the gods think subjectively, so their definitions of pious will only vary just as much as and humans'. Euthyphro has the right idea when thinking that the meaning comes from a higher power, a power greater than the law, but he does not execute his beliefs when he is betraying his father. Socrates is searching for a transcendental truth that dictates what is good in bad throughout humanity. In his quest for the meaning of piety, he will enlighten everyone he encounters as they are forced to reflect upon their own values (Laura, Blog Post, 4 April 2013).

Laura interprets Socrates' purpose to a search for a transcendental truth, because this is her wish. In fact, Euthyphro is an essay that shows how important context and contingency are in determining our values and ethics. Laura had difficulty seeing this

because she began the semester at stage two, and remained there for the duration of the class.

Mark

Transferring to Midlantic University was something of a homecoming for Mark. Mark a 21-year old, Caucasian, criminal justice major, with the goal of becoming a police detective. He began the semester not liking GB100, *Gilgamesh* in particular, but ended the semester recognizing that his reading skills had improved. This was a goal he had set for himself at the beginning of the semester. He rarely spoke in class.

He had started his university education at a large university in Colorado, but then transferred back to a satellite campus of his home State University. He explained that he was uncomfortable with the liberalism he had encountered when he had ventured out-of-state.

The Interview

He found studying and living at the satellite campus too socially isolating, so he had transferred again:

It's a culture shock out there, just the way of life and the lifestyle. Like we were talking about in class, weed is legal out there. There are hippie-type people out there. It's really liberal. I'm not a liberal, so I didn't quite find my group of friends out there. I went to community college. It was a lot better, but it was a tiny mostly commuter school. Everybody would show up for classes and then drive all the way home. I lived on campus, so I was left without any people, so it got really boring (Mark, Personal Interview, 09 April 2013).

In-class Observation

I observed Mark to be quite reticent during class discussions and he confirmed this in the interview:

I'm usually pretty quiet. Even if I have a thought, I'll usually keep it to myself. I've always been pretty quiet in the classroom. Some of my best classes were the math classes I would take, where they would assign homework, and then after the homework you could basically see this is what I got done. Here I will spend an hour reading and I will have nothing to show for it (Mark, Personal Interview, 09 April 2013).

In keeping with his discomfort with discordant political values, Mark was not willing to actively participate in a discussion where he would have to grapple with uncomfortable points of view.

Blog Posts

Despite his professed intolerance, Mark did progress in small ways on the critical thinking scale over the semester. At the beginning of the semester we find him unwilling to accept uncomfortable historical truths:

In class we've mentioned a few times are there any good guys in this book. Las Casas makes it seem like all the Catholics are the enemy and all the Indians are the victims. Las Casas doesn't mention anything about any good Catholics. Since he is trying to convince the King of Spain about all the bad things happening it would not benefit him to mention anything positive. I think Las Casas is purposely leaving out anything positive about the Catholics and anything negative about the Indians (Mark, Blog Post, 21 February 2013),

But, as the semester progresses we see him making an effort to understand the ideas, even if he dismisses them:

In Tuesday and Thursdays class we talked about Freud and his theories on our unconscious. He believes that if we have a dream about something, it's from an unconscious thought we have. He also says we know what dreams mean, but we don't know what they mean because we don't know we know what they mean. It seems to me that Freud is making things more complicated than they have to be. If I dream about zombies after watching an episode of *The Walking Dead*, most people would assume that your dream was about zombies because the show put the thought of zombies in your head. Freud would argue that there was already some unconscious thought about zombies in your head (Mark, Blog Post, 21 March 2013),

And closer to the end of the semester, we see Mark weighing ideas that he finds in the text against his own experience. Still, he is unwilling to consider the validity of what he reads, as it does not align with what he already understands:

In the book *Borderlands* Anzaldua talked about how women only had three options in life. They could either a stay-at-home and become a mother, become a prostitute or enter the religious life and become a nun. This seemed like such a foreign concept to me because my mom went to college and has a job and my neighbor went to college and is a nurse. None of the women I know are stay at home moms, prostitutes or nuns. Anzaldua talked about a fourth option which was getting an education. This gave women more independence allowed them to be self-reliant. Today there are more women in college than men (Mark, Blog Post, 7 March 2013).

Mark was unable to contextualize what he had learned. He could not square it with his own experience, so he rejected it. He had not developed to the point where he could grasp the concept of inequality. Thus, Mark began the semester at stage two and moved toward stage three, but was unwilling to enter into the dissonance required to first wrestle and then make peace with ideas that differed from his own. He never progressed into the all important stage four, crossroads level.

Marsha

Marsha had come to Midlantic by way of a private art college in New York City, but found after her first semester that she could not afford to live in the city. She switched her major from fine art to advertising, because she enjoyed her academic classes as well as her creative classes, and transferred to Midlantic, where she was able to live with family friends that had lived across the street from her when she was growing up. After her first year at Midlantic, she found work at an expensive restaurant downtown and was able to get an apartment with roommates.

The Interview

Marsha, 21 and Caucasian was the last student I interviewed and I was struck by how goal oriented she was. It was the end her junior semester and she was preparing to begin a summer internship in a Los Angeles (her hometown) advertising firm. Afterward, she planned to return for her last year of university:

I intend to make some good business connections, while I'm at my internship, get my foot in the door and apply those skills to either getting a job at an agency in LA, or Philadelphia, or New York, or anywhere I can get a good job. I've already moved 3000 miles away from home. I think I could end up anywhere. When I first moved here I only knew one person, so I had to make completely new friends. I had never moved in my life, up until that point (Marsha, Personal Interview, 24 April 2013).

I placed Marsha highly on the critical thinking scale. Marsha saw a clear connection between Great Books and the work she planned to do in the future:

I think it's good to be exposed to these different types of texts. You have more of a knowledge base, things to pull at in other situations. This relates to this. Your brain makes connections on how this is related to this other thing. Especially in advertising, you can pull on any experience in your life to make something more interesting (Marsha, Personal Interview, 24 April 2013).

In-class Observation

I was able to observe Marsha closely during small group, in-class exercises on two separate occasions. The first required students to pair up to discuss potential topics for the major writing assignment, the second required groups of approximately five students to develop a Freudian narrative around small objects given to them in a Ziploc bag. In both instances, Marsha was assertive yet collaborative. She worked well with others.

Marsha was particularly good at connecting the texts to her own experience and interests. For her paper, she chose to use Gilgamesh as a way to discuss gender issues.

Marsha: I'm thinking of writing on Gilgamesh also, either number one or number three. I want to deal with gender. It's so different from Protestantism and how it oppresses women. I want to look into Shamhat and Inkidu and compare the two of them, compare how they're treated in modern light.

Student A: You want to look at if women are above or below, at sexism? Before the bible women were less oppressed.

Marsha: I call it freedom. Shamhat is a prostitute, but she isn't treated like dirt. Women aren't treated like that in the modern world. Aphrodite was the goddess of prostitutes.

In the larger group exercise Marsha took a leadership role, which made sense as she was a junior and exhibited behaviors, such as greater goal orientation ability to evaluate and contextualize information, which placed her higher on the critical thinking scale. She started the conversation and she was the one to present the narrative created by the group to the class:

The group I join has the following objects in their baggie: small plastic chain saw, melted baby, key, queen of hearts playing card, toy battleship and a yoyo.

Marsha lays out the objects in front of the group.

Marsha: It looks like a nightmare.

Barbie: What are these things?

They pair up the objects with the playing card. Some comments are "say they are in a valley," "swimming," "Mr. S."

Marsha: It looks like a nightmare (this is second time she has said this).

Barbie: Maybe he's on a trip.

Marsha: Let's make a nightmare.

Barbie: Did we say these two are together (holding up the key and the queen of hearts playing card)?

Marsha: Maybe he has the key to a new heart.

Barbie: One from the queen of hearts?

Jake says nothing.

Suzie writes down the story as everyone is speaking. Laura and Barbie also take notes. Suzie guffaws as she writes.

Marsha ties the baby to the yoyo string.

The group laughs.

Marsha: That makes sense in dream logic.

Suzie: Remember that we are not supposed to find the meaning from the dream we create, but just create it.

Professor J.: Please put your names on the dream reports to know whose dream is whose. The students look confused.

Mo: I don't want to be a part of the group dream.

The class laughs.

Gary gathers and redistributes the dream reports (they could also be called narratives), along with the corresponding baggie of objects, to the other groups for interpretation.

Marsha reads the dream that they receive aloud.

Marsha: This guy is a mouse. I guess he feels insecure.

Suzie: I guess he feels small.

Jake: Is that a book?

Marsha: Yes, he's being chased by a flying book.

Professor j.: Really 'go out there' to interpret the manifest content. Draw on Freud's text and make use of it.

Laura: So, it's a book?

Marsha: A flying book. He's a mouse with a briefcase and a sword and a severed head falls out of the briefcase.

Laura: On page 90, Freud says that a sharp weapon is a stand-in for male genitalia.

Marsha: Usually.

Suzie reads from Freud about the role of animal symbols.

Suzie: Freud relates animal symbols to various aspects of sexuality. (Katie makes a disgusted face.)

The group is silent.

Laura: The mouse is a dreamer. He's feeling inferior.

Marsha: The briefcase is about work.

Suzie: It's about secrets.

Barbie: He could be running from something.

Marsha: He could be a recent graduate trying to get a job and his Dad is hitting him on the tail. What do we think about the sword?

Barbie: He's trying to hide something and he doesn't want to have it there.

Jake shifts and sighs. He says nothing.

Suzie reads from the text.

Barbie: Maybe he's trying to hide something and that's why...

Laura: What is the symbolism?

Katie reads the text.

Laura: Maybe..." She smiles nervously.

The group is silent.

Laura: Maybe the book is his boss, and he doesn't want to get caught.

Suzie: Since he doesn't get on the plane, he gets caught.

Laura and Suzie laugh.

Marsha: Then there is the shoehorn. He is climbing a shoehorn. A shoe horn is a shoe molder.

Katie: A shoe horn is used by to put on nice shoes, work shoes.
Silence.
Gary comes over to ask how things are going.
Jake: It's weird.
Marsha offers the hypothesis that has developed.
Jake to Professor J.: It's a severed head. It's a bad secret.
Professor J.: If it's repressed, it must be bad.
Marsha: Freud says the sword and the severed head speak to sexual frustration.
Professor J.: You don't have to agree with Freud. You can just acknowledge him.

Blog Posts

Unlike many of the students in the class, Marsha used the blog posts to show how to evaluate and judge what she learned. In this post, she learns better how the components of a good argument:

What was interesting about his argument (and probably most frustrating to Euthyphro) was that Socrates used Euthyphros agreement with his logic statements in order to construct an argument against whatever Euthyphro just said. Each statement that Euthyphro says makes sense initially, until Socrates tears it apart with logic. Euthyphros first answer to the question "what do you say the pious and the impious are?" appears on page 9, in which he states that "what's pious is precisely what I'm doing now: prosecuting those who commit an injustice ... regardless of whether they're one's father or one's mother or anyone else whatever. Not prosecuting them, on the other hand, is what's impious." As we learned in class, this answer is rejected because rather than a definition, it is merely an example (Marsha, Blog Post, 5 April 2013).

Taking on new methods of how to think and not just what to think is a characteristic of the higher stages of development in the reflective judgment model. However, Marsha could be obdurate when it came to reckoning with new ideas:

Initially when I thought about Freud, all I knew was that he related everything to sex. While this is sometimes the case, he attributes thoughts and actions to other motives as well. The parapraxes were interesting in particular because Freud analyzed something to which we usually give little thought to. Minor mistake that considered "trivialities" (31) in the face of more magnificent fields of science are considered important symptoms of the brain's hidden intentions. For example, the gentleman

who mislaid the book his wife had given him was later found to have been disinterested in his wife, and that is why he "lost" the book. While this is a novel notion, I disagree with Freud that these types of parapraxes are indications of hidden thoughts. A person that forgets their keys every day is not disinclined to go somewhere if it happens all the time, even in instances of pleasure, such as a date. Some people are just naturally forgetful. While he has some important insights and made great leaps in the study of psychology, Freud overanalyzes many aspects of life that are better left to the universe (Marsha, Personal Interview, 22 March 2013).

Marsha was not comfortable with the concept of the unconscious. She argues that the hidden workings of the mind are not worthy of consideration rather than acknowledge the difficult implications that the concept brings up. She began the semester in stage two and though she made forays into stage three, as can be seen in the first blog post, for the most part she remained there for the duration of the class.

Mary

Mary, 22 and Caucasian, grew up in a traditional, Lancaster County, PA, farming family, and she and her sisters are the first generation in her family to go to college. She transferred to Midlantic after having spent three years at a Texas junior college, while simultaneously interning and then working at a Christian leadership program. Extremely focused on her academic goal to be an early childhood educator, she enjoys teaching in the inner-city school system as part of the credentialing requirement. Living off campus, she has a strong social network through Midlantic's education program and through her church. Good in her English classes, throughout her academic career, writing comes easily to her. She began the semester at stage two and finished at stage three.

The Interview

Mary placed value in Great Books on the habits of mind to which the class exposed her:

As a teacher I'm always going to have to learn something to teach my students. It's different because most of the stuff I teach is common knowledge, but not all the time. There are definitely going to be history lessons I'm not going to understand, and that I'm going to want to study deeper, and I'm going to have to study outside of the classroom, so I can teach my kids fully. That concept of learning how.... In this course we are challenged to take a book, go for it, figure out and analyze it. We talk about it, but for the most part you take it under your own wing. You have to go for it. As a teacher, you have to do that. You have to be able to do that. You have to want to understand a subject and analyze a subject, so that you can communicate it to your students. That would be the main transfer (Mary, Personal Interview, 13 February 2013).

In-class Observation

Mary spent a good deal of time in class behind an open laptop computer. She explained to me later that she was taker of copious notes and that she learned best if she had time to reflect on the class discussion at her leisure.

Blog Posts

In her bog posts, Mary showed progress from stage two, able to interpret the material:

The two friends recognize what a enormous task they have before them and need to rely on one another. Their friendship has transformed from previous parts of the text when they are competing to now where they realize they need the other one, or they will not survive. This part of the poem Gilgamesh is using the word friend multiple times towards Enkidu and Enkidu is also directing the term towards Gilgamesh. This again indicates the way that they are learning to respect one another and fight on behalf of their now adopted brothers (Mary, Blog Post, 1 February 2013),

but not yet willing to take authority over its meaning:

Within this part of the passage there are many breaks that show we are missing text that was originally written. This tablet ends a few lines later, abruptly and without conclusion. This gap is the most frustrating to me for various reasons. The first reason is because Enkidu is such a crucial character that I find the mystery of the final moments of his life wearisome because I feel like I am left hanging. This 30-line break before his funeral also allows me as a reader to assume various scenarios that

could sway the story significantly. When reading this however I simply wish that I could know what the author of the text had purposed for this scene and not only my imagination (Mary, Blog Post, 8 February 2013),

to stage three, interrogating the text and relating it to her own values:

“To withdraw when the work is done is the Way of Heaven” Which I think is saying that money does not buy happiness. It is interesting because many times we as humans think that money or possessions can buy us happiness and live our lives in that way. However what the Dao is suggesting is that if we live our life with perspective of eternity and others we will be able to be happy in other ways. Many times we see celebrities in their fame and wealth and want to be like them in our society. Yet how many celebrities’ lifestyles would reflect true happiness? It is often that these people are living tragic lives with many horrific relationships and lack of peace in their lives. What would our world be like, if we truly did not live our lives for wealth (Mary, Blog Post, 26 April 2013)?

Mitchell

Mitchell, 19, a Caucasian landscape architecture major, was the most active participant of all the male students in GB100 and a stage four critical thinker. The reason for ranking him so highly on the critical thinking scale had to do with how intensely social he was. He had been well prepared for college stating that his high school teachers had told him “what to do and how to get a better place in college.” His mother had wanted him to go to college, but his father had told him that he had other options, as there was plenty of work in the booming natural gas fields of northern Pennsylvania, near the New York state border, where he grew up.

The Interview

During our interview, he declared that he hated large lecture classes, and that he liked a class where students were encouraged to participate. His enjoyment of GB100 was checked by a sense that the class was not useful. He had a hard time seeing the value of the class:

I wouldn't say it's challenging. I think of it as a basic class. I guess it's kind of important, but not really because I'm not learning anything that new. I'm glad that I'm learning new pieces of literature and history, but it's nothing important. In the span of college it's probably one of the least important classes. My process of reading is to read and to analyze a piece instead of... that's what the class is about. It's to analyze work and pick it apart and figure out the meaning. I feel like I already have that skill (Mitchell, Personal Interview 21 March 2013).

Mitchell had enjoyed Midlantic's prerequisite writing class, describing the teacher as particularly talkative. He had made and maintained a friend group from that class. He was one of the few students to describe doing this. Again he repeated how much he valued discussion:

I guess our class was very discussion based. Most of the prerequisite writing classes were very strict. Most people didn't like their writing class, but I loved mine. My teacher was very talkative. We were able to just debate the whole class. It was a debate session (Mitchell, Personal Interview 21 March 2013).

Moreover he had created academic/social relationships with students from outside his major. In these relationships he talked about topics from the class, "My one friend, he's major in philosophy and we'll talk a lot. Sometimes, I'll ask him to explain things on a deeper level" (Mitchell, Personal Interview, 21 March 2013), and shared papers to be edited and proofread to the group formed in the prerequisite English class, "

In-class Observation

Sitting directly across the table from Professor J. Mitchell made constant eye contact and was quick to raise his hand with a response. Sometimes, he was the only student who would engage with the professor, carrying the entire seminar for the class. While willing to speak out in class and openly debate with other students he was less aware of his own biases and less open to the ways GB100 could expand his frame of reference: "I've always been really good at the reading/analysis thing... For the analysis,

I feel like I already have all those skills. It would be easier just to take a test to show that I had those skills.”

Blog Posts

In his blog posts we see Mitchell at stage three in the contingency phase where all opinions are equal and there is no discernible way to determine the truth:

He shows that everybody has their own opinion and one cannot be more correct than the other because there are two sides to every argument and the only thing that can actually be true is anything proven by mathematics but otherwise everything has two sides and different ways in which people can see things and no one sees eye to eye. The class discussion and examples on what we saw and what perfection was showed that there are two sides to everything and that no perfection actually existed. There are some objects that are close to perfection, but true perfection does not exist but in theory because no one can prove perfection and so it does not exist. Overall the discussion was very interesting and showed that Socrates' question on piety was answered by showing that reality is just what you see in your head and that everyone sees different objects in their own ways (Mitchell, Blog Post, 5 April 2013).

Moreover, Mitchell's development from stage two to stage three of the reflective judgment model aligns with his development within the other criteria on the critical thinking scale.

Patricia

Patricia is an African American, 54-year old woman who had grown up in the city's public schools. After high school she went to Syracuse University to study nursing. Recently, she had returned to the city university to pursue a degree in sociology after leaving her nursing career. She lived approximately 10 blocks from Midlantic.

Patricia sat between Marilyn and Carrie and would often confer with them during class discussions. She spoke to people. She was comfortable asking questions of

Professor J. and he would often call on her to see if she agreed or disagreed with comments made during class discussion. Patricia would not hesitate to express an opposing viewpoint. She said that she considered class participation fundamental to her learning process “Attendance is important. Attendance creates participation. Participation creates your mind” (Patricia, Personal Interview, 19 March 2013).

