

**Family Newsletter**

April 2015

**Rethinking Critical Thinking: It’s Not about Criticism**

Written by Rebecca Pelky a Future Faculty Fellow at NMU

Sometimes when people here the term “critical thinking,” they get the wrong idea about what it means. The word “critical” brings to mind all sorts of negative ideas, like criticizing someone or their ideas, being judgmental, or just plain mean. In fact critical thinking is something completely different—a useful tool to help people solve problems and navigate an increasingly complex world.

**So what is critical thinking?**

One simple way to understand critical thinking comes from The Critical Thinking Web (CTW) (see web address in works cited). This website has many useful resources to further explore critical thinking. The CTW offers these six points to explain what critical thinking is:

* “understand the logical connections between ideas”
* “identify, construct and evaluate arguments”
* “detect inconsistencies and common mistakes in reasoning”
* “solve problems systematically”
* “identify the relevance and importance of ideas”
* “reflect on the justification of one's own beliefs and values”

So, in other words, critical thinking is all about analyzing information, solving problems, and explaining logically how you got to your conclusion. Now, here’s where people tend to think the “critical” part comes in is here: critical thinking does allow a person to see the logical flaws in someone else’s argument. Bringing those errors to light can appear to be argumentative or judgmental, but really, talking about and thinking about those logical fallacies is one of the best ways to become a better thinker and a better learner!

**Why does critical thinking even matter? (Can’t we just memorize facts?)**

Don’t get me wrong, memorizing facts is important too! Sometimes, we just have to fix names, dates, and other information in our brains for retrieval later. However, having all of the facts doesn’t necessarily mean being able to organize those facts in a logical way to answer a question or solve a problem.

Here’s a simple example: As college students begin their careers, they often have to make confusing decisions about things like which college and major to choose. Gathering facts about different programs and schools may be time consuming, but the more difficult part is being able to analyze that information, and figure out what it might mean for a student’s future. They have to consider not just what classes sound the most interesting, but they have to project into the future, analyzing which course, which campus, and which program of study is going to help them most in a professional career. This is where critical thinking skills are imperative!

When students master critical thinking skills, they are able to not just memorize facts, but to figure out how to find information on their own, how to make decisions based on logical arguments and how test information for accuracy.

**Ok, we’re sold! Now how do we learn to think more critically?**

Here’s the best part. Students who are attending liberal arts colleges are already learning critical thinking skills in many of their courses. Although students may wonder why they have to take literature or history or philosophy classes as, say, biology majors, those humanities classes are often focused on the kinds of thoughtful reading and discussion that foster critical thinking skills. Many colleges even have a critical thinking course requirement. Students may be learning critical thinking skills without even realizing it!

Lau, Joe & Jonathan Chan. “What is Critical Thinking?” Critical Thinking Web. 2004. Web. 20 Feb 2015. <http://philosophy.hku.hk/think/critical/ct.php>

Next up: Olivet College

From enrollment to graduation, Olivet College is committed to your personal academic and career success.

How do we make this happen? Our highly qualified faculty and staff are committed to engaging with you, our students, throughout the learning process. While the learning that happens in the classroom is powerful and important, you also grow as an individual while you live, play and interact with your faculty and peers outside the classroom. In fact, we often form connections with students that last well beyond graduation.

We invite you to campus to experience Olivet for yourself. We thank you for your interest in this great place and look forward to seeing you soon!

Olivet College’s Mission

Olivet College’s mission is to provide an education that enriches lives intellectually, morally and spiritually to a diverse campus community. Having attained these qualities through their educational experiences at Olivet, our hope is that our graduates will embody the “divine art and science of doing good to others,” as stated by the college’s founding fathers in 1844.

Quick Facts:

Enrollment: 1,152

Student-to-faculty ratio: 17 to 1

Minority students: 15 percent

Female: 46 percent

Male: 54 percent

Affiliations: United Church of Christ and National Association of Congregational Christian Churches

School Colors: Red and White

School Nickname: Comets

<http://www.olivetcollege.edu/content/about-olivet>

**Spring Break Tour**

During the Spring Break tour, NMU’s GEAR UP will be going to the following schools. By taking these road trips GEAR UP is showing your students some of their options for higher education. They will have an opportunity to see the campus, talk to current students, interact with faculty and/or staff members, and decide if some school might be a better choice for them. All information provided is taken directly from the school’s main web page.

First Stop, Mid-Michigan Community College in Mt. Pleasant

Each year, thousands of students across central Michigan attend MMCC. Some are pursuing goals of enrichment, others are preparing to transfer to a university, and still others are training for a technical career. Their motives may be different, but the results are the same – a higher quality of life.

MMCC, with campuses in Harrison and Mt. Pleasant, has been serving its community since 1965. With state-of-the-art facilities, experiences faculty and knowledgeable counselors, MMCC is dedicated to helping students get the most out of every class.

MMCC offers over 50 programs. Transfer programs are designed for students intending to transfer credits to baccalaureate degree-granting institutions. Career programs provide students with the necessary skills and related knowledge to qualify for skilled, technical, and semi-professional positions in business, industry, and the allied health fields. General studies programs allow students that are not interested in a four-year degree an opportunity to receive education experiences in a variety of subject-matter areas.

Small classes and highly qualified instructors provide an excellent foundation for a career or continued study. Attending a community college offers the opportunity to more clearly establish career goals and adjust to college studies. Because financial aid and academic support are readily available, MMCC can make a college degree both affordable and attainable.

