Olin’s Approach and Experience with Critical Thinking

Jackson Nickerson
Frahm Family Professor of Organization and Strategy
Brookings Senior Scholar in Governance Studies
Director of Brookings Executive Education
Grameen Foundation non-resident Senior Fellow

Agenda

- What is Critical Thinking@Olin?
- What are the components of Critical Thinking@Olin
  - Mindset
  - Elements
  - Standards
  - Processes
- How is Critical Thinking@Olin taught?
- How do we know it is effective?
- Implementation issues and next steps in the journey
Branches of critical thinking

Launch Inquiry

- Logical reasoning
- Overcoming biases and impediments

What is Critical Thinking@Olin?

- What is critical thinking?
  - Internally consistent logic
  - Externally valid logic
- What is different about Critical Thinking@Olin?
  - Yes, logic matters….but…. 
  - Individuals and groups have debilitating biases that often lead to poorly or incorrectly formulated problems.

Critical Thinking@Olin therefore focuses on:
  - Problem formulation tools and processes to overcome biases
  - Techniques to advance metacognition so that students can improve their own thinking
Components of Critical Thinking@Olin

- Mindset
  - Disposition that relies on self-directed, self-disciplined, self-monitored, and self-corrective thinking
  - Daily reflection

- Elements of thinking (PPPICACC, “Pick-axe”)
  - Points of view, purposes, problems, information, concepts, assumptions, conclusions, consequences

- Standards of thinking (CARE)
  - Clear and precise; accurate and logical; relevant, significant, deep, and broad; evenhanded and ethical

- Thinking processes
  - Individual inquiry ($I^2$)
  - Collaborative structured inquiry leadership (CSIL)

Individual inquiry

Launch Inquiry

Choose Framing

- set of questions chosen to be addressed

Decision

Reflection

Forestall thinking of or mentally committing to a decision or solution
Importance of problem formulation(s)

Create Strategic Advantage

Support Strategy

What is Critical Thinking@Olin?

- Critical Thinking@Olin is comprised of four components
  - Mindset
    - explains that you are solely responsible for your thinking
  - Elements
    - span categories of consideration for critical thinking
  - Standards
    - help you evaluate the quality of your thinking
  - Processes
    - are necessary to avoid biases that undermine thinking and represents the vital ingredient that often is missing
How is critical thinking taught?

- Olin’s GO!Program
  - Boot camp approach to breaking down and rebuilding thinking
  - Involves writing and peer and self assessment

- Integration with Core
  - Training sessions and coordination with faculty
  - Part of the onboarding process for new faculty

- Elective Course
  - Syllabus focuses on problem formulation and analytics around problem solving

- New integration on the way…

Peer and self-assessment
How do we know it is effective?

- Conversations with recruiters
- Placement statistics
- Student testimonials
  - Let me introduce you to Matt Fyock
Implementation and next steps

- Faculty issues
  - What’s easy?
  - What's difficult?
- Curriculum committee concerns
- Next steps
  - Continuing commitment and refinement
  - Creation of new texts
  - Continuing expansion across programs

Please feel free to contact me with any question.

Jackson Nickerson
nickerson@wustl.edu