The Interview

She had not taken any writing classes at the university:

As we go along I’m realizing there are a lot of things I can’t do. I can’t analyze a chapter and summarize it. I forgot how to do that. When I look at my other classes, this class plays a major role in me passing, because of the writing (Patricia, Personal Interview, 19 March 2013).

She acknowledged that it was difficult coming back to school later in life, but felt that her social skills were an asset. She explained that she had difficulty in another class with a writing assignment that involved summary of various texts. Because of her comfort talking with other students she was able to enlist the assistance of a group of students to explain how to do the assignment and check her work once she had completed it.

In-class Observation

Her social dexterity, which Patricia attributed to her maturity, was apparent during GB100 class sessions. The other students liked her. They smiled and greeted her when she entered the class. Before class, she always conversed with the students sitting near her, asking them about the reading and upcoming assignments. Also, she conferred with the other students sitting around her for help in navigating the class discussion. Sometimes, she did not know what page was being referenced in the discussion, so she

would lean over to one of the women sitting near her for direction. She would also request that Professor J. repeat his comment or explicate his meaning, if she did not understand: “I learned when I first started that when you are in an education environment, it’s very important for you to ask, and ask, and ask, if you don’t understand something” (Patricia, Personal Interview, 19 March 2013).

Blog Posts

Patricia brought her past experience to the class

This week in class we watch the movie *Dottie Gets Spanked* by Todd Haynes. Looking at the movie all I could think about is my Developmental Psychology class I had over thirty years ago. Stevie, a six year and three/fourths, little, only child who has a fixation for a television actress name Dottie. This movie made me think about Freud's pleasure principles the phallic stage, where little boys tend to fight for the mothers attention from the father. Little Stevie mother is his first line of defense, she nurtures him, so he could have some envy of his father. This is why he has a fantasy of the woman Dottie, because woman is who he really interacts with better. In the chapter of Children dreams, Freud suggests that children dreams are just what things that happen in the child’s life the day before. Freud is all over the spanking and sexual arousal. He would probably look at this spanking issue as Stevie’s lust for Dottie. I did not see the movie as a way to question Stevie’s sexuality, because he is around his mother the most. This does not suggest he will be gay when he grows up (Patricia, Blog Post, 29 March 2013)

Patricia moved from stage two to stage three on the critical thinking scale.

Rebecca

Rebecca, 18, is a Caucasian actuarial science major with a statistics minor, had always known that she would go to college, stating that both her parents and her high school teachers had high expectations for her. Extremely efficient I never saw Rebecca, either during group work, or during our interview, do unnecessary work or waste time. She explained that she had enjoyed her senior year of high school, because once she

knew she had achieved the grade point necessary for admission to Midlantic, she no longer had to study that hard. This is not to say, that she did not value the class or was not a committed student. For example, she did not consider herself a good writer and welcomed the opportunity to rewrite her papers by meeting with Professor J. and making use of the writing center. Seemingly pragmatic by nature, she did not waste time or engage in unnecessary work.

The Interview

Rebecca was oriented to do well in school and had focused career goals:

I'm still taking the business requirements so far. I haven't started anything in my major. I hope to get a job after college. I want to work for a life insurance company. I'm not sure what area of actuarial science I want to go into yet, but I know I want to work for an insurance company (Rebecca, Personal Interview, 12 February 2013),

But she conceded that she needed to develop study skills:

I always plan out all of my work and split it up until it's due. I never had that in high school, but there's so much work in college that I don't have the option. I just did it myself. I'm not that great at studying. I have trouble focusing when I study. I'm better just doing the homework. When it comes to studying, I get confused as to where to start and where to finish. Like, studying for test, when it comes to that, I have trouble (Rebecca, Personal Interview, 12 February 2013).

In-class Observation

She never spoke in class, although she told me she valued the class discussions and considered herself part of them, I think we just discussed a lot of the readings that we did. I did like the class discussions" (Rebecca, Personal Interview, 11 June 2013).

Blog Posts

In this blog post Rebecca discusses learning Freud's scientific concept of the unconscious:

This week we began to discuss Freud. On Tuesday we discussed the parapraxes and on Thursday dreams. I thought our conversation about parapraxes was very interesting because it made me notice the everyday mistakes I make without realizing. Freud took something humans perceive as normal and common, and nit-picked it so we would see why these things occur. I also liked this theory on dreams because we do not realize how many unconscious thoughts occur in our dreams. It reminded me of dreams I have had that seemed to be unimportant but ultimately had some kind of subconscious significance (Rebecca, Blog Post, 22 March 2013).

And later, despite uneasiness with culturally dissimilar ideas, Rebecca attempts to unpack a difficult text using this scientific concept. In a show of critical thinking she analyzes *The Daodejing* using what she learned from Freud's *Introductory Lectures*:

On Thursday's class we started to discuss *The Daodejing*, a text I found rather confusing. The first half of the book (chapter 1-37) was very complex and difficult to understand. I believe much of my confusion comes from the translation. Many times, throughout the chapters, there was no way to reproduce in English the use of certain Chinese words, like dao. When *the Dao* is introduced in chapter one, the footnote states that the Dao can mean either "the way," "the path," or "teaching," all which have very different definitions. Translation aside, I found much of the text contradicted itself: "Always eliminate desires in order to observe its mysteries; always have desires in order to observe its manifestation (chapter 1)." On the surface these phrases seem to counter themselves but referencing Freud, one must look deeper into the texts "latent meaning." On the surface these readings are complicated, but after looking further and carefully analyzing the text in class, the meanings became clearer and easier for me to understand (Rebecca, Blog Post, 19 April 2013).

In the follow-up interview, Rebecca described weighing concepts against each other, "Comparison between two things. It's describing something as something. It's figuring out what you mean" (Rebecca, Personal Interview, 11 June 2013). She begins

by interpreting the text and ends by considering opposing viewpoints. Thus, she moves from stage two to stage three.

Theresa

Theresa, 20 and Caucasian, grew up one hour from the city university. She was in her first year at the school, but had changed her major from journalism to public relations. She did this after her journalism and society professor told the class that the only students that should only stick with journalism were the ones that truly had a passion for it; jobs in the field were limited. She described herself as a good writer and communicator, so she felt her new major would be a good fit.

The Interview

She enjoyed Great Books and saw it building on skills she had established in high school. She articulated her goals clearly:

I'm supposed to be learning close reading and critical thinking. That's what I take out of it. I think you can use that in the future too. My junior year English teacher said that close reading was like sifting for gold. You can't just take information at face value. Ever since then it has been developing. It's a good skill to have throughout your life (Theresa, Personal Interview, 04 April 2013).

In-class Observation

In our interview, Theresa described a reluctance to openly challenge fellow students. She revealed that she was shy and often took a passive approach to the class:

I think I'm more of an introvert. It depends. If I'm in the mood to be outgoing and talk about my opinions, then I'll participate in the class. Sometimes I just want to sit back and observe what everyone else is saying (Theresa, Personal Interview, 04 April 2013).

In explaining that she did not see any point in debating with students because it would not have any effect on their opinions or values, she showed herself to be at stage three, where personal impressions and feelings determined the validity of a viewpoint. She was unwilling to engage in a dialog that while necessary might also have caused discomfort and confusion:

I don't ask questions of fellow students. I don't disagree openly with other students in the class. Sometimes, I disagree in my head with the other students. I feel like they have their opinions way of thinking and I have mine and there is no sense in arguing because you are not going to change them. I consider what they are saying. I think of what I'm saying and I try to look at the other perspective on it. I don't have to disagree with them (Theresa, Personal Interview, 04 April 2013).

Blog Posts

Theresa used the blogs to dissect the persuasive effect of arguments she was exposed to in the texts. In this blog we see her comparing the Las Casas rhetorical methods:

As discussed in class, one of the most prominent aspects of *The Destruction of the Indies* thus far has been Las Casas' word choice when describing both the Christian Spaniards and the native people. He provides a clear and obvious contrast between the nature of both peoples, which aids in his goal to paint a picture of the monstrosities and wrongdoings of the Spaniards. His description of the Indians as "most humble, most patient," contrasted with the "evil" and "tyrannous" Christians, portray his disgust with the actions of the so-called Christians, and even convey the message that the Indians were more Christ-like than the Spaniards. His writing reveals the hypocrisy in the Spanish Christian mission with the story of a native lord being burned alive. In his conversation with a Spanish priest, the native decides that he did not desire to go up to heaven when he died, "but rather down to hell, so that he would not be where they were and would not see such cruel people." Stories of atrocities such as this, paired with the descriptive, emotionally charged language, aid in Las Casas' persuasive goal (Theresa, Blog Post, 15 February 2013).

Thus, Theresa began the semester at stage two on the critical thinking scale and progressed to stage three.

Considering Opposing Viewpoints

Barbie

Barbie, 18 and Caucasian, grew up on a successful cattle farm in Lancaster, PA. She was in her second semester at Midlantic, studying business, having taken the prerequisite writing course in her first foray into higher education. She hoped to one day open a clothing store.

She did not like her first-semester writing class, which she attributed to a poor instruction, but conceded that she never liked any of her high school English classes either, because she considered herself a math person. To emphasize the point, her main complaint with high school was that the math classes were not challenging enough.

The Interview

She was having a better experience in Great Books because “I really like the teacher now. He’s really cool. He makes it enjoyable;” although, she did not like all of the books, “sometimes the readings... I didn’t like Freud” (Barbie, Personal Interview, 04 April 2013). Barbie saw GB100 as improving her thinking skills, and recognized that improving her writing skills would be of benefit even if it was a chore:

In this class, you have to read a lot and think about it. It’s not just that you read it and you’re done. You have to think about and blog about it and also write papers. I like it. I definitely agreed with his feedback on my paper, and I knew I messed up. As much as I don’t like writing, I don’t like the class, but I know it will be valuable, because I know I need to learn new writing skills. So, it’s valuable in that it’s something that I don’t want to do, but I know that I should (Barbie, Personal Interview, 04 April 2013).

In-class Observation

Barbie tended to answer questions in class when Professor J. queried to the students on the form of the text. She responded when she could observe the way the text

was written. Here in an exchange with Professor J. about *Borderlands/La Frontera* she draws attention to the form on the page:

Barbie: It goes zigzag when you look at it. It forms a pattern. She's talking about barbed wire. Maybe it shows us the inconsistency of the border.
Professor J.: That's exactly what I'm after. So, we should pay attention to the way the words are arranged on the page? Anything else about the placement of words?

In our interview I learned that Barbie had been raised in a religious family. I also learned that she particularly enjoyed reading and discussing Plato's *Euthyphro*, which describes Socrates questioning of piety.

Blog Posts

Barbie used the blogs to question received knowledge:

For today's reading we were assigned to read the first chapters of Genesis.

Growing up in a Christian family I had already read them before, but I reviewed them to try and see them in a different light. This was difficult though because I was used to reading the verses and accepting them as what they were literally. In class we worked with the text in a deeper way than just literal. We tried to find different meanings on different things that I normally would not question.

One passage that we took some time to look over was the end of Chapter one verse 27, "And God created the human in his image, in the image of God He created him, male and female he created them." This version was different than what I was used to though. In my version it says that Adam was created from the soil in God's image then Eve was created from a rib of Adam. Now everyone knows that this is impossible for any human to do. No one can create a man out of dirt, but I think that is the significance of this. It is showing how powerful this

"God" that the narrator is talking about really is. But maybe that is my background getting in the way of the actual text. It is hard to look at these passages with new eyes and to try and see it as a fiction novel rather than a history book from the beginning (Barbie, Blog Post, 11 April 2013).

In her effort to consider opposing viewpoints, she shows progression from stage two to stage three.

Brittany

Brittany, 20 and Caucasian, had a circuitous path to Midlantic having attended a community college in her native Boca Raton, FL and then a smaller, private college in the same city as Midlantic. With each school transfer, she had changed her major. Then, she changed her major for a fourth time. Her academic journey and her independence had been difficult for her:

I felt like my town, because I was in band throughout high school, all my friends were holding me back from advancing in my life, not in a bad way. I felt like I was being held down. It was the hardest decisions of my entire life. Me and my mom and my dad are really close. It was choosing between them and me. I miss my friends and stuff. They're awesome. Over the years my friends have shrunk down, because some of them can't accept that I don't see them every day. At the end of the day, it was between me and my parents. I miss them, but it was choosing my career and go forward in my future or to live with my parents and stay in Florida and mooch off of them. I knew that I wanted to eventually move up North. I knew that if I stayed in Florida, I would just stay there forever, if I didn't get out (Brittany, Personal Interview, 21 February 2013).

The Interview

When I interviewed her, she had just chosen her fourth major: therapeutic recreation, but she was unsure of her vocational path after university. I determined Brittany's to be at stage three of her executive function development as she was

consciously aware of her own motivational states and could moderate her behavior. Moreover, she expressed interest in considering opposing viewpoints.

Brittany was ambivalent about Great Books; although, she understood that the course outcomes involved her becoming a better reader of complex texts. She acknowledged that she would have to read more complicated texts as she moved through her university career. She stated, “I don’t like over-analyzing, because I think it complicates a lot.”

In-class Observation

At times, Brittany was a lively participant in the class discussion, asking questions and offering comparisons from the readings to popular culture. At other times, she was silent, hunkered down in her chair. She admitted that she didn’t always read the required pages in preparation for class, and this may have had a strong effect on the quality of her engagement on any particular day.

She described ambivalence about asking questions in class.

I’m always asking questions because I feel like I need to, just to be sure that I understand things. In GB100 when someone says something either that I don’t agree with (another student) or I don’t understand, I’ll ask a question. Jessica asks a lot of questions and she says a lot and I like her. She always says things that are different from what I think. I wrote on the blog last week about something she said. She said that the holocaust and the genocide that we are reading about couldn’t be compared. I thought they were completely the same. I asked her a question right after she said that. I’m not really comfortable doing it in class. I could have easily done that. I could have said I don’t agree. I feel like there is a tension when someone says they don’t agree. I don’t want to make tension (Brittany, Personal Interview, 21 February 2013).

Brittany understood that asking questions was important and wanted to do so, but had not yet overcome her social discomfort with debate or disagreement. She was in

transition toward becoming comfortable managing opposing viewpoints, but had not yet reached that stage in her critical thinking skills.

Blog Posts

Nevertheless, Brittany used the blog posts as a forum to ask questions. She exhibited noteworthy changes in her critical thinking development while reading Las Casas' *A Brief Account of the Destruction of the Indies*. She progresses from skepticism at the described genocide of the native population:

There is a lot that we learn from only the first few pages of Las Casas. In this book so far I found that the two very different images that Las Casas was developing for both the Indians and also the Spaniards was very interesting. In the first few pages it clearly describes the Indians as "most humble, most patient, meekest..." and also "most delicate, slender, and tender of complexion..." The writer goes on and on about how the Indians are pure and know of God and so on. But then he depicts the Spaniards as destroyers, cruel, and slaughters. I find this very odd because of the fact that he himself is a Spaniard. The question I would like to ask is, does he consider himself a Spaniard? We know that he is one, but does he consider himself to be a destroyer and to be cruel? He is obviously catholic being that he is a priest. But since he is stereotyping all the Spaniards as cruel does this mean that he is also cruel? I find this confusing. He also highly exaggerates both of the images of the two very different groups of people. Obviously all of the Indians are not perfect and humble, patient, etc. And then also not all of the Spaniards are cruel and killers. I think that the only justification of him sorting, generalizing, and exaggerating these groups of people would be to try to make the king keep wanting to read his story. If Las Casas had just put the correct number of people in this and he didn't put the exaggerated amount, it might not have been as interesting to read. I believe that he is exaggerating to try and conduct a change in the king's thinking (Brittany, Blog Post, 13 February 2013).

to historical comparison:

To me, when you step back and generalize both of these genocides they are closer to the same than they are different. The Holocaust was all about the removal of those who didn't fit into one person or a group of people's idea of what a "perfect" human was. The act done to the Indians was because they Indians weren't willing to convert to Christianity. I see these two separate events almost in the same way, even though they are both

awful and shine a light on just how cruel human beings can be. The Spaniards found that those Indians who didn't believe what they believed and wouldn't convert were imperfect and should be wiped out, just like the Nazis. The Spaniards thought that the best way to handle these people who committed "a mortal sin [was] punishable by man (p. 16)." The Nazis had the strongest hatred for those that weren't like them either physically, cognitively, or even spiritually. In a sense or at least to me, this is just like the slaughter that the Spaniards did to the Indians. The only real difference that I do see is that in the beginning of the Indian genocide the Spaniards gave the Indians a chance to convert. But eventually they become completely inhuman and just slaughter the Indians without question (Brittany, Blog Post, 19 February 2013).

and finally to understanding of the atrocity and greater understanding of herself:

For this week's blog I am just going to write just a little about my findings when I searched the web a little more about what really happened and also my opinions on the overall book. The first thing that came up was Wikipedia. Obviously I was a little hesitant reading a wiki page but when I started to read about Las Casas, I found out a lot of information. One of the things that I read was that in his early writings he actually advocated the use of African slaves vs. Indian slaves. Some critics give him partial responsibility for the transatlantic slave trade. Another fun fact I found where he spent almost his entire life, 50 years, "actively fighting slavery and the violent colonial abuse of indigenous peoples." In regards to the numbers of people that were killed, the numbers are actually pretty close according to a few articles that I read. It is amazing what humans can do, without remorse, to another human. Even though I am still skeptical, it would only be because I don't want to believe in such evil. As young adults I believe that all of us have a hard time believing in this because of the simple and internal innocence of our generation. We have never had to experience a genocide or holocaust like past generations have experienced first-hand. I also feel that this has a negative effect on us to where we sometimes question too much of something (Brittany, Blog Post, 28 February 2013).

The blog posts provided more evidence that Brittany was moving from stage two: interpreting material to stage three: considering opposing viewpoints, and make a similar progression in the other critical thinking criteria as well.

Jennifer

Jennifer, 18 and Caucasian, is a confident and competent business major who participated in every class session that I observed. Two factors had contributed to her solid academic preparation: her mother had encouraged her to work hard to develop study habits and her high school had placed her on a college track. She had focused on her grades in high school with an intense single-mindedness. While she did not make social connections with her fellow classmates, for example, she could not remember the name of the young man who sat beside her and with whom she conferred regularly, she did develop an academic relationship with Professor J. She reported taking advantage of his office hours and went to see him numerous times during the semester. However, in terms of developing her critical thinking skills, she entered the class at stage three and remained there at the end of the semester.

The Interview

Jessica was confident in her study skills and work ethic.

I've always had really good study skills. I don't know how I learned that. Maybe my mom did. We are very much alike and stressed how important school was. She never showed me how to study. She just implemented that studying is really important. I know I get a lot of grades because...I'm not putting myself down. I'm smart, but it doesn't come easy to me, so I have to take that extra time, where someone maybe who it came easy to wouldn't have to study (Jennifer, Personal Interview, 18 April 2013).

Jennifer described herself as an active class participant. "I think you get into a class what you put in. You might not be graded for raising your hand, but you get more out of it as opposed to just sitting there and just being there" she explained (Jennifer, Personal Interview, 18 April 2013). She enjoyed the discussions and was able to articulate clearly what she had learned in the class

I learned how to analyze texts and look deeper than what the surface meaning tells you and how there is a lot behind what the author is trying to say. It could have one meaning, but if you analyze the text deeper it really could have a different one (Jennifer, Follow-up Interview, 11 June 2013).

In-Class Observation

Despite her claims to be an active class participant, my recorded class observations did not bear this out. Although, reliable when called upon, she rarely spoke-up of her own volition. She did not laud the variety of viewpoints that the class tended to engender, nor did she challenge or question ideas.

Blog Posts

The bulk of Jennifer's blog posts were devoted to rhetorical analysis of the texts and close reading. She would comment on the way a text was written:

Another line we discussed in class today can be found on page 35 "no man is or may be called a rebel if he is not first a subject." We explored the options of possible definitions of the word subject. After much discussion, I have come to believe that when Las Casas used the word subject, he was referring to the people of the King. I thought this was an interesting point because if Las Casas is calling the natives "people of the king," wouldn't that mean they deserve more respect? After being brutally attacked and murdered by the Christians, it makes me wonder why Las Casas would use the word subject (which is a category the Christians would fall into) for the natives (Jennifer, Blog Post, 19 February 2013).

And by the end of the semester, the blog posts provided a similar analysis, showing little in the way of progress beyond stage three:

On Thursday's class we started to discuss *The Daodejing*, a text I found rather confusing. The first half of the book (chapter 1-37) was very complex and difficult to understand. I believe much of my confusion comes from the translation. Many times, throughout the chapters, there was no way to reproduce in English the use of certain Chinese words, like dao. When the Dao is introduced in chapter one, the footnote states that dao can mean either "the way," "path" or "teaching," all of which have very different definitions. Translation aside, I found much of the text contradicted itself. "Always eliminate desires in order to observe its

mysteries; always have desires in order to observe its manifestation (chapter 1).” On the surface these phrases seem to counter themselves but referencing Freud, one must look deeper into the texts “latent meaning.” On the surface these readings are complicated, but after looking further and carefully analyzing the text in class, the meanings became clearer and easier for me to understand (Jennifer, Blog Post, 19 April, 2013).

Jennifer begins the semester focuses on the text and ends the semester in largely the same place, which is to say stage three on the critical thinking scale.

Jeremy

Jeremy’s parents had high expectations for him. He came from a white, upper middle-class community an hour northeast of the city, he had gone to a private high school and then to a small, private college in Maryland on a tennis scholarship. Unable to manage the practice schedule and keep up with his grades, he had failed two of his prerequisite college classes and dropped out. The next year, he had transferred to Midlantic, enrolled as a business major and was living at home, commuting in to the city to go to his classes. He was 21 when we spoke.

The Interview

Jeremy described himself as “more of a math guy than a reader,” but acknowledged that the skills learned in Great Books could transfer to other areas of his life, even though he would not take the course of his own volition. “What you learn from the class is valuable learning: reading and understanding what you are reading and being able to discuss it in class with people, to present your ideas” (Personal Interview, 7 March 2013).

He described his parents as having focusing intently on his study habits during his younger years, demanding that he do his homework the minute he arrived home from school. There was pressure for him to succeed as others in his family had:

My dad has his Masters and my mom went to school. My dad has always had a business influence on me. He works for KPMG. He's pretty successful. My uncle Dave is my dad's brother. He's a doctor, a very successful doctor, and he has his own practice, so that's the business aspect there. My mom's two brothers are very successful. One is a really good programmer, very smart, and made a lot of money doing that; and the other one is really smart and he's the CFO of a hedge fund. There is a lot of pressure to not be a total screw up (Jeremy, Personal Interview, 7 March 2013).

In-class Observation

Jeremy was not an active participant, but he was a brave one. If he had a question for Professor J., he would ask. Here he questions ideas presented in Freud's *Introductory*

Lectures:

Jeremy: Wouldn't a recurring dream be worth analyzing, as opposed to a normal every day dream.

Professor J.: Why?

Jeremy: Because it is happening more often.

Professor J.: Any dream could have meaning.

Jeremy corroborated this in our interview:

I'll participate if he (Professor J.) calls on me or if I really have something to say. Usually, I'm pretty outgoing. In the next class I have a coffee beforehand. I do best in math or science classes, something that has step, step, then answer kind of thing. That's not what this class is. A lot of things are open for interpretation or opinionated. I like that. I like to discuss and stuff, but I'm definitely better with more structure. Mathematically. I'm likely to ask questions if I wasn't understanding the text, or someone said something and I felt strongly about something. I would openly disagree if the opportunity was there and I felt strongly about it (Jeremy, Personal Interview, 7 March 2013).

Often, when Jeremy wasn't active in class discussions, he expressed doubt and sometimes even cynicism around the ideas being presented in the class and in the text through his facial expressions and comments made under his breath to the students sitting nearby. This behavior, and other comments he made during the interview show him at stage four on the reflective judgment scale. His stopping-out of college, which had led to his transfer to Midlantic, pushed him into a period of confusion where he began to question prescribed pathways. In our interview, he expressed resistance to his parent's intense focus on academic achievement.

Blog Posts

Jeremy did not analyze the texts to any great depth. He used the blog posts to indicate that he had done the reading and show that he was paying attention in class. The blogs allowed him to communicate that he enjoyed the discussion, but they showed that he didn't grapple with the ideas presented in the texts. No matter what the stage in the semester, all of his blogs tend to follow the same format, as can be seen in these three examples. The first one begins with Jeremy describing the discussion as interesting:

I found yesterdays discussion in class on our new book *Borderlands* to be very interesting. The exercise at the beginning of class was not only interesting, but in a way eye opening. For us to be living in America we really tend to take our freedoms for granted. In a later class I had yesterday I watched a video about an Indian couple just trying to get a temporary visa to come to America. The process is long tedious and even with all of the right qualifications not always certain. It really is a privilege to live here and have these freedoms. On a different note I found the Spanish in *Borderlands* to be a little confusing I would almost have to double back in some spots to make sure I understood what I was reading. Although this is annoying in a way I think it is good because it makes you really look into what you're reading and not just read it to get it done. I look forward to next week's discussions and hopefully some more entertaining class exercises (Jeremy, Blog Post, 1 March 2013),

As does this second example:

I felt Thursday's discussion on Socrates was very interesting. I have always been fascinated with Socrates and his ability to use questioning like who, what, where, and when to find an answer. He was truly a revolutionary mind for his time. In class we started talking about piety. In "The Trials of Socrates" piety is not really defined more as given as an example. I found this to be a little difficult to follow especially when reading, however the discussion in class helped to clear up any confusion. I also thought our discussion about the dog show was cool. I liked how it was tied into the lesson. All in all I am very excited to see where this new reading takes and I look forward to more interesting conversations in class (Jeremy, Blog Post, 5 April 2013),

And, the third as well:

I found yesterday's class exercise to be very interesting. It revolved around understanding the Dao. Dao is a Chinese concept signifying the way, path, route, or sometimes more loosely doctrine or principle. My partner and I decided to leave the classroom and walk around one of the lower level floors. It was interesting because we were told to find something you can't really look for, but we did our best. While on our escapade we came across an empty lounge with a piano in it. We decided to play it. After this we returned to class and I wondered if because we weren't looking for anything we found this lounge. If so, was that our "way" and did we give that room purpose by entering and playing the piano? The room was empty which the Dao concept embraces, so it all seemed to make sense to me. Either way next class should be another interesting discussion (Jeremy, Blog Post, 24 April 2013).

He reported that he is either intrigued or entertained by the class discussions, but he does not engage the text beyond the superficial, as his main comment is one of puzzlement or difficulty apprehending the text. Thus, Jeremy showed himself at stage three, at the beginning and at the end of the semester, where knowledge is arbitrated largely by personal impressions and feelings.

Kelly

Kelly, 18, is a Caucasian, media studies freshman, who grew up in suburban, northern New Jersey about 15 miles from New York City. She credits her big, Russian

immigrant family for giving her an appreciation for diversity and the ability to consider different perspectives:

Listening is important. I didn't learn that in school; I learned that from my family. Every night we would have big family dinners and we would go around the table talking about our day. My parents encouraged taking turns. That's how I learned to listen (Kelly, Personal Interview, 05 February 2013).

She was president of her high school and wanted to attend an urban university with a diverse student body like that of her high school. She was an avid participant in the class who came to class with questions on her own.

The Interview

She described beginning GB100 with the preconception that the class was mostly a requirement, and still thinks it is a great deal of work with all the books that the students must read, but liked the professor and the way he guided the students through questioning. She had identified herself as a procrastinator, but said that Midlantic's prerequisite writing class gave her skills that helped her in Great Books. Her academic management skills improved:

Remember how I was talking last time about time management. That got better managing the reading. It can pile up if you don't keep up. I think it was equally spread out. If you look at it on paper, it looks like a lot. *The Daodejing* would be 80 pages in a night, but those things are not that long. Sometimes, the Freud reading would get lengthy (Kelly, Personal Interview, 5 February 2013).

At the end of the semester she was able to articulate clearly what course outcomes she had achieved. This included the way she interacted with the professor

Talking more helps me figure out things. I didn't realize how much it's important to discuss what you've learned or what you've reading. Before, I'll just answer a question if the teacher asked. It's OK to ask the teacher a question and question what the teacher thinks. It's OK to talk back to them, not talk rudely, but debate with them (Kelly, Follow-up Interview, 24 April 2013),

to the way she saw the students interact with each other:

A lot of times there was actually a lot of debate in the class. There were times when not only would the students disagree with each other, they would disagree with the teacher. Before, if I disagreed with something I wouldn't have said something, but now I say "I disagree with you. In my opinion, you are wrong." No one ever said, "oh you can't be wrong." No one ever said, "your idea is wrong" (Kelly, Personal Interview, 24 April 2013).

In-class Observation

Kelly was an avid note taker. She raised her hand in class when Professor J. asked a question and had a courageous attitude when it came to interrogating the text. During a difficult class discussion where the class was reluctant to analyze Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, Kelly was unafraid to offer a controversial interpretation of the sacred text asking, "Maybe they left stuff out on purpose to show only what God wants will happen. It's manipulative. It tells people that they should follow God the way that Abraham did. Don't question God."

She was friendly with the students that sat beside her, regularly conferring with them during class discussion, but also before class as we waited for the room to empty

from the previous class. These conversations were mostly about upcoming assignments and the reading that was due that day. I did not observe Kelly, or any of the other students, engage in analysis outside of class. Regardless, she was more outgoing than most of the students.

Blog Posts

Kelly's blog posts due show her an evolution from interpretation to analysis, but by the end of the semester she is firmly at stage three recognizing that an authoritative document may not present 'the truth,' but depending on feeling and impressions rather than reason and evaluation to make sense of it:

What was interesting about the gender roles was that the woman was created after the man, and was created from the man; which is biologically incorrect since women create men. And the way it was described that woman were created seemed so "unimportant", it was original like the man but it was quick and easy. But at the same time it makes woman look more important than man because they were created to help the man, meaning they couldn't survive on their own. So maybe that's the hidden message. Everyone in class was looking at the text and thinking women meant less than man because they were created after man when we skipped over the idea that the woman was created to help the man and accompany him because he couldn't do it alone, because if he could than women wouldn't have been created. But then the text portrays women in a negative light and blames the woman for the punishment God gave Adam and Eve. Adam blames to god that it was Eve's fault, "the woman whom you gave by me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate." Another thing that was pointed out in class discussion was the fact that the serpent went to the woman instead of the man. This makes it seem like the woman can be more easily persuaded by evil men, and that's why the serpent went to the woman instead of the man. I still can't decide whether or not woman have been given a totally secondary role from just this text. Even though the obvious answer is that they are secondary to men they were still created to help man and be there for the man because he couldn't survive without her (Kelly, Blog Post, 11 April 2013).

Kelly's often offered feminist interpretations of the texts and commentary during the class discussion. The development of a feminist identity may have been the catalyst

for adopting new approaches to learning in Great Books. At the end of the semester, Kelly had progressed to stage four.

Marilyn

Marilyn, 19 and Caucasian, was not the most outspoken student in GB100, but she was an avid listener. As a psychology major, she had decided on the discipline after analyzing her strengths and abilities. She was extremely social and had highly developed academic management skills. She began the semester in stage two.

The Interview

Marilyn was also goal oriented. She stated that she was already planning to go to graduate school:

I wanted to be somewhere with mental health and helping people and interacting with people, because I am a social being. I've always been that person that listens to my friends problems, gives them advice and I enjoy doing that. I enjoy talking, so I thought the whole counseling route. I analyze everything. I'm interesting in the whole link between the behavior and the crime, and why they do what they do. Then, the whole social talking thing, it led me to psychology, plus it plays to the strengths: organization, people skills (Marilyn, Personal Interview, 28 March 2013).

As well as being goal-oriented and clear about her purpose at Midlantic, she had developed an academic management system in high school that allowed her to keep track of all of her work both in class and when she studied on her own:

When I'm in class, I'll take more notes than when I am actually at home. I'll jot down the topic of what we're talking about, and what I want to say about it, and then I'll bring it up sometime in discussion. I don't take specific notes on everything that I'm reading and everything that we say. I focus on main points that really get me (Marilyn, Personal Interview, 28 March 2013).

In-class Observation

For the most part, Marilyn rarely spoke in class, but her body language and facial expression indicated that she was actively engaged in listening during class. She leaned forward in her seat, kept her eyes on Professor J., nodded or shook her head at student comments, and paid careful attention to the text as the discussion progressed. However, she became much more active in the discussion whenever it moved into psychological analysis. When Professor J. asked the students to interpret the role of dreams in Gilgamesh Marilyn enthusiastically raised her hand. During the section of the semester that focused on Freud's *Introductory Lectures* she was particularly enlivened. Professor J. asked if any of the students in the class had a background in psychology. In this case, Marilyn raised her hand again and provided a definition of parapraxis, even going so far as to engage with two other students in a dialog about the nature of parapraxes and why they happen outside of professorial direction and guidance.

Blog Posts

In the blog posts, Marilyn shows evidence of moving into stage three:

Today in class we did a very interesting dream interpretation activity where we first wrote the manifest content of a dream, and then received a dream from another group to analyze. The most fascinating part to me, was hearing what each group came up with in their analysis of a dream. As the dreams were being read, I examined it in my head a completely different way than others. And this seemed to be a common comment by my classmates: "These dreams could be interpreted in a hundred different ways, because each person sees things differently." This comment got me thinking and triggered my comment of, when analyzing a dream, it not only examines the dreamer's unconscious, but the interpreter's unconscious too. This week in the Freud reading, we discovered a lot of his dream symbolism and discovered what these common symbols mean. However, are they universal symbols? Depending on your cultural or even your personal experiences you may see a symbol completely different than another person. For example, some people love to fly. Others may be

terrified of flying because they have a fear of heights. I supposed Freud would say that this in itself has meaning, but I think my argument is valid. Based off of how the interpreter of the dream sees things, the dream could mean two different things. His unconscious is in question – the ideas and things that he is open to or represses may make him closed off to certain ideas that may be valid. Dream analysis is a tricky business. An interesting business, but tricky. Tricky because both the dreamer and the interpreter create meaning in the dream. All of their ideas are credible. However, at the same time, we can't really trust either of them fully because whether or not they know it, they have some sort of bias, whether repressed or not (Marilyn, Blog Post, 26 March 2013).

Once she has moved into stage three on the critical thinking scale. Marilyn shows evidence of considering opposing viewpoints and some movement toward managing contingency.

Mo

Mo's family had taken him out of the city's public school to complete his last two years of high school in the West Bank of Palestine. This is where his family was from originally. He described himself as Arabic and told me he was 18. He identified as Palestinian and had firmly formed opinions around the Palestinian –Israeli conflict.

The Interview

Here he explains why his family returned to the West Bank:

We went because our parents realized we were straying too far away. We were losing our sense of culture and we didn't know the language at all. They wanted us to go over there and learn the language and know who our family is. I can speak and write Arabic fluently (Mo, Personal Interview, 23 March 2013).

This return had allowed Mo to attend the American high school in the West Bank, which was much more rigorous than the public high school he had attended in the United States. It had prepared him well for college. He described working hard just to maintain a B average.

In his first year at Midlantic, Mo's major was biology. He took the prerequisite writing course and liked to read. He described Great Books as valuable because it would benefit him by helping him become a more thoughtful reader of complicated texts, as well as a better writer.

In-class Observation

Mo responded positively to GB100's seminar format, because he wanted to be able to ask questions, even though he was more inclined toward the content of the classes in his major.

It depends on the day. Some days I come in and ask a good amount of questions. Some days I sit back and listen. This semester I'm interested in biology. I like the content. I guess the seminar is pretty good. My biology class is a lecture hall. It's kind of annoying because you can't actually ask questions. We use the clickers. When you have a smaller class and you're close to the teacher, it's better. I like biology best because of the content, not the way the class is taught (Mo, Personal Interview, 23 March 2013).

Nevertheless, he was not particularly active in class discussion, describing himself as preferring to listen and form opinions through reflection.

Blog Posts

In this blog post from the beginning of the semester, Mo describes how he makes meaning from what is in the text, but also what is not there:

Today's class was very interesting to me because filling in the gaps of Gilgamesh is not as easy as it seems. The reading of the book itself contributes to helping the reader build ideas about what these gaps, or "lacunae," actually hold but in reality it is very difficult to figure out what exactly it is that these lines use to say. The first problem assigned to us was to examine Tablet III pg 27, and fill in what we believe is the correct words. My group used our knowledge of previously read information to help us fill in the gaps. An example of this would be the lines in Tablet III v.151, it is saying "Enkidu is in the chapel..." my group used our knowledge of the book to fill in that Enkidu was in the chapel of Shamash,

because of the fact that he was the god that was helping them and it is logically that they would be there. The toughest part of the assignment itself was the second question because rather than having a small guideline to follow, like the first part, this question required us to completely construct a passage that is 4-5 lines when really 30 lines were missing. We thought that writing the complete 30 lines would be easier because that gives us a good amount of room for explaining everything, when its just 4-5 lines you have to summarize a large amount of information in too little of a space. This exercise makes use of our creative as well as analytical skills. Anyone can just fill in these gaps with words that sound correct, but the real challenge is accurately filling them with words that make sense in regard to the book (Mo, Blog Post, 5 February 2013).

Because of his experience in a family with a clear ethnic identity from a politically conflicted region, Mo had been compelled to independently think about and form his views and values at an early age. For this reason he was open to the class discussions and to the ideas presented in the readings. Over the course of the semester, he progressed from stage three to stage four on the critical thinking scale.

Porter

Porter, 19, Caucasian, had started at Midlantic on an athletic scholarship as a defensive lineman for the football team. Over time he had become more invested in biology, his major, than in sports and had quit the team due to the rigorous early morning practice schedule that would have conflicted with an important prerequisite biology class offered in the morning only. It would have interfered with him graduating on time, so he chose to quite football.

The Interview

During the interview, Porter described his career goals coming into sharper focus after freshman year, during his summer job erecting tents for large formal parties in the homes of the wealthy families in his community. Porter is goal oriented. He explained

that he aspired to have such a life and that he had added on a minor in business to achieve that end. He described going against the wishes of his father, who had been the coach of his high school football team, and aligning himself with his brother who worked as a chemist, when he had decided to focus on academics instead of football.

Porter expressed nostalgia for high school and reported that making social connections at Midlantic had proven difficult. He stated that he had made most of his friends at Midlantic on the football team, but otherwise it was difficult to meet people at the university. He had not made social inroads through his classes and expressed misgivings about showing his work to fellow students or working in a team on a group project. Porter expressed dissatisfaction with his social life and laughed at the idea of discussion topics from the class with friends from outside of the class. This placed him in the instrumental/self-directed stage of executive function development.

In-class Observation

Porter had excellent academic management skills: he came to every class prepared and he had read. He did not voluntarily raise his hand in class, but he was always engaged in the conversation, making eye contact with both the professor and his fellow students and avidly following the discussion. He described having received good training in high school in terms of writing papers and conducting research. He did not voluntarily do research on class topics nor did he discuss topics from the class with other students. This placed him in stage two on my scale of critical thinking development. Porter's blog postings show him reading the text on a more superficial level at the beginning of the semester

In the last tablet of Gilgamesh, it reveals a lot about Gilgamesh's character and also his leadership qualities. A quote from the book says, "Of the plant's fragrance a snake caught scent, came up in silence, and bore the plant off. As it turned away it sloughed its skin. Then Gilgamesh sat down and wept, down his cheeks the tears were coursing." This is on the last page of the book, and it demonstrates how much Gilgamesh has changed over the course of the book. Normally, if something like that had happened to Gilgamesh, he would have fought back at the snake to try and get his plant back. The plant, it seemed, was very important to Gilgamesh because if he ate he would "be again as I was in my youth" (Porter, Blog Post, 08 Feb 2013).

to interpreting the texts and discerning meaning.

We also extensively discussed the meaning of dreams, and how Freud would interpret each dream. I think it is true that our dreams are a way for us to become connected with our subconscious and be able to accept it. There is a fine line between interpreting a dream correctly. Look too shallow and it can be the way you would like to perceive it. Look too far and you can go way to into the true meaning your subconscious is trying to portray. I feel that it is important to interpret your dreams and it interests me enough that I strive to find the meaning of my own. I feel that a lot can be learned about myself and what I truly feel if I can correctly understand what my subconscious is telling me. (Porter, Blog Post, 21 March 2013).

Blog Posts

At the beginning of the semester he was discomfited by the discussion comments of other students with whom he disagreed. He took umbrage during a discussion of homosexual subtexts within Gilgamesh arguing that such a homosexual narrative could not have been a part of the story as it was so long ago. By the end of the semester, he acknowledged that multiple interpretations were possible:

If I had to pick, it would have to be that I learned how to read the text with more of an open understanding of it instead of just what the words were. There's always a second meaning to it. There's always symbolism or another meaning. It's not just read what it says on the paper, but what can be interpreted (Porter, Personal Interview, 29 April 2013).

He intimated that certain reading, in particular *The Introductory Lectures* by Sigmund Freud, had made him “more open to certain things and understand them in different light.” In acknowledging that multiple meanings are possible, Porter showed a progression toward considering opposing viewpoints.

Suzie

Suzie was clear about her long term goals. A Caucasian transfer student from one of the inland state university campuses where she had studied psychology, which she found interesting, she had come to Midlantic to study marketing instead, because there was a much greater likelihood of getting a job in that field.

I like psychology and I like learning about it, but I didn't think I was into it enough to pursue a career in it because it is very hard to accomplish being successful in psychology. Too much years of schooling. I don't think I could put into that. I don't think I have that much, I guess, interest in it to really push through and be successful in it. While in marketing it's more natural and easier.

Suzie explained that she had begun to form strong academic relationships with her fellow classmates and also with a professor with whom she had taken two classes in her major, but she reported that she had not formed stronger relationships with any of her fellow Great Books students.

The Interview

In our interview she described having a keen interest in learning about religions. She enjoyed reading, and although she did not find Great Books a pleasure read, she able

to align the stated course outcomes with her own goals. She described it as a literature course:

My initial thought was that I have to get this class over with. It's something that is required of me, but I understand why they put it in the curriculum. Everybody should have a literature class, I believe. Literature has been a huge part of history, shaping culture, and always will be. No matter how far technology gets, I feel like writing will always be predominant. Yeah, it's a hassle and it's not the class I would choose for myself, but I understand why it's in the curriculum (Suzie, Personal Interview, 7 March 2013).

In-Class Observation

I noticed Suzie, 19, during class when she spoke up in class to explain the system of Catholic saints during a discussion on Catholicism relationship to colonization. It was a discussion in which she was particularly active. Suzie reported that her level of engagement depended on how confident she felt with the material that was being discussed that day. She had taken a course that she felt was akin to Great Books:

I see a lot of familiarity between this class and my religion class last semester. We talked about kind of the same thing through the different periods... I like learning about different religions, because it shows the different ways people think (Suzie, Personal Interview, 7 March 2013).

She spoke of herself as someone who always questioned what she was learning. She described the behavior of looking things up on her own had transferred to topics she was introduced to in the classes in her major:

In some of my human resource classes, I look into different corporations and what interests me from there (Suzie, Personal Interview, 7 March 2013).

Strangely, however, her attendance was not good. I observed that she was absent for approximately five classes. During my observations, it was also unclear whether or not

she had read the required text for class that day, as she rarely spoke but she said that she knew the importance of keeping up with the reading:

When you make mistakes you learn from them and remember them. Last semester, I had a religion class, and we were assigned books, like in this class, even though it wasn't a reading class. We had to read books, probably five during the whole semester. In the beginning, I read all of them. Toward the end of the class, I stopped reading them because I had so much work and I didn't feel that they were important. At the end of the class, I didn't get the grade I wanted and I realized it's because I didn't put in as much time and effort as I should have. I learned from that mistake. I read now (Suzie, Interview, 07 March, 2013).

Classroom management skills remained important to her. In the follow-up interview she reported that the class had helped her become more conscientious about the day-to-day management of the course workload.

Blog Posts

Suzie's critical thinking skills evolved over the course of the semester. Her blog posts moved from interpreting the plot with Gilgamesh:

This passage represents change within the characters. In previous tables Gilgamesh comes off as a strong fearless man yearning to defeat Humbaba whom guards the cedar forests. Although opposite of what Gilgamesh portrays himself, when he is actually faced with the challenge he becomes hesitant and fearful (Suzie, Blog Post, 01 February 2013),

to identification of audience, author intention and persuasion in *The Destruction of the Indies and Borderlands/La Frontera*:

In comparison to the other two books we read this piece of literature sets itself apart by the way the author writes. In my opinion she is very linguistic and makes for a smoother read, when the words are in English. Like the previous book we had read as a class, *Las Casas*, *Borderlands* talks about the unfair treatment of people based on their cultural backgrounds. What separates this from *Las Casas* though, is the perspective the authors write from. In *Borderlands* Gloria writes from the perspective of those who were being treated unfairly. This piece allows for us to look at these

slavery type issues from a different perspective. The author uses personal stories that also allow you to make a deeper connection and allows for the readers to get to know her. This approach for writing gets the readers to feel empathetic towards you and the struggles you have encountered which is good for a persuasive piece (Suzie, Blog Post, 1 March 2013),

to actively engaging with the text and looking up definitions:

The one I want to focus on is Socrates himself and his quest to find the meaning of piety. Now, going to Google or using the dictionary you will find the definition of piety being, the quality of being religious or reverent; a belief or point of view that is accepted with unthinking conventional reverence. In order to define this word, which in the past time of Socrates era one was not specifically able to give a definition without using examples of what piety can take form as. Socrates is known for using his systematic questioning inducting the questions of, who, what, where, when, why, and how to find an answer. Combined with this way of solving a question, he also uses adduction to get a result. This means to reach a general inference from particular truth, which provided examples and scenarios of being pious helped in producing a definition of the word. Socrates was a man with a very curious mind, always questioning and trying to prove the meaning and underlying factor of particular subjects (Suzie, Blog Post, 5 April 2013),

to further interest in the nature of objective truth and the impact of emotions on our beliefs when reading The Sacrifice of Isaac in the Bible:

Although composing the story's making up the Bible cannot contain every emotion or response held by each person it would be more believable if there were objective feelings at times (Suzie, Blog Post, 19 April 2013).

By the end of the semester Suzie had progressed from stage three to stage four on the critical thinking scale.

Managing Ambiguity

Jake

Jake was the only traditional student in GB100 who had reported taking Midlantic's remedial English class. This, despite having had an English teacher in his

senior year of high school whom he described as both caring and challenging. Moreover, he told me he acquired a love of reading about history from his father, who gave him books as gifts. Growing up in a mid-sized city approximately one hour west of Midlantic, he described his parents as “encouraging, but not pushy” (Jake, Personal Interview, 28 March 2013) about him going to college.

The Interview

Despite providing articulate and even thoughtful responses during the interview, Jake, 19 and Caucasian, could only be characterized as an undisciplined student. He understood the kind of behaviors that would lead to good academic results, but was unable to put them into action:

If I started it the day it was assigned and worked on it until the day it was due, I would be able to put out a pretty good paper, but hammering it all out in one night it’s... you put out shabby work. You don’t do the best you can do. This has happened a lot. Pretty much between last semester and this semester, I’ve done that pretty frequently. It’s a personal issue. It’s kind of an internal thing that you have to work on as a person and just realize how detrimental it can be (Jake, Personal Interview, 28 March 2013).

In-class Observation

Jake spent the classes reading the text assigned for that day on his laptop. He did not contribute actively. In our first interview, when I asked him to describe himself in the class, he responded:

Non-existent. Almost. I do best in sciences and history because those classes interest me the most. Obviously, a class where you’re interested you’re going to pay attention more. If it were a class that interested me, I would ask questions, but not necessarily in Great Books (Jake, Personal Interview, 28 March 2013).

But, over the course of the semester, his opinion of the class changed. In our follow-up interview he stated, “Me personally, I loved the class meetings, because I didn’t do that much work outside of class, so it was useful. We really just went over texts and further analyze them (Jake, Personal Interview, 11 June 2013).

Blog Posts

Jake had the ability to examine himself, but he seemed unable or unwilling to use that knowledge to change his behavior. Despite being somewhat underdeveloped in terms of his academic management skills, and thus low on the scale of metacognitive development, Jake had reached stage four or the point of skepticism in the reflective judgment model. We see this when he blogs about Freud:

Freud explains that simple mishaps or mental deficiencies such as the happen-chance of forgetting an object somewhere actually have explanations. To elaborate, Freud explains these encounters as workings of the unconscious mind. In example, if you had forgotten where your car keys were on the way to a wedding, Freud would question whether or not you actually wanted to go to that wedding; with him more than likely asserting that you didn't want to go after all. Personally, I find this way of thought a bit primitive, yet fascinating. I find it a primitive way of thought because I feel as though it's more so obvious that forgetting your car keys is a mistake on your behalf, not actually some absurd reason of your unconscious mind. In that, I would like to say I feel that most of Freud's thoughts are, obviously, mere speculation with little scientific backing. Though, as we delve further into his book, I am interested in what else he has to say about the inner workings of the human mind and its unconscious (Jake, Blog Post, 22 March 2013),

And also when he blogs about Socrates:

Socrates comes to point out that the prosecution of Euthyphro's father may not be the correct moral choice after all. Though, Socrates also suggests with his above words that the opposite could be true as well; prosecuting Euthyphro's father could wind up being the more moral choice after all. In such, I believe the lesson learned from the situation depicted above is that there is not positivity with anything in life which does not provide a clear black or white answer. More often than not, individuals will come to

believe so ardently in a subjective idea and ignore the possibility of a more objective viewpoint. In other words, some people believe so entirely of an idea that they come to reject anything doubting that idea. In a real life example, one could view religion as a prime notion of this. Although it cannot be proven as a right or wrong decision that God(s) are real, some people ardently believe otherwise, with little proof backing their argument. Therefore, I believe that all things in life should be taken with doubt and scrutiny, with no one ever coming to fully believe in anything; for humans and their senses as a whole are imperfect and are therefore subject to mistake and miscalculation (Jake, Blog Post, 5 April 2013).

Here Jake exhibits the skepticism so characteristic of a young adult at the crossroads stage of cognitive development. This aligned with his ability to tolerate ambiguity.

Evaluating Arguments

Jack

Jack, 21 and Caucasian went to what he described as an average public school about one hour north of the city. He grew up in a divorced, single parent household, where his mother received social security disability benefits. He attributed his success to his high school teachers challenging him, particularly the faculty leader of the audio visual club who had mentored him. “He encouraged you to come and talk to him if you needed to talk about anything: academics, family problems, whatever. He was also really big on positivity and putting good things out there” (Jack, Personal Interview, 16 April 2013).

As a marketing major, he had taken such a circuitous path to Midlantic that he estimated that it would take him five to six years to graduate. He had started at a rural state university campus that had lacked diversity, and then transferred to a community college closer to the city that didn’t have enough student life to meet his interests.

Finally, he had transferred to Midlantic and found an apartment with his girlfriend. He

had a full time job working for a private laundry service that he intended to buy into as an owner when he completed his studies. He admitted that school was a competing priority. “It’s not always easy. I’ve been handling things like that for a while. My parents divorce and I had to step up. Sometimes I’m envious of life in the dorms” (Jack, Personal Interview, 16 April 2013).

The Interview

Jack expressed an interest in learning as well as practical concerns about his future employment. Jack’s circumstances required that he be financially and emotionally self-reliant at an early age. In our interview, he described himself as the “man in the family” (Jack, Personal Interview, 16 April 2013) with some regret. Jack was a naturally curious student who valued learning, even as he kept his vocational goals in mind:

To be engaged in learning is to genuinely care about it, not just getting the degree but learning the content. That’s the only way to actually learn the content and not just memorize it for class. Ultimately, I’m here to get a job, but I try to keep the mentality. The best way to actually learn something is to want to learn it. Even if you’re having difficulty and you don’t have time, you try to just remind yourself of that as often as possible (Jack, Personal Interview, 16 April 2013).

Necessity may be one of the reasons that Jack had developed to stage four, methodological/self-reliant, in terms of executive function. This did not impede development within other criteria of the critical thinking scale, but seemed to work in tandem with growth in those areas.

I don’t have that much leisure time to read. I really like self-help books. I find it keeps me on track, and keeps me thinking about it. It’s easy to just forget about it and if you’re not thinking about it then you’re not engaged in your own well-being. If I’m not very intentional in all of my activities, it’s easy to get sidetracked. Not in just a specific thing, but in my overall well-being and not pay attention to myself. I tend to help other people a lot more than me. If I’m not intentionally working and

consciously working on myself, then I'll forget (Jack, Personal Interview, 16 April 2013).

In-class Observation

Despite Jack's maturity in areas of executive function, he was still finding his voice when it came to expressing contrary opinions in class:

I don't typically (ask questions of other students) because I wait for them to talk about what they're feeling and then I go off. Not directly, but I do in a way. I listen to what they have to say and get their perspective. I don't openly disagree with anyone. I might pose an opposite view, but I don't directly talk to that person (Jack, Personal Interview, 16 April 2013).

Despite his reticence, he was clear in his desire to hear the viewpoints of other students in the class and consider different ways of understanding an issue. This speaks to Jack's tolerance of ambiguity.

Blog Posts

In the blog posts, Jack related his own experience to the readings that he was required to analyze. Here is an example of Jack assimilating the text into his frame of reference rather than treating it as unrelated to previous knowledge.

or this week's posting I'd like to discuss a passage that we focused on last week. On page 21, the text reads, "...others to hang themselves in desperation and lack of hope, and husbands and wives hang themselves together, and with them, hang their children...above two hundred Indians hanged themselves. An infinite number died in this manner." For some reason this exert has stuck with me. Not only because the obvious reasons of shock and disbelief, but because of a connection I share to it. Over winter break I went on a birthright trip to Israel. While there I visited Mount Masada. The mountain was originally constructed for a Roman lord as a vacation destination. In 66 CE a group of Jewish rebels took the mountain by force and made it their home. A few years later, in 73 CE, Romans surrounded the mountain and waited for the Jews to surrender. To surrender meant to either convert to become slaves or convert to Christianity. After about 2-3 months of siege, the Romans breached the wall. When the troops entered they found that its 960 inhabitants either murdered each other or committed suicide. It is easy to see the many

parallels between this story and that of Las Casas. Because of the cruelty of the oppressors, the group given the choice to convert chose death instead (Jack, Blog Post, 19 February 2013).

Jack also exhibited a moral intelligence, placing the texts and the class discussions within an ethical framework that allowed him to evaluate them according to a self-authored system of right and wrong:

I found it extremely hard to believe that some people actually argued for "just causes for the war against the Indians." Sepulveda's excerpt was actually hard for me to read. Anyone who can interpret the events that took place as just clearly is not right in the head. In his words, "we may believe, then, that God has given great and exceedingly clear instructions respecting the destruction of these barbarians." People have killed in the name of religion forever and I'll never understand it. To me, it is the most contradicting thing one can do. This counter -argument only strengthens Las Casas' argument. An interpretation of the Bible cannot justify the massacre that took place here (Jack, Blog Post, 26 February 2013).

Thus, we can see him moving beyond skepticism to judgment. He uses evaluative skills to make sense of the new ideas the class presents to him.

Richie

Richie, 22 and Caucasian, grew up in an upper middle class hamlet north of the city, although he described struggling through public school, particularly his math classes. He explained that had grown up with his grandparents, instead of his mother, who lived in a poorer town, so that he could attend a better quality public school. He had transferred to Midlantic from an urban state university in Massachusetts, where he had begun his higher education career. He studied sports industry management.

The Interview

Richie was reticent in class. He described himself as impatient with the kind of analysis GB100 promoted: I'm not a big fan of looking too deep into meaning when you

are reading a book. What does this mean? What does this mean? I find it tedious, I guess (Richie, Personal Interview, 11 April 2013).

Despite his apathy around the content of the course, he found the writing valuable. He considered himself a good writer and described a detailed process of developing and supporting an argument in his written work.

In-class Observation

Richie never asked questions in class and described himself as uninterested in the class:

If we're on a subject that is interesting to me, I will be very attentive towards it. If we're talking about something that doesn't intrigue me as much, I'll find my mind wandering a bit. My core classes I did really well in, like strategic management and stuff. I'm really interested in the field that I want to go into, the different techniques. For the core classes that I was really interested in, I did have a lot of questions, because they wanted you to bring information in from the outside, from the sport world. For Great Books, not so much (Richie, Personal Interview, 11 April 2013).

Blog Posts

Despite his unwillingness to participate in class, Richie actively disagreed with a conclusion reached during class discussion and then to bolster his argument compared the text to a text from another class:

In class we discussed Gilgamesh's reaction, and the general consensus seemed to be that it was out of character for such a heroic figure. I disagree with this assessment and believe that not only is this behavior seen in other epic heroes, but it is real in human nature as well. The first example that comes to mind is in *The Iliad* when Achilles weeps over Hector's body. Although Hector was his adversary and not his best friend this seems to be the same type of emotional break-down. Another example of this is our sports "heroes" of today. Although on the surface they seem have no emotion, when something devastating happens to a close friend or a player on the team they break down just like anyone else. Although Gilgamesh's breakdown over Enkidu seems out of character for the story,

I believe it is not because it reflects real human nature (Richie, Blog Post, 08 February 2013),

And later in the semester we see him holding up knowledge learned in another classes to gauge the accuracy of his view on the value of Freud's research. In so doing, he changes his own mind:

The debate and discussion on whether Freud's studies can be considered scientific really grabbed my attention this week. When the question arose in class I was fairly certain I stood on the side saying his research was not scientific. All of Freud's work was based on closely examining patients, his findings being predominately based on his own observations, beliefs, and calculated guesswork. To me this left too much room for bias and was too open to interpretation to be scientific, however, I remembered my previous science classes which dealt with qualitative vs. quantitative research. Quantitative research deals with hard facts, studies, and numbers which give clear scientific answers. This is what I was looking for in Freud's work that I did not find, and therefore, could not consider his work scientific. I then remembered qualitative research, which is more exploratory and gives answers that can be derived strictly from what you see. This part of research is equally as important in science and cannot be overlooked. Given this, although I believe Freud's work is more theoretical and open to interpretation than it is factual, I must change my side and say it can be considered scientific (Richie, Blog Post, 05 April 2013).

Richie presented the most variation between his observed classroom behavior and the content and analysis presented in his blog posts. In the former he shows an almost complete lack of engagement. In the latter, he evaluates his own argument against a set of criteria and changes his own mind about a scientific concept. This is metacognition.

The Importance of Academic Relationships

One noticeable difference between transfer and traditional students emerged during the interviews in terms of what sort of academic relationships they had coming into university. In this sample group of 24 students, the traditional students described having entered college with a long-term relationship with a trustworthy adult or mentor who advised them in their academic decision-making. Most often in this sample of

traditional students, these academic mentors were parents, but sometimes they were siblings. Often, these traditional students described calling upon these mentors for help with papers:

I revise. That's what I use my mom for. I'll do it and I'll send it to her. Other people see things that you don't. She'll give me feedback and I'll go back again until it gets better (Personal Interview, Jennifer, 28 March 2013).

And:

A lot of the time when I'm stuck on something or I feel like I'm going off topic or my argument isn't that good, I talk to my parents about it. I'll usually do it in my room by myself, but I'll go downstairs or something. I'll talk to my mom about it or my dad. My dad is really good at writing (Personal Interview, Theresa, 04 April 2013).

And:

My sister is somewhat of a nerd. She has always been smart in school. She was a straight A student, all the time, even in college. School was never a difficulty for her. When I need help with something, when I need someone to revise it, she always gives me input on the best things to do (Janet, Personal Interview, 28 February 2013).

Moreover, students called on these academic mentors for overall academic career advice, such as what class to take and how to manage their academic career:

My brother is a big influence. That's why I decided to focus on academics. He has a doctorate in chemistry, but he went through hard time career-wise. He told me that I need to have everything lined up. It's competitive out there. That's why I went against my Dad and gave up football. My Dad was upset about it (Porter, Personal Interview, 26 February 2013).

Professor J. built opportunities to interact with him one-on-one into the syllabus. He incentivized the students to come to his office hours by allowing students to rewrite their papers but also requiring a student-professor conference to first discuss a revision plan. Many students took advantage of the opportunity, but not all of the students described it as valuable. Even though they acknowledged in the interview that positive relationship with their instructors was valuable in the abstract, many students met the requirement as a pro forma exercise or didn't go to meet him at all. Most students were quite clear that they understood that they had a responsibility to build and maintain a positive relationship with their instructor, but later in the interview many of those students responded negatively when asked if they intended to meet with Professor J. In contrast, all of the students in this class who reported that an ongoing, personal relationship with an academic mentor, indicated their interest in meeting with Professor J. and also characterized great books as a valuable course overall. This is not to say that students who did not have a trusted advisor saw the class as worthless or did not go to see Professor J. to discuss revising their paper, but those who did were more like to report that their overall class experience was positive. Providing a professor-student conference turned out to be very important in two other ways. It was made doubly important as many students did not make use of other academic resources available to them. Only two of the

24 students in GB100 said that they had ever used the tutoring services of the writing center for any class. In some cases, students in GB100 would have roommates look over their papers for a final edit. None of the students reported making friends with other students in GB100, except for Marilyn who told me that she had completed the second test of the semester at the same time as Brittany. They had walked out of class together and struck up a conversation about the test and paper rewrites as they walked through campus. She did not indicate that the relationship was ongoing.

No student reported showing their work to a fellow classmate in the class. Some said that they had shown their work to classmates in the prerequisite writing class they took prior to taking this class, indicating that they were not averse to peer review, but had not done so this semester. Most students did not indicate a desire to establish academic relationships with their peers. Some went so far as to express a feeling of competition or lack of trust toward other students:

Generally, with my other classmates, I don't share my work with them. It's more of a pride thing. I think you are in competition with classmates (Marilyn, Personal Interview, 28 March 2013)

Or:

I wouldn't show it to any of my classmates. I don't trust my fellow students.
(Porter, Personal interview, 26 February 2013)

Only one student, Janet, out of the total 24 students, stated that she had made regular use of the writing center for this class. Also, she was the only student to report

having made an important academic connection, albeit in another class, to a student where work was traded to be evaluated:

... another student in another one of my classes, me and her actually became friends, since last semester, because we had another class together. She's in the medical field, but she's going for kinesiology. I would talk to her about writing papers. I would give her feedback and she would give me feedback on writing papers and test skills and how to study. We just help each other out (Janet, Personal Interview, 28 February 2013).

Janet was also the only student to report a significant change from her initial impression of the class to her final response. She began GB100 mildly interested in the content of the class, but having trepidation about the work required. By the end of the semester she reported GB100 as having transformed not only her reading, but also her writing skills:

I do believe my critical thinking skills have expanded and that my critical writing skills have expanded as well. I was just working on the introduction to my portfolio paper. I learned a whole lot more as far as to how to form a paper and how to better it by the skills that we have gained and learned in Mosaic from the start of the semester until the end (Janet, Personal Interview, 28 February 2013).

The Student Participant Experience

The stated goal of the course is to improve the student's reading skills. Writing assignments were designed to improve close reading, with the syllabus (see Appendix B) explaining that the purpose of any written exercise was 'writing to learn' and by

extension 'writing to read.' Simultaneously cultural knowledge, such as ethical values, scientific concepts and uncomfortable historical realities, were transmitted through these classic texts as the content of the course, although that was not a stated course goal. This was made apparent when the students read Freud's *The Introductory Lectures*. Here we see Professor J. introducing them to Freud's theory of the unconscious.

Class Discussions

Gilgamesh

That many instructors begin the semester with *Gilgamesh* is no accident. Professor J. explained that this text confronts the students with reading problems that help them begin to learn to make sense of the text and become better readers. As so much of it is missing, it lent itself to close examination:

It's an ancient text. It's an epic poem. The edition we use is challenging, because it gives the students a sense of the artifact, so there is a lot of ancillary material. There are these huge lacunae that the students have to wrestle with in terms of making meaning. It's dealing with ambiguities; it's dealing with a kind of textual history, which is not seamless. The problems there are thrown right at the students. Their job and the instructor's job are to make sense of that. What do you do when you don't understand something? What do you do when there is a hole in the reading and you have to make a leap in terms of filling it in. It's also trying to find out what kind of stories the poem is trying to tell, which may be in dialog with the students experience, but can also be radically different (Professor J., Personal Interview, 28 March 2011).

I was able to see students confront the gaps in the text and try to make meaning from it when I observed the students work in small groups as they grappled with a passage with a large gap to fill in the lacunae with writing that they deemed appropriate in both form and content.

Professor J.: Academically, I want you to be aware of how you make sense of context. I want you to reflect on the choices you make and why you make them.

I joined a group of three young men: Jake, Mo and George. They begin by going to the passage that is indicated in the instructions. Professor J. had handed out these instructions at the beginning of the exercise. First, they try to figure out how Professor J. wants them to fill in the gaps. They read the passages before the gap for more context. George asks the others if his assumption about where the characters are in the story is correct. Jake agrees that he has correctly identified the setting and confirms that rituals are being described in the text. The group seems unsure of what to do. George offers a passage. Jake confirms and asks another question about the setting in the text. I ask the group if they feel this is a creative exercise. They all say yes.

Mo: You basically fill in whatever you think works.
They all propose ideas. Mo begins to compose. He doesn't think the gap can be filled with just one word. They agree that they need to write a few lines.

Mo: What are the characters trying to do?

There is silence for a minute while they all read around the passage. Jake likes a line and they all write it down. More quickly now, the three young men bounce ideas off of each other. Their body language relaxes and their dialog accelerates. Mo confirms again the location of the characters. They refer to a previous passage in the text. They underline passages as they go.

Professor J. comes over: Is it is hard?

Jake: It's different, but it is interesting.

Professor J.: How are you making choices? Where are you going back to in the text?

Jake: You have assumptions based on what you already know.

Presumptions come from the reading you have already done.

Professor J. turns and announces to the class: Feel free to make comparisons to real life.

The three young men return to the text.

Mo: Did they ever talk about a council before?

George: That's another word for elders.

They move on to the next passage, which is lengthy. They spend some silent minutes re-reading it. Mo starts the group talking by asking a question. I have noticed that he often asks questions, while Jake tends make statements or give answers.

Professor J. asks the class: Is it easier to fill in the gaps from the beginning

of the line? Does knowing what comes earlier make it easier to figure out what is missing?

He then directs them to later passages that seem connected.

Mo looks up the passages on Sparknotes on his phone.

Mo: I want to understand it in plain English.

Professor J. comes over to the group with a disapproving look on his face.

Professor J.: I don't think that (using Sparknotes) is a good idea because it doesn't use the same edition.

Professor J. addresses the class: If you are doing it right, your head should hurt a little bit.

George redirects Mo to the correct passage in the class text. Jake was also misled as to what section they should use. I can't tell if this is because they misread the instructions, or if the instructions are not clear. Still, they work well together.

Mo discusses the concept of a hero's glorious death. He talks about honor and dishonor and how they could figure into the poem. I ask if the young men if knew each other prior to this. They don't. They all say that they did group work in high school.

Jake: I enjoy group work

Mo: I like it, if people know what they are doing.

Professor J.: I am going to ask you to please stop the group work now. Be sure to save it for a future purpose. OK, what did you find difficult?

Jessica: It's hard to back up what they put in the gaps.

Professor J.: Yu could use anything.

Mo laughs.

Professor J.: Let's look at the first of the two passages you worked on.

Marsha: We filled it in with descriptions of dancing.

The class laughs.

Professor J.: Where did you get this idea.

Marsha: Camping.

Professor J.: Was that based on your own campground experiences? Can you give me the specific lines?

Professor J.: What about your group, Jessica?

Jessica: We focused on the repetition. So much of it repeats in other tablets, so we looked at a similar passage later in the poem and filled it in from that.

Laura: We looked at previous passages to see how characters in the poem spoke and might speak in the sections we had to fill in.

Professor J.: Can you give me the specific line?

Mitchell: We used things that appear in the bible.

Professor J.: Interesting.

Barbie: We looked forward in the text and thought that there have to be a lot of things, because there are a lot of things in a future section that is similar.

Professor J: How many of you are reading the synopsis provided by the editor of this edition at the beginning of each tablet?

The students shake their head no.

Professor J.: Is it fair to do this to the poem?

Many students shake their heads and say no in unison.

Mitchell: I don't like that we interpret it based on our own experiences.

Jessica: But isn't that what we do anyway?

Theresa: How can we know if we are being true to the author?

Professor J.: I want you to think about what the poem is trying to tell you.

Gilgamesh uses a narrative form of an epic tale to describe the maturation process of a young king as he moves from selfish adolescence to responsible adulthood. It presents a narrative about an important stage in individual development (Erikson, 1994). Just as it showcases the development of a tribal culture into a more complex civilization, it closely resembles the socialization process many of the students experience at this point in their lives. It was a particularly popular book among the students, not least because it was a story and thus more closely resembled the novels that dominate the curriculum of high school English classes:

It also depends if I am interested in the story or not, and I thought *Gilgamesh* was interesting (Carrie, Personal interview, 7 February 2013).

And:

The first story, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, I was really into that. I really loved it (Janet, Personal Interview, 28 February 2013).

Perhaps because it was the beginning of the semester, students had trouble grasping the main concept of the book even when directed toward it during class discussion. When Professor J. pointedly asked the students if the main character showed change, and pointedly reminded the students that when the story begins *Gilgamesh* is a

rapist (Class Observation, February 2013), the students were unable to respond either affirmatively or negatively. Instead the discussion devolved into a debate about the sexuality presented in the book, arguing back and forth as to whether or not Gilgamesh and Inkidu were lovers (Class Observation, February 2013).

This is not to say that the fundamental concept of the book eluded all of the students. One young man chose a paper topic that called for them to explore Gilgamesh's maturation, and he developed a clear understanding of this concept within the narrative:

That was about how Gilgamesh came full circle. How he started here, and ended here, and how he's better now. I really try to find examples in the text, because I've read Gilgamesh a bunch of times, that I think are significant in his life to have that kind of effect of him. I decided that the death of Inkidu and his failed quest for eternal life were two big things that shaped his life and turned him from the oppressive ruler to the better ruler (Jeremy, Personal Interview, March 2013).

In this case, the attention required by the writing assignment afforded the kind of exegesis that led to a more complete understanding of the book's main concept. More importantly, not every student chose that topic for their paper, so it is quite possible that their study of the text did not result in understanding of this central concept.

Sigmund Freud, The Introductory Lectures

Three class periods were devoted to analyzing *The Introductory Lectures*. At times, as many as 14 out of the 25 students would participate in these lively discussions, when normally, six students, who I identified as first-line discussants, engaged with Professor J. These active participants almost always spoke in class and were often called

on by Professor J. to respond to his questions. When Freud became the topic, the field widened to increase the second- and third-line discussants. Professor J.'s instruction is intentional, even though he never articulated the concept of the unconscious. On the first of the three classes devoted to Freud he guides them to it. What follows is an exchange that shows the students grappling with Sigmund Freud's concept of the unconscious mind as described in the introductory lectures (1920, 1989):

Professor J.: Why does Freud put us into the interloper role?

Jennifer: Maybe it's like teaching something to a five year old. I don't know anything about Freud and he starts at the beginning.

Professor J.: He positions himself as the expert. But still, why the neurotic patient?

Laura: He's trying to connect it to a medical idea.

Professor J.: He reminds us that there is a medical model. When he's writing this, it's a brand new idea, even though we are all familiar with it.

Jeremy: Neurotic means emotionally unstable.

Professor J.: How many of you have the word neurotic in your vocabulary? Patricia, you do. I'm dating myself. What the shape of the text? What is the unconscious?

Mary "It's the reason why we do things.

Marsha: I don't understand the question?

Professor J.: It's a stupid question. He's treating you guys like patients.

Marsha: He asks us to examine ourselves as we read.

Marilyn: This is an audience that has a medical and anatomical background. It's intangible.

Marsha: It's all in your head.

Professor J.: What constitutes evidence?

Marsha: In the medical model you can cut someone open and see what's going on. With the brain, you can't do that.

Professor J.: The evidence and symptomology is indirect. Who here is a psychology major?

Marilyn raises her hand.

Professor J.: What are the two hypotheses that are trouble for his readers and his audience? Let's go to p. 25. Professor J. reads. Then he says "He anticipates our objections.

Mo: Mental process is thought to be unconscious.

Nora: People will be upset because they think they have control of their body and their mind. It's a control issue between you and your unconscious.

Professor J.: Right. He puts a lot of weight on unseen things.

Nora: It means we are animals, even though we analyze things and

animals don't.

Professor J.: And, that makes us uncomfortable, vulnerable and weak. What's the second one?

Mo: We are governed by instinctual impulses that are largely sexual.

Patricia: What page is that on?

Mo: Page 26.

Professor J.: How does that make you feel?

Marsha: Like an animal.

Kelly: I have a question. Does Freud say we do things and we don't know why we do them at all?

Professor J. asks: What are parapraxes?

Kelly: One is a slip of the tongue another one has to do with names.

Marilyn: Misreading.

George: Mishearing.

Barbie: Forgetting and not remembering.

Marilyn: Mislacing.

Professor J.: What do they have in common?

Laura: They're mistakes, things we didn't mean to do.

Professor J. then goes through the list of things that are commonly misplaced and appointments that are missed. He asks if the students experience this. They raise their hands for every single one as he goes down the list.

Professor J. and George have a fast-paced dialog about whether parapraxes matters and why it happens. Marilyn joins into the dialog. The conversation is jokey and funny but also educational. They have a discussion about losing things.

Professor J.: Where does he draw his evidence?

Marsha: Shakespeare. *The Merchant of Venice*.

Professor J.: Is this a work of science?

Jennifer: Yes. It's not chemistry, but it is science.

Professor J.: Does Freud think it is science? George, can you bring in Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* as evidence in science?

Brittany: His ideas are so bogus.

The students who actively participated did not receive the course content passively. They interacted with it, sometimes disagreeing with the theories presented. They interrogated the content, asking questions from their own experience to see if their understanding squared with the concepts presented to them. More than what the professor did, these behaviors created a dialogic classroom culture, with discourse and interaction as the primary intellectual activity. This runs counter to the structuralism promulgated by Bourdieu and Foucault. They argue that social hierarchy and culture forms a fortress that

is rarely if ever breached through a bottom-up offensive. For Foucault power is clearly transmitted one way, from the top down, from elites to the lower classes (1994). Bourdieu argues that individuals interact with culture, but are largely unaware of the undergirding power structure, so they tend to replicate it unconsciously (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). However, this was not the case in this class. Students questioned power structures presented during the class discussions. No topic was off limits, as long as it was relevant to the discussion of the day. For the most part, the dialogic nature of the discourse between the students and the professor, and more importantly, between the students and each other showed students questioning the content of the course regularly. There were exceptions of course, for example when the course content interfered with participation, but these exceptions will be addressed later. A format where the professor lectures to the students on the value and the meaning of these books would more be more likely to replicate existing power structures. Prof. J. had created the structure for what was essentially a discourse ecology (Erickson, 2004) where students were encouraged to examine course content as they assimilated it and also to examine the power relationships the content addressed.

Bartoleme de Las Casas, A Brief Account of the Destruction of the Indies

In this text, the important concept is genocide. No text elicited such a vehement challenge from the students. As the following excerpt from class discussion around the text shows, many students were unwilling to accept the account as provided by the author citing lack of evidence as the basis for their incredulity.

Professor J.: What are you noticing from your reading?

Mark says: The numbers seem exaggerated. In one day 5,000 people are killed and it seems ridiculous.

Brittany: On page 21 he says ‘an infinite number of people are killed.’
Professor J.: So, this is causing some skepticism?
Mitchell: He makes it seem like it happens all at once and this would make more sense if it happened over time. He can’t tell time very well.
Professor J.: Why would he give himself the license to play with the numbers like this?
Mo: He’s trying to prove his point that it was a really bad thing. It was so bad that he uses ‘infinite.’
Barbie: They don’t care how many they were killing. Maybe he’s the only one keeping count. It doesn’t say that the Spaniards are writing it down, just that they are killing and burning.
Professor J.: Who would pay attention to the numbers?
Jessica: Off of what Barbie said, maybe the numbers are his first reaction and then he went back later and made an exaggerated guess.
Brittany: When he first says the tragedy, it is so horrible that he uses emotional words like ‘infinite.’ It’s like a holocaust and you can’t conceive of it.
Patricia: I’m coming from another perspective. They didn’t have an original population count. They don’t know how many they killed. They tricked them.
Brittany: In the holocaust we don’t know how many people died. We have records, but they didn’t write every name down. I’m skeptical of the exaggeration.
Mitchell: Was he in all of these places. Also, what does the money mean?
Professor J.: Why are we skeptical of the numbers?
Mitchell: He’s writing it persuasively, so he’s not going to put the numbers on their side. I think he’s expanding the numbers.
Brittany: He’s only seeing the negative. He is a priest so he’s not a writer, so he doesn’t know how to use the language.
Mary: Because he’s a priest, what he says people will believe.
Jessica: Isn’t there a situation at this time with corruption in the Catholic church? The characters have no depth. The Spaniards are bad and the Americans are good and that is it.
Professor J.: I want to get back to the numbers. Do we share expectations about how we make an argument?
Mitchell: He’s a priest, so he’s reading religious texts and don’t religious texts exaggerate things? Maybe that’s how he writes. Also, mass destruction afterwards of the lands? He makes it seem like everything is barren afterward.
Jessica: With those metaphors he’s trying to show how bad it was. The numbers matter because we make things seem better than they are.

Professor J. never directly mentioned, nor defined, the word genocide in the three classes devoted to analyzing *A Short History of the Destruction of the Indies*; nevertheless, the students arrive at an understanding of the concept through class

discussion. Nor was the concept introduced to the students in a more abstract way before they read the text. That human beings engage in systematic killing of other humans is a dark and difficult concept to fathom, and the students had a difficult time coming to terms with the text. This may be one of the reasons that initially the students had such an unwillingness to believe the account in the book. As is apparent in the previous example, the students took turns expressing disbelief. It was only when one student confessed to having a painful emotional response to the description of the infanticide described in the book that the tone of the class changed and the discussion shifted to deeper meanings.

Brittany admits: In my head I'm making myself more skeptical because it was so bad. I love children and the 7,000 children were so terrible. I had to stop. I'm reading it as a fiction work. I know it's real or whatever, but I can't read it like that.

Theresa: I had the same reaction. I read that they took babies from their mothers and dashed their heads against the rocks.

Porter then relates the book to the book to another one of his classes. In that class he studies how Christianity contributed to slavery. He relates that his professor argues that they wanted the slaves to become Christian because it made them more submissive.

Brittany: Maybe he had a group of people who went out and he took what other people saw and felt. I don't think all of these things happened in one place.

Mitchell: This is not exaggerated, if you compare it to other genocides like the holocaust or whatever happened in Africa. People do this because they are brainwashed. Compared to other things, there is truth here.

Patricia: It brings up the profit motive and how they wanted the land.

The students were further along in the semester and their reading and critical thinking skills were improving. Just as he had with Freud and the concept of the unconscious, Professor J. had allowed the students to come to an understanding of the implications of the text in their own time and in their own way. Many students found this account of genocide alarming, but were glad to have been exposed to it.

I just think it is interesting, the *Las Casas* especially. We never read something that brutal in high school, because they would never expose us to something like that. I think it was shocking that you could read that for class and talk about that in class (Rebecca, Personal Interview, February 2013).

Gloria Anzaldua, Borderlands/La Frontera

Professor J. began the section of classes devoted to *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987, 2007), by Anzaldua, in an usual way. The day the class was scheduled to begin the book, I ran into Professor J. in the elevator. He wore an old Boston policeman's shirt in thick blue cotton, with a patch on his left shoulder.

Once he entered the classroom, Professor J. taped off half of the class with duct tape. This put one half the conference table that dominated the room on one side of the tape and the other half on the other side. He moved some of the students out of their normal seats and forced them to sit on the other side of the room.

As the beginning of class got closer, he stopped students as they entered the room and demanded identification. If they didn't have identification, and many of them did not, he quizzed them about their affiliation to the school and what right they thought they had to enter the room. While the students being questioned were nervous, the students already seated were delighted at this. The more aggressive he became in the interrogation, the more the students laughed. He announced that he was a border guard and the entrance to the classroom was now a border crossing. He began to question the entering students about what language they spoke and where they were born. At various points he engaged the already seated students to ask them if those being detained at the classroom entrance should be let through.

He gave one good-natured student, Porter, a particularly hard time because his last name was of Spanish origin. For no clear reason, Professor J. did not accept Porter's university identification and cross-examined him as to his native language. He behaved as if Porter were suspicious and seated him on the side of the class that Professor J. had designated for foreigners. The students began to call it the wrong side, even though half of them sat on that side for every class meeting. Porter now sat on the 'wrong' side of the class, which is to say Professor J.'s left side or the side to which he gave more eye contact.

Without warning, Professor J. moved the tape so that Porter sat on the right side, where according to the rules of the game he should not have been sitting because he had been labeled a foreigner. Professor J. asked the class what should be done with Porter. “Deport him!” the students shouted. Mo disagreed stating that Porter should be allowed to stay because Professor J. had moved the tape. When class discussion began, Professor J. asked them whether borders are real. Brittany answered that the border is an imaginary line and explained that the border is arbitrary. Mark agreed that the border is made up, even though more security exists in the real world (Class Observation 28 February 2013).

Metacognition and Critical Thinking

Some of the more challenging texts came in the last third of the semester. Indeed this section of the syllabus was designated as ‘Ways of Knowing.’ It began with Plato’s “Euthyphro” from *The Trials of Socrates*. Other texts provided alternative paradigms or through close examination asked the students to examine their biases and assumptions. The latter was almost painful for the students and resulted in some of the most awkward and halting class discussion of the whole semester. Two texts were read next to each other. They were “The Sacrifice of Isaac” from the *King James Bible* and excerpts from the *The Daodejing of Laozi*.

Plato, Dialogs, Euthyphro

Even though Professor J. had been demonstrating it throughout the semester, the class discussion around Euthyphro formally introduced them to the Socratic method:

Professor J. says: In Euthyphro, Socrates is looking for a definition. What is piety?

Professor J. defines inductive and deductive reasoning. He goes through what a syllogism is and explains that the strength of the syllogism rests on the strength of the premise. Then he directs them to pay close attention to the text.

Professor J.: What exactly is going on in Euthyphro? What is the setting? Where is this taking place?

Barbie: Isn’t it at the courthouse or near the courthouse?

Professor J.: Why there?

Barbie: They are talking about where they are and why they are there.
 Professor J.: Right. They are talking about the stakes, why Socrates is there and why Euthyphro is there.
 Mitchell: Euthyphro is there to prosecute his father.
 Barbie: To indict Socrates.
 Mitchell: Define indictment?
 Theresa: It's a lawsuit.
 Mitchell: They represent both and opposite sides of the law.
 Professor J.: Why think about these two cases in the same context?
 Jennifer: Socrates' case is about corrupting the youth.
 Professor J.: There are two parts to this.
 Suzie: He's trying to teach them to question things.
 Professor J.: Well, we see it that way, but there is a change here. Who are these youth? They're young boys, but he's not buying them liquor.
 Mitchell: He's invented new Gods.
 Professor J.: What does it mean to accuse someone of inventing new Gods and disregarding the old ones?
 Mitchell: There is no freedom of religion.
 Professor J.: This is a test of what thinking is. (Class Observation, 04 Feb 2013)

Professor J. then asked them to examine the implications of Socrates indictment and in so doing questioned them on what a definition is and what is not. He guided them to see the fallacy of arguing by example.

Kelly: But if the law is bigger than the Gods, then it ...
 Professor J.: Correct. What is the role of religion here? How does he begin to explain what piety is? Who are the impious? Who are pious?
 Jennifer: Above 5C, it say what he does is prosecuting for justice.
 Professor J.: If you say piety is what I am doing, what kind of an answer is that?
 Theresa: It's an example.
 Professor J.: Is an example a definition?
 Theresa: No.
 Professor J.: So you're explaining, but not showing. This is key, because if I ask you to define what fruitless is and you say orange, is that a definition?
 Jennifer: No. It's just one example.
 Professor J.: Follow it to section 6D and 6E. He reads. "I want to draw your attention to the form itself and the essential qualities. Euthyphro says what is pious is what is loved by the Gods. What is impious is not loved by the Gods. Does this make topical sense?
 Theresa: Not to Socrates. He argues that the Gods don't always agree.
 Professor J.: What does he discover?

Theresa: The Gods argue and they quarrel.
Professor J.: When we disagree about things, which of these things is bigger, the grapefruit or the tennis ball?
Mo jokes: The tennis ball.
Christie: The tennis ball?
Suzie: We can look at the circumference and the area. We can measure it.
Professor J.: You can calculate it.
Mo is playing the devil's advocate to full effect arguing that the tennis ball is bigger.
Mo: I will never change my mind.
Jack smirks and agrees with Mo that the grapefruit is bigger.
Professor J.: We do quarrel about things that don't have an easy resolution. What are the issues that drive people to war?
The students look through the text. There is an extended silence.
Professor J.: Section 7D: the good and the bad.
Suzie: Those things are hard to measure.
Professor J.: Can we measure good and bad, ugly and beautiful, just and unjust.
Marilyn: You can't measure them.
Professor J. writes on the whiteboard the question: Is it pious because it is loved by the Gods or do the Gods love it because it is pious?
He asks: Do they mean the same things?
Porter: They don't necessarily. The first implies that the Gods make the decisions, the second implies that the rules are already established.
Professor J. reiterates what Porter has just said and asks: What else does the second one imply?
Suzie: That the Gods don't really have control (Class Observation, 04 April 2013).

During this discussion I was able to see the enjoyment the students took in the discussion. They laughed at Professor J.'s jokes and made small comments to each other. Although the class discussions followed a hub-and-spoke pattern, with Professor J. generating the questions and students responding back to him, the students seemed more comfortable in their responses, more trusting of their own ability to analyze the texts. There were moments of playfulness with Mo and Jack, who were often silent during class discussions. This gave me the impression that the class had reached a level of rapport where the students would begin to directly ask and answer questions of each other without having to go through Professor J. However, during a subsequent class discussion,

the students seemed to regress to behaviors exhibited at the beginning of the semester. This showed that the choice of text had a distinct effect on the quality of the in-class interaction.

Despite their success unpacking Euthyphro, the students were much less comfortable applying the Socratic method to a text from their own cultural tradition, particularly a sacred text. When it came time to closely analyze Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis, both rhetorically and in terms of its implications, the students were uncooperative:

Professor J. hands out extra copies of the bible for those who didn't bring the book. He directs the students to chapter 22. Marsha explains that this is about Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac.

Professor J.: What do you notice? How do you feel? What is going on? How is it told?

Silence.

Professor J. reads from the chapter: What does Abraham do?

Silence.

Professor J.: What does he not do?

Silence.

Professor J. Are there things that are not revealed here?

Patricia: He does what he's told. He doesn't kill him.

Professor J.: Any thinking about Abraham's reaction?

Mary: Isn't it weird that he doesn't question it?"

Professor J.: What does that tell you?

Silence.

Professor J.: What the questions and what are we thinking about Abraham? Is it fair to ask what is going on in Abraham's mind? What kind of a story is this?

Silence.

Professor J.: This is a free zone. You are not going to be punished for trying to make sense of what is here in the text. No one is going to get hurt. What questions do we want to ask?

Mary: The thing that is missing is what he is feeling.

Professor J.: What's going on in his mind?

Mitchell: He's struggling, maybe. He hesitates.

Kelly: Maybe they left stuff out on purpose to show only what God wants will happen. It's manipulative. It tells people that they should follow God the way that Abraham did. Don't question God.

Porter defends the story. He feels the story has value.
Professor J. leans forward.
Marsha yawns. (Class Observation, 16 April 2013)

The Daodejing by Laozi

The Dao, as it is commonly called, contains many fundamental concepts that are part of Asian spiritual traditions. One important idea that is important in Daoism is the concept of detachment. This can be particularly difficult for Westerners to grasp when it is first introduced to them. It runs counter to many streams of thought in Western philosophy and religion.

Professor J. asks if they see any spatial metaphors in the text.
Silence.

Professor J.: The silence is so deafening. Are you performing the Dao?

Patricia: I don't get this book. This is the only book this semester where I cannot get into it at all.

Professor J.: What makes it hard?

Patricia: Well it's a book of poems and I'm not a poem person.

Marsha: A lot of it is really contradictory, particularly the parts that are about non-action.

Professor J.: Why is that a problem?

Jennifer: Because you read one sentence, and then you read the next one and it says the opposite.

Professor J.: Do we normally accept contradictory statements?

Mitchell: No. We are trained to accept statements of fact.

Professor J.: Are there facts here?

Mitchell: If you think about it, it makes sense. There's more thinking involved.

Jessica: We think right or wrong, left or right, and this text is about both existing at once.

Mitchell: If you compare it to Plato and Socrates, they said this is not this, so is this, therefore it is this. The Dao says this is not this, so figure it out.

Jennifer reads from p. 51: I find this contradictory.

Professor J.: Why would a philosopher argue to do less? Are you told to do less? What does it mean not to do?

Kelly responds with an example of two divergent paths: One is everything you believe. The other is the opposite of what you believe.

Mitchell: When you meditate, you do nothing.

Many students express confusion about the concept of non-action.

Professor J.: What is meditation?

The students can't or don't answer.

Jessica: The second you decide to act it becomes an action. Didn't we say that in chapter two?

Brittany: Even if you're meditating, you are making a choice to not act. You still breathe.

Marsha: It's something we've never experienced before. We are always acting and standing

Professor J.: I think you have done this.

Marsha: Do you mean when I chose not to react to something?

Jessica: But isn't the choice not to act an action?

Professor J. draws a bicycle wheel on the board. It makes a hub-and-spoke pattern.

Professor J.: How does the wheel move? What is there?

He points to the hub: I'm asking about this shape.

The students confer with each other. They acknowledge that for the wheel to turn, so that the carriage moves, the hub must be empty. The axle has to go into the empty space.

Professor J.: It's the empty space that allows the carriage to move. It's the emptiness, the lack. Its emptiness is a necessity.

Professor J. holds up Jessica's water bottle: What does it need to hold water?

There is collective aha! sound from the class.

Marsha and Brittany engage in a quiet dialog with each other, after which Brittany asks Professor J. about what makes a room. Marsha explains the concept to her. Jessica agrees with Marsha. Brittany nods her head.

Professor J.: Attain extreme tenuousness! What does this mean?

Mo: To be weak.

Silence.

Mitchell: It means you let go of the world around you.

In his blog, one student explained how this classroom interaction had made the opaque concept of nothingness clearer. In this way, the blogs were extremely valuable as they forced students to engage with the material even if they were reluctant to speak in class.

When discussing the topic in class it wasn't very clear to me what the Dao actually was until the idea of the wheel, the spokes, and the empty space was explored. We discussed how the empty space is what actually allows the wheel to move. This idea of the empty space being the crucial part carries over into every

facet of life, whether you look at a water bottle, which wouldn't be a water bottle unless it was hollowed out on the inside, or even a room, which wouldn't act as a room without doors or windows. After exploring this idea it's hard not to look around at everything you see and think in terms of the Dao (Richie, Blog Post, 26 April 2013).

Another student reflected on how this idea is a difficult one to grasp for a person educated in the Western tradition of rationalism,

When talking about the Dao, we find it very hard to understand because of our western culture and upbringing. The fact that something can have no action do nothing or be nothing is something that has to be a hard concept to understand. With the exercise I was able to better understand exactly what the Dao was about. It's this understanding about how we can't have some things or their use without the something missing in them.

This discussion took place at the end of the semester, where the students were much more likely to exhibit pro-social learning behaviors. I observed more cross-talk or student-to-student interaction during this exchange, less trepidation around asking questions of the professor, and more of a willingness to examine their assumptions and biases by beginning their comments with "I'm not sure about this..." or "I've always thought that..."

Academic Management Skills

One of the most interesting patterns that emerged from the research is the correlation between academic management or organizational skills and critical thinking skills. The more highly developed a student's academic management skills, that is the skills around note-taking or keeping track of ideas presented in class, outlining and revision of written work, meeting with professors or tutors, and self-regulation to keep abreast of reading requirements and to meet deadlines, the more likely the student was to see GB100 as valuable and connected to other classes.

Jennifer was a good example of this. At the both the beginning and end of the semester she described herself as liking GB100 and having strong study skills. At the end of the semester she reported,

I did really enjoy the class. I learned how to analyze texts and look deeper than what the surface meaning tells you and how there is a lot behind what the author is trying to say. It could have one meaning, but if you analyze the text deeper it really could have a different one. I think that I can take that with me and use it in other classes, not just English classes, but other classes throughout my academic career (Jennifer, Personal Follow-up Interview, 11 June 2013).

As an example of her development, here are two blogs posts showing the development critical thinking skills, one from the beginning of the class and one that she wrote midway through the semester. In the first, she merely reiterates the reading.

Lines 220-225 in Table III of *Gilgamesh* describe Enkidu and Gilgamesh preparing to leave for their voyage to the Forest of Cedar to fight the ferocious Humbaba. This passage comes after the two have paid a visit to Gilgamesh's mother, Ninsun, where she adopts Enkidu as her own son. This passage of the text describes why it is important for Gilgamesh to let Enkidu lead them in their journey to the Forest of Cedars. (Jennifer, Blog Post, 30 January 2013).

But, by the middle of the semester she is analyzing the text and using it as platform to ask questions about her own life.

Anzaldua's text and the discussion in class today got me thinking today, how do we identify ourselves as people? From the reactions in class, I noticed that it's a very confusing and uncomfortable question to ask. From reading *La Frontera* I feel Anzaldua identifies herself with gender and culture. Regarding gender, Anzaldua states that "I know things older than Freud, older than gender." I feel Anzaldua does not agree with how society tries to find logic and science (Freud) behind sexuality and that it is only one part of our overall identity. On the subject of culture, I feel Anzaldua is trying to find where she fits in (Jennifer, Blog Post, 05 March 2013).

More importantly, students who began the semester viewing GB100 as a pointless academic requirement, were more likely to have changed their minds by the end of the semester to say that the class had helped them develop useful critical thinking skills, if they were able to improve their academic management skills.

I don't know what I said the first time, but I remember I wasn't really enthusiastic about the class. My perception of it definitely changed. I think I learned a lot throughout the class, and I became a lot better of a writer and a reader. I think it was mostly Profesor J. The way he kind of explained everything, it was interesting. I was intrigued to learn more. Then my writing progressed because I was more interested (Rebecca, Personal Follow-up Interview, 11 June 2013).

Mark, one of the more uninterested students, started the semester resigned to the class as an onerous general education requirement saying,

It's just one of those 'geneds' to make you more rounded. Maybe a different kind of text would help. All of these are older texts. *Gilgamesh*, I know it says it's a classic, but it's half a book. I don't want to buy a book and guess what is written in it (Mark, Personal Interview, 09 April 2013).

However, by the end of the semester he reported that he had improved both his analytical and his organizational skills.

Looking back, reading between the lines and analyzing, I can relate specifically to that. I got better at analyzing the content and putting that into something I can relate to. Some of the more classical texts, like the Socrates one where he's questioning the guy testifying against his Dad, because his Dad had killed someone. I've never had to do that with my Dad, but if one of my friends did something or had the same dilemma I could relate to it... The readings you had to do required a lot of time management. You had to set aside time to read most of the text. I learned summarizing after reading a large story, just going back and reviewing it and making sure that I can explain what I just read to myself (Mark, Personal Follow-up Interview, 05 June 2013).

Analysis

The required, weekly blog post forum became an important place for students to examine their own thoughts and feelings on what they were reading. Moreover, these blogs had the added benefit of allowing reluctant speakers to grapple and disagree with the material in less exposed forum. Quite often the students posted their thoughts to the blog when they encountered a way of knowing that did not square with their frame of reference or when a concept made them uncomfortable. The blog provided a much needed outlet for students to freely question the material and unlike the class discussion, mandatory participation was required. I saw resistance to new ideas when the students encountered Freud's theory of the unconscious.

Freud's story of the man misplacing a book his wife gave him, and then finding it when he began to appreciate her more is presented to illustrate his point, however it brought out my skepticism. This, along with the other "evidence" of his theories seem to show that he may over-analyze some situations and tailor the story to fit the point he is trying to prove. The evidence he presents is not concrete and entirely too subjective for me to fully go along with his theories (Theresa, Blog Post, 22 March 2013).

And when they chafed at the deeper analysis the class demanded,

We talked about Freud and his theories on our unconscious. He believes that if we have a dream about something it's from an unconscious thought we have. He also says we know what our dreams mean but we don't know

what they mean, because we don't know we know what they mean. It seems to me that Freud is making things more complicated than they have to be (Mark, Blog Post, 21 March 2013).

Or, they were unwilling to accept an important part of the theory,

I disagree with Freud that these types of parapraxes are indications of hidden thoughts. A person that forgets their keys every day is not disinclined to go somewhere if it happens all the time, even in instances of pleasure, such as a date. Some people are just naturally forgetful. While he has some important insights and made great leaps in the study of psychology, Freud overanalyzes many aspects of life that are better left to the universe (Marsha, Blog Post, 22 March 2013).

This idea that there was too much unnecessary analysis appeared frequently in the blog posts. It was not limited to Freud's theory of the unconscious. At times students dismissed close analysis of text as a fruitless exercise around a sacred text from another cultural tradition,

We think much too much about these writings and about life. The Dao is not meant to be analyzed and picked apart, considering form and rhetoric. They are meant to be read and taken as is. It's really difficult to do so because they are so contradictory in such simple terms. This leads us to analyze more than we need to (Laura, Blog Post, 19 April 2013).

Or, one from their own cultural tradition.

Today in class we discussed and analyzed the first three or four chapters in Genesis. Like I said in class it is more difficult for me to analyze this because I have a more bias view on it because of my religious background and from growing up learning of the catholic religion (Brittany, Blog Post, 11 April, 2013)

In many cases, students manifested this lack of desire to dig deeply by not researching the authors they read in class or further into the topics that they found challenging. This is one of the CIRP habits of mind survey questions, so I was particularly interested to see if the students exhibited this behavior. Only three of the students reported that they did this.

Self-directed Learning

Self-directed learning is considered a strong indicator of critical thinking skills, I wanted to focus on their learning habits outside of class. To better understand their abilities as researchers, I asked them where they learned to do research at the university level. All of the students described writing research papers in their prerequisite writing class, whether that class had been taken at Midlantic or not. In that prerequisite writing class, they all confirmed that they had received research training, which is to say a class session devoted exclusively to showing them the university library website and how to access different features provided on it. Great Books, because of its exegetical focus, does not require outside research for any of the assignments (see Appendix B). If the students research topics for the class, they do so voluntarily.

Only five of the twenty-five students researched further into the topics and then allowed what they learned to inform their understanding. This occurred when they were challenged or disturbed by what they were learning in Great Books. In the class discussion on Las Casas' *A Brief Account of the Destruction of the Indies* captured for this study, we see Brittany refusing to believe the account of genocide. Here we see her following up. We also see her evaluating the quality of the information she finds.

For this week's blog I am just going to write just a little about my findings when I searched the web a little more about what really happened and also my opinions on the overall book. The first thing that came up was Wikipedia. Obviously I was a little hesitant reading a wiki page but when I started to read about Las Casas, I found out a lot of information. One of the things that I read was that in his early writings he actually advocated the use of African slaves vs. Indian slaves. Some critics give him partial responsibility for the transatlantic slave trade. Another fun fact I found where he spent almost his entire life, 50 years, "actively fighting slavery and the violent colonial abuse of indigenous peoples." In regards to the numbers of people that were killed, the numbers are actually pretty close

according to a few articles that I read. It is amazing what humans can do, without remorse, to another human. Even though I am still skeptical, it would only be because I don't want to believe in such evil. As young adults I believe that all of us have a hard time believing in this because of the simple and internal innocence of our generation. We have never had to experience a genocide or holocaust like past generations have experienced first-hand. I also feel that this has a negative effect on us to where we sometimes question too much of something (Brittany, Blog Post, 28 February 2013).

Janet also reported doing more in-depth research on her own. In her case, it was not because she wanted to refute what she learned, but rather out of a desire to know more. In part, it was also facilitated by the assignment design within the course. She had chosen a paper topic that asked her to examine the female characters in Gilgamesh. This had inspired her to look closer into the specific characters.

Yes I have explored topics. I can say for *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, learning about Ishtar, she was a very funny character to me, because she always wanted things her way. I wanted to know more about her. I did do some research about her. In the epic, she was known as the ablest of gods, whereas in other stories, she was known as the god of love and fertility. I find that hard to believe, because she was so evil, but I guess her love will suck the guys in. She did the evil things in all her marriages. My paper is not based on her, but I did some background information on her, just to know. I get curious (Janet, Personal Interview, 28 February 2013).

In our interview, Suzie described an ongoing theological curiosity.

I definitely research topics on my own. I had a religion class that I thought was pretty interesting. I like learning about different religions, because it shows the different ways people think (Suzie, Personal Interview, 07 March 2013).

Then, in a blog post later she described researching for Great Books.

This week we started a new book, *The Trials of Socrates*, which led to the immergence of new topics. The one I want to focus on is Socrates himself and his quest to find the meaning of piety. Now, going to Google or using the dictionary you will find the definition of piety being, the quality of being religious or reverent; a belief or point of view that is accepted with unthinking conventional reverence. In order to define this word, which in

the past time of Socrates era one was not specifically able to give a definition without using examples of what piety can take form as. Socrates is known for using his systematic questioning inducting the questions of, who, what, where, when, why, and how to find an answer. Combined with this way of solving a question, he also uses abduction to get a result. This means to reach a general inference from particular truth, which is what provided examples and scenarios of being pious helped in producing a definition of the word. Socrates was a man with a very curious mind, always questioning and trying to prove the meaning and underlying factor of particular subjects. Some of these subjects are controversial because of the time period, and because it was combating what has been engrained into society for so long (Suzie, Blog Post, 5 April 2013).

But, the majority students who reported researching further, when queried about the Great Books' topic that had piqued their curiosity, reported that they did little more than superficial query. This was true even when whether they agreed or disagreed with the concepts presented in class.

With Gilgamesh I looked up writings from that era. It was very brief, just curiosity. It was the history aspect of that time period. Just to look at the history at that time. It was the time period, I wanted to look more. I looked up a little bit on Cortez, but besides that it wasn't really in my... I didn't favor that subject. (Mitchell, Personal Interview, 21 March 2013).

And, when they did research a topic, it generally involved Wikipedia.

Maybe I have been a little bit inspired to look things up. Last class we were talking about Freud, Sigmund. I remember taking AP psych in senior year and remember learning about him, but I wasn't quite sure. There's dim early memory. When I got back from the class after this, just to chill out, I looked on Wikipedia on Sigmund Freud. They had a little thing about him. He's the doctor of psychoanalysis (Jeremy, Personal Interview, 07 March 2013).

Self-reflection and Metacognition

Initially, at the beginning of the semester, the majority of the students used the blog posts to recapitulate what they had read, but for some that changed over time. They began to compare the texts to their own lives and reflect on the implications of the ideas

presented to them. Here is Marilyn comparing the questions asked in Euthyphro to the questions she is allowed to ask.

I was intrigued by the pious discussion. One of the ideas brought to the table was if the Greek Gods love something because it is pious, or if something is pious because the Gods love it. I think this kind of question is a great example of the way of thinking of a philosopher. And I don't think this was an unusual question for Socrates to ask. I think it is relevant and interesting to hear discussion about this. That's why it is so shocking to me that such a question could cause such an uproar and make Socrates go to trial. In this question, I didn't notice Socrates "preaching" or even sharing his opinion on the matter. Simply, he was attempting to get others to look at things more closely. Challenge their ideas. I don't see this as a corruption of youth whatsoever. I guess it just shows the difference in the time periods in which we live. We really are lucky to have the freedom to explore different ideas, even if they stray from the majority view. I feel really bad for Socrates being tried for asking questions like this. Definitely not pious, Athens (Marilyn, Blog Post, 04 April 2013).

CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

Research Questions

The section answers the three research questions that guided this study. They were:

1. Do students recognize critical thinking as it is taught to them?
2. How do students absorb and manifest critical thinking skills in this course?
3. Once they have been exposed to critical thinking, do students use it in other contexts?

This is followed by the study's contribution to the literature, implication for practice, and recommendations for future research.

The theory of student engagement provided the structural foundation for this study. Colleges and universities want students to be academically engaged, as engaged students are more likely to graduate. The theory of student engagement generated my guiding hypothesis that increased critical thinking would lead to improved student outcomes particularly around engagement (Carini Kuh & Klein, 2006). Students come to critical thinking through habits of mind (CIRP, 2011). Habits of mind function as metastrategic gateway behaviors that take place as students first begin to develop their critical thinking abilities. This supports the concept of critical thinking as a staged process. Habits of mind are behaviors that are evidence of the early stages of critical thinking. Content specific critical thinking comes later, after it first develops out of the behaviors manifested as habits of mind.

Do students recognize critical thinking as it is taught to them?

All of the students in the class were able to articulate that they recognized that the goal of the course was to become a better reader, but only five of the twenty-five stated explicitly that they saw GB100 as a critical thinking course. All five of these students were transfer students, and all five were women. Four of the five were Caucasian and one was African American. These five ranged in their level of class participation. One was a first-line discussant, three were second-line, and one was third-line. The majority of the students in the class did not recognize critical thinking as it was taught to them. All of the men in the class fell into this 80 percent.

All of the students in the class reported that the class discussions were interactive, with a wide variety of opinions expressed, and that they understood that the goal of these discussions was not to find a correct answer, but rather examine all sides of a subject. Sixteen students reported that they valued these discussions; however, only the five students who identified critical thinking as a course goal saw the interactive classroom discussion as the link between the course texts and the widening of their perspective and understanding. The interactions that took place in the class did not bring the students to an understanding of the concept of critical thinking.

This is related to the way course outcomes were articulated to the students. The GB100 syllabus does not state that critical thinking is an explicit course goal. The course goals, as stated in the syllabus, say that the class will teach the students to “read difficult texts, recognize positions taken and rhetoric used, identify continuities and discontinuities across texts, and make connections to other material and experiences outside these readings” (Course Outcomes, GB100 Course Syllabus, Spring 2013); the Midlantic

general education website includes critical thinking as the first general education outcome, stating that “students who think critically recognize an object of investigation, frame questions about it, and interrogate assumptions—explicit or implicit. Critical thinking includes the evaluation of evidence, analysis and synthesis of multiple sources, and reflection on varied perspectives” (Midlantic University Website, 01 Aug 2013). Thus, while critical thinking is an explicit student learning goal set by the university, this message is not conveyed to the students directly through the course.

How do students absorb and manifest critical thinking skills in this course?

Students described social interaction as important to their learning. This brings up the possibility that students evolve into early stage critical thinking through more social, interactive modes of learning. This will be discussed in further in recommendations for research. GB100’s large group discussion seminar format favored extroverts. Every student reported that they enjoyed the discussions, even if they were not active participants, but they were much more likely to describe the class as valuable and connect it to other classes, if they were active participants. In the class itself, there was limited student-to-student interaction facilitated through smaller study groups or in-class team work.

Students reported that having a network of fellow learners matters to their academic success. The stronger the academic relationships in that network the more likely the student was to identify critical thinking as a course goal. Students who had long standing academic relationships tended to like the course better and see it value in relation to other courses. They reported consulting with their peers on projects and giving

them work to edit and proofread and more importantly, they reported helping their friends learn in the same way.

The stronger that network the more likely the student was to identify critical thinking as a course goal. Six of the students in GB100 described having a strong academic relationship with a trustworthy adult, often a parent or sibling, but sometimes an older student, who was deeply invested in their academic success. They described sending their work to these mentors before submitting their work to the professor for all of their classes. Two of these six mentored students were from the other group of five students who saw GB100 as a critical thinking class. Other students had forged academic relationships with roommates and friends at Midlantic. They reported consulting with their peers on projects and giving them work to edit and proofread and more importantly, they reported helping their friends learn in the same way. Three students from the group of five students who saw GB100 as a critical thinking class came from this group.

All of the students who reported conferencing with the professor, described it as helpful and productive. These conferences were required, if the student opted to rewrite their paper for a better grade. Thus, students were incentivized to rewrite their work. More than 80 percent of the class took advantage of the opportunity. Even those students who described the course as a requirement that needed to be fulfilled and not valuable overall, reported the student-professor conferences useful. The students in this class valued one-on-one interactions with the professor.

Very few students in the class explored topics on their own. If they did so, they performed a simple Google search that led them to Wikipedia, and stopped there. Once

again, the students who conducted more in-depth research came from the group of students who identified the course as critical thinking focused.

Once they have been exposed to critical thinking, do students use it in other contexts?

Once again, the five students who identified the course as a critical thinking course were able to describe how what they learned in GB100 could be applied to their majors. These students also reported an increase in their analytical skills when it came to the texts and reported that the reading of one class text, for example Freud's Introductory Lectures illuminated and expanded how they read other texts such as the Biblical story of Abraham and Isaac in Genesis. The other eighty percent of the students reported that they were unable to connect the learning taking place in GB100 to courses in their major. For the most part, when those students made connections to other classes, they were other classes within the general education curriculum. Five students in the class reported that they were links between Great Books and course entitled Race and Diversity that students took to fulfill their general education social science requirement. Many students described Great Books building on skills that they had learned in English classes they had taken previously. They stated that Great Books helped them become a better writer, and that was useful no matter what path they chose in life.

Contribution to the Literature

The definition of critical thinking remains elusive, but this study adds to the body of work that supports critical thinking as a staged process of learning. The development of critical thinking is an ongoing concern in higher education. Findings presented in the

National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983) and findings based on substandard test scores presented in the Spellings Report (2006) argued that many students do not learn to think critically in college. This lack of critical thinking skill was substantiated by a large-scale study using the College Learning Assessment (Arum & Roska, 2011).

Student voice is largely silent in the ongoing critical thinking debate. There are two major reasons for this. The first is that the definition is contested. Critical thinking isn't communicated to faculty members and thereby to students, and professors do not formally gauge their students' level of critical thinking ability when they enter a class. This has serious implications for program design, as it can lead to professors repeating each other in the kinds of assignments they design and the learning they promote, so students can learn the same thing in a number of classes, or can miss instruction at the intermediate levels, due to poor articulation of the skills and thinking required as the students move step-by-step through a program.

In significant amount, student outcomes are assessed quantitatively. The institutional effort spent in figuring out students' level of critical thinking involves using NSSE or CIRP survey data, and the results of these surveys are not relayed to faculty. They have little impact on teaching practice. Studies that examine faculty member's perceptions of course restructuring around critical thinking goals (Thaxton, 2009) and the methods used in that restructuring (Smith & Stitts, 2013) have value in that they describe a useful process; however, analysis of critical thinking instruction has limited value if it is not tied to student outcomes. Qualitative analyses of student learning, as it is tied to

instruction, can provide a more valid, although potentially less reliable, way to think about success.

This study further stresses the need for a definition of critical thinking that can be applied across the disciplines (Davies, 2013). Faculty cannot design authentic assessments without a goal to work toward. In all areas of assessment, it is impossible to measure student success unless a clear understanding is developed. Assessment must be something students do, it must be measurable, and it must be authentic in order to contribute to any improvement in student learning. Moreover, the communication of the concept of critical thinking to faculty members, as well as integrated professional development programs, cannot occur without a clear definition.

Implications for Practice

While critical thinking is foundational, it is an elusive concept. It is unclear that students recognize critical thinking as a goal of higher education or even know how it is articulated in the curriculum. All regional accreditors make statements about general education, but they leave specific general education outcomes up to each individual institution (Yin and Wolkwein, 2010). There may be a gap between the way accreditors assess critical thinking and the way critical thinking is operationalized in college and university curriculum.

Critical thinking is discussed quantitatively for stakeholders outside of the institution. Accreditors assess academic engagement as one measure of student success. It is a concept based on the simple theory that the more involved a student is in their studies the more likely they are to persist to graduation (Astin, 1999). Despite a plethora of

quantitative measures, they do not explain what these activities mean to the students or how they construct deep knowledge within and through these behaviors. Most importantly, they don't provide guidelines for how institutions of higher education can improve instruction. For the most part, it is left up to isolated faculty members creating authentic assessments around the students they teach.

Great Books instructors are an intelligent and passionate group of people. In many cases, they like the texts that they teach and they like to talk about the larger ideas within those texts. They are less enamored of pedagogical or methodological discussions. For many of them, the dominant instructional mode is still the lecture. Also, how well they know their students is unclear. When asked who their students are, most instructors described them with the word diverse. The instructors have some knowledge of how their students read and how the specific texts can improve their critical reading skills, but they did not report understanding of their students' critical thinking skills.

The instructors do have a sense of how to make inter-textual connections within the course. Some go beyond that goal to make connections to the larger world. Some of the instructors do that creatively and effectively, particularly through the use of innovative assignments and classroom discussion. Moreover, the new structure of the course forces those connections and they seem fully embraced by both the students and the instructors. Each text is chosen because it presents a certain type of challenge for the students, and as it turns out for the instructors as well. Each instructor is highly influenced by their disciplinary training. Finally, many instructors do not mandate that the texts be read in their entirety, despite this as a course mandate, or opt to cut whole texts out completely. Thus, this course outcome may not be completely realistic.

Recommendations for Future Research

The Social Academic Connection

One of the most significant predictors of student persistence from the first to the second year of college or university is the amount of faculty interaction a student experiences (Keup, 2005/2006). There is a collective wisdom in higher education that professors should move away from a lecture format toward a more interactive classroom, where students are encouraged to take in multiple points of view learn to better manage ambiguity (Paul, 1987). Higher education would benefit from a greater understanding of the specific nature of that interaction and the kind of learning it promotes, whether it is small group work, student-led discussion, or the flipped classroom (Alkandari, 2012). More qualitative research is needed to analyze the type and quality of interaction that serves students best.

Young Adult Learners and Executive Function

The development of critical thinking as a defined concept could be aided by drawing upon research on executive function. The idea that young adulthood offers specific learning challenges and opportunities has been corroborated by neuroscientists examining the pre-frontal cortex in young adults found the part of the brain that is responsible for executive function. The brain changes as we age, with pre-frontal lobe activity, also known as executive function peaking in early adulthood and declining as we get older (Hedden & Gabrieli, 2004). The level of executive function maturation rate in young adults aged 16 to 25 is distinct from both adolescents and older adults (Sowell et al, 1999) and research points to it being a more gradual process than originally thought (Giedd, 2004). Executive function goes beyond learned behaviors and habits. It is “self-

directed actions needed to choose goals and to create, enact, and sustain actions toward those goals or more simply as self-regulation” (Barkley, 2012, p. 60). It is described as comprised of five levels: instrumental-self-directed, methodological-self-reliant, tactical-reciprocal, strategic-cooperative, and extended utilitarian (Kelsey, 2013) that could provide a guideline for understanding the stages of critical thinking.

Understanding the development of executive function offers practitioners and researchers a better way to connect theories of adult learning, its process and purpose, under one theoretical umbrella. Its major advantage is that it can be researched empirically, by taking pictures of the brain. Using adult learning theory to better understand critical thinking has proved fruitless. Moreover, leading theorists admit that adult learning theory has reached a crossroads with many competing spontaneous concepts forming a hodgepodge. “We have some foundational theories and models that are being revised, and we have new ways of looking at adult learning, some of which have been borrowed from other disciplines and some of which are certainly colorful!” (Merriam, 2001). Twenty-first century theories of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000), while provocative as they designate this life-stage as distinct from young adulthood, promise to only muddy the theoretical waters further. It, like other theories of young adult development are task oriented, so it runs into a theoretical wall when it tries to explain young adults, who due to circumstantial or developmental deficiency, are not engaging in the appropriate activities (Hendry & Kloep, 2010). The theory of executive function allows us to take a fresh look at young adult learners both individually and within groups.

Summary

Because critical thinking is not stated explicitly as a course goal in GB100, students have a hard time recognizing it as it is taught to them. Students reported that social learning interactions, both in terms of the large group class discussions, conferences with the professor, and eliciting support from members of their academic network, were important to their epistemological success in the class. Nevertheless, few students made the connection between the learning that took place in GB100 and the learning done in other classes, particularly those in their major.

This study contributes to literature on critical thinking that aims to establish a definition around which assessments can be developed and measured. A better understanding of the development stages of critical thinking would contribute to that goal. Future research on the specific benefits of interactive learning and the relationship between critical thinking and executive function hold promise.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEWS

First Interview

Demographic Information

How old are you? Can you tell me about where you grew up, where you went to school as a child? How would you describe your school? Were you encouraged in school?

Points to Address:

Do you like to read? When did that start?

If no, why not?

If yes, what kind of things do you like to read?

Now you are at Temple. Can you tell me about your experience here?

Points to Address:

What is your major?

What year have you reached in your studies?

Have you started taking classes in your major?

If so, how many?

What are your plans after you complete your university degree?

And now you are in this class. What are your initial impressions of the class?

Points to Address:

Did you take writing classes at Temple?

How useful or applicable are they to this class?

How would you describe the texts you will be required to read in this class?

Do you know what the learning outcomes are for this class? Do they seem beneficial to you?

Informational In-class Behavior

How would you describe yourself in class? In what kind of classes do you do best and why?

Do you plan to ask questions of the teacher in class?

If so, can you tell me when you have done this?

Do you ask questions of your fellow students in class?

If so, can you tell me when you have done this?

Do you ever disagree openly with others in class?

If so, can you tell me when you have done this?

Student Work

How would you describe yourself as a student? Are there any things that you do that help you as a student? For example, are there any things that you do that help you when you write papers?

Points to Address:

How do you prepare to write papers?

How do you plan to look up research articles and resources?

How do you evaluate the quality or reliability of information you use?

Do you plan to revise your papers?

What is your revision process?

How do you support your opinions when you write a paper?

How do you seek solutions to problems?

Do you explain solutions to others?

Has anything in the class inspired you to explore topics on your own, even though it was not required for a class?

Do you talk about topics in the class with students outside of class? When did you do this?

Do you see any connections between the content of this class and other classes you are taking? Can you tell me about that?

Student-Professor Interaction

How would you describe a good professor? What kind of relationship do you generally have with your professors? What should the professor do to make that relationship happen? What do you do to make that relationship happen?

Points to Address:

What kind of feedback do you expect from your professor?

Do you plan to meet with your professor outside of class?

How will you arrange to meet with your professor?

How will you respond, if your professor doesn't like your work?

Will you seek feedback on your work from classmates? Why?

Do you plan to take your work to the writing center? Why?

Follow-up Interview

You've already given me your initial impressions of the class, and now I have some more specific questions.

Do you feel the class was challenging? Can you tell me about that?

Did you perceive your learning to be important in this class?

Can you explain in what cases you would be willing to accept mistakes as part of the learning process?

Do you feel like this class will be valuable to you or do you feel it is merely a requirement you must fulfill? Why so?

APPENDIX B: GB100 SYLLABUS

M***

Spring 2013

M*** is a reading intensive course, and the material for our class is a selection of intellectually challenging primary texts. In M***, we begin with the theme of Journeys. Think of this journey as a metaphor for your experience as a student in M***. Because the readings that make up our work in this course are “open texts,” your ideas and responses are essential to the success of our class discussions.

Writing is also an important component of M***. This does not mean that this course is an extension of a composition class, nor is it a writing course with more reading. Core to my teaching philosophy is that you write to learn. In M*** we call this “Writing to read”: the writing you do as part of this course serves your understanding of these texts.

Learning goals: by the end of M*** you will be able to read difficult texts, recognize positions taken and rhetoric used, identify continuities and discontinuities across texts, and make connections to other material and experiences outside these readings. As writers, you will be able to create meaningful college- level prose that engages with and/or questions these source texts. I hope for you to realize this development for yourselves because a skill is most valuable when you can recognize it.

Required texts:

The Epic of Gilgamesh

Las Casas, *Destruction of the Indies*

Anzaldua, *Borderlands/La Frontera*

Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psycho--- Analysis*

Plato, *The Trials of Socrates*

The Daodejing of Laozi

All of the texts listed above are available at both the Midlantic bookstore and Z****. The texts can also be purchased online through Amazon, half.com, and other sites. Please use the specific editions chosen for this course. Check ‘Course information’ on Blackboard for a detailed reading list with specific ISBNs. A limited number of copies of the texts are also on reserve in Paley. In addition to these required texts, there are complementary readings posted to Blackboard (Bb). Keep in mind that these are required texts and you will need printed or electronic copies of these readings. Please be sure to bring the texts assigned for discussion to our class meetings because these will serve as our tools.

Course requirements:

Prerequisites: Students enrolled in M*** have completed Temple's composition requirement or its equivalent.

Paper: There will be one essay (about 3 – 6 pages in length). Topics and guidelines will be distributed at least a week before the essay is due. I encourage you to discuss your paper with me as you work on it (share your prospective ideas, show me your drafts). I normally require that you submit a proposal as part of the writing process for this essay.

Heed deadlines: I reserve the right to not accept written work more than one week late. Guidelines for the grading and evaluation of your written work are posted to our Blackboard course site.

Revision: Writing is a process: we do not write simply to demonstrate our knowledge, but more often we write to discover that knowledge and we make that discovery by returning to and reconsidering our ideas. You will also have an opportunity to revise the paper; in most cases I strongly encourage it. Instructions for the revision process will be distributed in class and posted to Blackboard. Please note that revision is not proofreading, correcting or fixing your written work; it entails a thorough rethinking of the writing project.

Blog: Students are required to maintain a blog on our Blackboard site and post at least one original entry per week; the suggested length for each entry is 150 –250 words. There may be occasional prompts. You should use the blog as a reading journal and explore your reactions to readings, class discussions, or any ideas raised by the course. Your blog postings can be informal but they must respond directly to the course materials – that is, they must clearly and directly engage with the course materials, either by direct paraphrase or quotation. In order to receive a satisfactory grade for the blog assignment, you will need to complete a minimum of ten blog postings by the end of the semester. Blogging will begin in the second week of classes, and you will have at least fourteen opportunities to post to the blog. (I've written reminders into the schedule below; I will also post regular reminders to 'Announcements' on Blackboard.) You can post more than once per week; however, only one posting per week will count towards the blog grade. The goal is for consistent writing. The "week" for blog postings runs from 12:01 a.m., Saturday, to 11:59 p.m. Friday.

Portfolio project: Your final writing project will be to construct a portfolio composed of a selection of blog postings and other informal in-class work. As the semester progresses I will distribute more specific directions.

Quizzes: There will be two quizzes (See schedule below).

Note: The quizzes cannot be rescheduled; there will not be make-ups. Please plan your time accordingly. In addition to the quizzes, there may be occasional short, impromptu (pop) reading quizzes. Be prepared.

Seminar skills (attendance and class participation): Because M*** is a seminar, its success depends upon your regular and active participation. Occasionally the discussions

are free-form; more often they are guided; and very frequently, we will work on specific exercises to enhance critical skills. As you can see from the schedule below, there are a number of specific in-class exercises planned for the course. Therefore, attendance is mandatory; punctuality is expected. I take this very, very seriously. Be aware that your attendance will affect your final grade: four or more absences (the equivalent of two weeks of class) will lead to an automatic failing grade for the seminar skills component of the final grade. Generally, I do not make a distinction between excused and unexcused absences. Illnesses and emergencies do happen; please reserve absences for serious conflicts. Student athletes or others with schedule requirements that conflict with attendance in M*** (away games, practices, field trips) must notify me as soon as possible. Come to each class and come to each class prepared. Complete the readings ahead of time. Make notes. Gather your questions and responses. Bring your text(s) to class. If, however, you very occasionally find yourself behind in an assignment, you should attend class anyway (you can still learn something!) but also inform me that you are lagging in your work.

In-class exercises and the Las Casas wiki: Throughout the semester you'll be working on informal and often collaborative assignments. Although these will not receive letter grades, these exercises are required work and are assessed as part of your seminar skills.

Classroom etiquette: My goal is to create an environment that encourages discussion, curiosity and debate. Everyone should feel free to contribute and to question. You need not be shy about what you ask. Any comment, connection, or speculation that relates to the material and the concerns of the course is welcome. To help create this environment, please keep disruptions to a minimum – so I ask that you refrain from texting and keep mobile phones on silent or vibrate. If you are using a laptop or tablet for the use of electronic versions of the course texts or for note-taking, please keep your use of the device focused on discussion-related tasks.

Grading:

Paper 20%

Portfolio 20%

Quizzes 20%

Blog 20%

Seminar skills 20%

The percentages above serve as guide for determining the final grade. As much as possible, I try to take into account your progress, your consistent and demonstrated effort, and, most importantly, your attitude. At any point should you have any questions about your work in the course, please feel free to meet with me.

Grading scale: Letter grades for the entire course will be assigned as follows:

93% and higher = A

90 – 92.9% = A-

87 – 89.9% = B+

83 – 86.9% = B

80 – 82.9% = B-
77 – 79.9% = C+
73 – 76.9% = C
70 – 72.9% = C-
67 – 69.9% = D+
63 – 66.9% = D
60 – 62.9% = D-
Below 60% = F

Please note that a student must receive a grade of C- or higher to receive Gen Ed (Core) credit for this course. For more information on grading, please consult the Blackboard course site.

Midterm reports: In M***, instructors are required to submit midterm reports for all enrolled students (usually around the 6th week). These inform your advisor as to whether your performance is satisfactory or unsatisfactory, and reflect not only your written work but also your attendance and class participation.

Blackboard: The Blackboard course site is an integral part of the course. Please be prepared to access it several times a week. If you're using a Mac, I strongly suggest using Firefox as your default browser for accessing Blackboard.

Plagiarism and academic honesty: Writing is an essential part of your learning, and the Great Books Program takes your work very seriously. We both require and value your original work. From the Temple University 2011- 2012 Undergraduate Bulletin: "Temple University believes strongly in academic honesty and integrity. Plagiarism and academic cheating are, therefore, prohibited. Essential to intellectual growth is the development of independent thought and a respect for the thoughts of others. The prohibition against plagiarism and cheating is intended to foster this independence and respect.

"Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use of another person's labor, another person's ideas, another person's words, another person's assistance. Normally, all work done for courses – papers, examinations, homework exercises, laboratory reports, oral presentations – is expected to be the individual effort of the student presenting the work. Any assistance must be reported to the instructor. If the work has entailed consulting other resource – journals, books, or other media – these resources must be cited in a manner appropriate to the course. It is the instructor's responsibility to indicate the appropriate manner of citation. Everything used from other sources – suggestions for organization of ideas, ideas themselves, or actual language – must be cited. Failure to cite borrowed material constitutes plagiarism. Undocumented use of materials from the World Wide Web is plagiarism. "Academic cheating is, generally, thwarting or breaking of the general rules of academic work or the specific rules of the individual courses. It includes falsifying data; submitting, without the instructors approval, work in one course which was done for another; helping others to plagiarize or cheat from one's own or another's work; or actually doing the work of another person." Please follow this link to read the complete description of the policy: http://www.*****. The assumption that all work done for courses must be the student's own work is especially important for M***. The penalty for plagiarism in my classes is an automatic failure for the course. Very serious cases

may be referred to the Office of Student Conduct; in some extreme cases, Student Conduct will recommend suspension or expulsion from the University.

Resources:

Disability resources: Temple University strives to make itself accessible to all students. Any student who needs accommodations because of a documented disability should meet with me privately to discuss the situation as soon as possible. Contact Disability Resources and Services at 215-204-1280 in 100 Ritter Annex to coordinate reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities. You can also follow this link: <http://www.tup.edu/disability>

Other academic resources: I am available as a resource, not just in the classroom but outside of it as well. Please feel free to make use of my office hours. If these hours are not convenient for you, I can sometimes arrange other times to meet. The Great Books Program also has a staff of student tutors who have completed both courses in the Great Books sequence and share your perspective as students. The Writing Center in the Temple Learning Center is another resource I encourage you to use for help with your writing assignments in this course as well as others. The Writing Center can be visited online at: <http://www.tup.edu/writing>

Miscellaneous:

- Take notes. Read actively. Reread. Take more notes.
- Because of the rigor of the course, expect to spend at least 6 hours per week outside of class on work for this course.
- Consider finding a study buddy or initiating a study group.
- If you have questions about anything in the course, do not be shy. Please ask.
- I will keep you informed of the specifics of reading assignments in advance, so be sure to keep up with the readings and complete all assignments when due.
- Lastly: MATH 101 is a demanding course. Students perform best in this course when they are able to contribute the time and effort to do well. If you are facing a semester with high demands on your time, I advise you to take Great Books in a semester when you know you can give it your all.

Schedule of assignments:

Below is a sketch of the course calendar. The specific reading assignments (chapters, page numbers, etc.) will be announced in class and posted to Blackboard. Remember that the readings must be completed before class so that you will be prepared for discussions.

Note: I have built extra time into the syllabus should we need some flexibility. As always, the syllabus is subject to change.

Week 1

What is M***?

Tuesday (1/22)

Getting started.

Read Manguel's "A 30,000 Volume Window on the World" and Piper's "The Past, Present, and Future of the Book."

Also: listen to the NPR piece "Chat While Reading." (All under 'Getting Started' on Bb.)

Thursday (1/24)

Introductions.

Review course goals and syllabus.

Read the M*** 851 syllabus carefully. (Be sure to bring a copy of the syllabus – print or electronic –to class.)

Getting to know *Gilgamesh*.

Read the introductory notes (pp. xiii - iv), examine the map and time chart, and read Tablet I (pp. 1-11).

Friday (1/25)

****Please complete the Plagiarism self- test.****

****Student information sheet due.****

****Reading profile due.****

****Links, prompts and dropboxes for all of the above can be found under 'Getting started' on Bb.****

Week 2

Journeys: 'Back in the Day'

Tuesday (1/29)

Continue with *Gilgamesh*.

Read Tablets II – IV (pp. 12 - 39).

Thursday (1/31)

Continue with *Gilgamesh*

Read Tablets V – VII (pp. 39 - 62).

Friday (2/1)

****Blog posting due on Blackboard by 11:59 p.m.****

Week 3

Journeys continued

Monday (2/4)

****Last day to drop a course****

Tuesday (2/5)

Continue with *Gilgamesh*.

Read Tablets VIII and IX (pp. 62 - 75).

Also read “Appendix: From Tablet to Text” (pp. 209 - 221).
In-class exercise on *Gilgamesh*.

Thursday (2/7)
Continue with *Gilgamesh*.
Read Tablets X and XI (pp. 75 - 99).

Friday (2/8)
Blog posting due on Blackboard by 11:59 p.m.

Week 4
Journeys: Troubled travels

Tuesday (2/12)
Introduction to Las Casas’s *Destruction of the Indies*.
Read introductory notes (pp. xi-lv) and the opening of Las Casas’s text (pp. 1-17).

Thursday (2/14)
Continue with Las Casas. Read pp. 17 - 25.
Also read “The Laws of Burgos” and “The New Laws” (pp. 89 – 102).
Paper workshop.

Friday (2/15)
Blog posting due on Blackboard by 11:59 p.m.

Week 5 Journeys: More *Destruction*

Tuesday (2/19)
Introduction to the Las Casas wiki assignment.
Paper proposals due in class.

Thursday (2/21)
NO CLASS MEETING

Friday (2/22)
Blog posting due on Blackboard by 11:59 p.m.

Week 6
Journeys: And even more *Destruction*

Tuesday (2/26)
Continue with Las Casas.
Read through pp. 43 - 88.

Thursday (2/28)
Introduction to Anzaldua’s *Borderlands*.
Read chapters 1 and 2 (pp. 23 - 45).
Additional reading to be assigned.

Friday (3/1)

****Blog posting due on Blackboard by 11:59 p.m.****

Week 7

Self/Other: Calling Dr. Freud

Monday (3/4)

****Paper due on Blackboard****

Tuesday (3/5)

Continue with Anzaldua.

Read 3, 5 and 7 (pp. 47 - 61, 75 - 86, and 99 - 113).

Review for quiz.

Thursday (3/7)

****Quiz 1****

Friday (3/8)

****Blog posting due on Blackboard by 11:59 p.m.****

Week 8

Spring Break

NO CLASS MEETINGS.

Please note: There is no blog posting due during Week 8.

Week 9

Self/Other: Calling Doctor Freud

Tuesday (3/19)

Introducing Freud.

Read introductory sections (pp. ix - xiii, pp. 3 - 13) and Lectures I - IV (pp. 17 - 98).

In- class exercise on parapraxis.

Thursday (3/21)

Continue with Freud.

Read Lectures V - VII (pp. 101 - 153).

Freud pop quiz.

Friday (3/22)

****Blog posting due on Blackboard by 11:59 p.m.****

Week 10

S/O: Spanking the Doctor

Tuesday (3/26)

Continue with Freud.

Read Lectures IX - XII (pp. 167 - 245).

In-class exercise on dream interpretation.

****Last day to withdraw from a course****

Thursday (3/28)

Continue with Freud.

Read Lectures XVI, XIX, XXI and XXVIII (pp. 301 - 317, 354 - 375, 397 - 420, and 557 -576).

In-class screening and discussion of Todd Haynes' *Dottie Gets Spanked*.

Friday (3/29)

Blog posting due on Blackboard by 11:59 p.m.

Week 11

Communities

Tuesday (4/2)

Introduction to Plato, *The Trials of Socrates*.

Read: "Euthyphro" (pp. 3 - 25).

Thursday (4/4)

Continue with Plato.

Read: "The Apology of Socrates," "Crito," and the excerpt from "Phaedo" (26 - 83)

Friday (4/5)

Blog posting due on Blackboard by 11:59 p.m.

Week 12: Ways of Knowing

Tuesday (4/9)

Introduction to *Genesis*."

Reading to be announced.

Introduction to the Portfolio.

Thursday (4/11)

Continue with *Genesis*.

Reading to be announced.

Friday (4/12)

Blog posting due on Blackboard by 11:59 p.m.

Week 13: Ways of Knowing

Tuesday (4/16)

Introduction to the *Daodejing*.

Read the introduction (pp. xv - xxxii) and all of Book One (pp. 1-37).

Thursday (4/18)

Continue with *Daodejing*.

Read all of Book Two (pp. 41-84).

Portfolio workshop.

Friday (4/19)

****Blog posting due on Blackboard by 11:59 p.m.****

Week 14: Ways of Knowing

Tuesday (4/23)

Continue with the *Daodejing*.

Reading to be announced.

In-class exercise on finding the Dao.

Thursday (4/25)

****Quiz 2****

Friday (4/26)

****Blog posting due on Blackboard by 11:59 p.m.****

Week 15: Exit strategies

Tuesday (4/30)

Portfolio conferences

Thursday (5/2)

Final class discussion reading and activity to be announced

Friday (5/3)

****Last blog posting due on Blackboard by 11:59 p.m.,**

Friday (5/3).**

****Portfolios due on Blackboard by Thursday (5/9).****