<https://www.midmich.edu/?gid=2&sid=35&pid=137>

Next stop: Albion College

The Albion Advantage is a comprehensive strategy designed to help you succeed in your studies, in your career, and in your life. It’s our commitment to your future.

We’ve always believed that a solid grounding in the liberal arts is the best preparation for your life after college, and we’ll provide you with all the resources and opportunities you need to create a successful future.

Albion College is a private – four-year college of the liberal arts, historically related to the United Methodist Church. Founded in 1835, Albion College was the first private college in Michigan to have a chapter of Phi Beta Kappa.

Quick Facts

Location: Albion, Michigan (population 8,600)

Nickname: Britons

Colors: Purple and Gold

Number of Students: 1,382

Student to Faculty ratio: 11 to 1

Full-Time Faculty: 105 (90 tenured/tenure-track)

Percentage of Women/Men: 49:51

Students Living on Campus: 90%

Campus Size: 90-Acre Main Campus, 144-acre Whitehouse Nature Center, 340-acre Held Equestrian Center

<http://www.albion.edu/about-albion/key-facts>

The fourth stop is Eastern Michigan University

When classes are in session, campus tours are scheduled Monday-Thursday during the morning and afternoon, Friday mornings and on select Saturdays at 10 a.m. Summer tour options vary. Every campus tour will provide you with an opportunity to meet with and hear from our Admissions staff and take a 90-minute walking tour of campus. Your tour will include visits to the Student Center, residence halls and rooms, main classroom buildings, Halle Library and the Olds Recreation Intramural building and other campus areas that interest your group.

Education First. It’s not just our tagline, it’s our culture. At EMU, our daily goal is to continue our proud education legacy and pass it on to every student. This year, our freshman class has an ACT composite score of 22.25, with an average high school GPA of 3.27. With then different countries represented, and with 15% of our incoming students coming from out-of-state, the word is getting out that EMU is a place of great learning opportunity. And with about 200+ undergraduate majors and programs, an Honors College enrollment that has doubled in size since 2012, and a graduate school that is quickly gaining national recognition, EMU is academic excellence on display.

<http://view.emich.edu/>

Last college stop: MSU

Michigan State University Spartans work to advance the common good in uncommon ways. The nation’s pioneer land-grant university, MSU began as a bold experiment that democratized higher education and helped bringing science and innovation into everyday life. Today, MSU is one of the top research universities in the world – on one of the biggest, greenest campuses in the nation – and is home to a diverse community of dedicated students and scholars, athletes and artists, scientists and leaders.

Quick facts

Approximately 50,085 students total: from all 83 counties in Michigan, all 50 states in the United States, and more than 130 countries.

38,786 undergraduate, 11,299 graduate and professional

51,5% women, 48.5% men

17.3% students of color, 15.3% international

Nickname: Spartans

Colors: Green and White

Mascot: Sparty

Conference Big Ten

[www.msu.edu](http://www.msu.edu)

The final stop: Tour of the Capitol Building

Step back into the Victorian era with a visit to Michigan’s award-winning Capitol Building. Designed by Elijah E. Myers, one of the foremost architects of public buildings during the Gilded age (1865-1924), construction of the Capitol Building took six years and contains over nine acres of hand-painted surfaces. It was dedicated to the citizens of Michigan in 1879.

They will also be touring the Michigan Historical Museum.

<http://www.michigan.org/property/state-capitol-building/>

Despite the many changes that are coming, one thing will not change. The state is required by law to provide a college entrance exam for free to all Michigan high school juniors. Students will also have the chance to take the ACT if they want to, (you must pay for that) and submit those test scores to the college(s) of their choice.

Here is a sample SAT questions taken from the practice site:

Part or all of the following sentence is underlined; beneath the sentence are five ways of phrasing the underlined material. Select the option that produces the best sentence. If you think the original phrase produces a better sentence than any of the alternatives, select choice A.

Their part of the reconstruction process that followed the Second World War, the nations of Western Europe took steps toward achieving greater political and economic integration.

1. Their
2. The
3. It was
4. As
5. On

The correct answer is D. It avoids the error of the original by using the preposition “As” to indicate what the “steps toward … integration” were a part of.

<https://sat.collegeboard.org/practice/sat-question-of-the-day>

**Michigan Switches from ACT to SAT for college admissions.**

As you have probably heard, beginning in Spring of 2016 all college juniors (meaning your students) will begin taking the College Board’s SAT as the state-required, free college entrance exam instead of the ACT that has been administered since 2007. This means that your students will be the first ones to take the newly designed SAT test as part of Michigan’s M-STEP (Michigan Student Test of Educational Progress). SAT stands for Scholastic Aptitude Test. ACT stands for American College Testing.

Not only does this change save the state of Michigan money, because the bid for the SAT over the ACT amounts to a savings of $15.4 million over three years, but it is also more in alignment with Michigan standards, according to information on [www.michigan.gov/snyder](http://www.michigan.gov/snyder) where there are answers to frequently asked questions about this topic. This website also reports that although the SAT is not specifically linked to the Common Core requirements, the test will provide more evidence –based assessments that “will include multiple item types beyond multiple-choice questions.”

What this means for your students is that this assessment will make sure that students know the difference between memorizing (Who was the first president of the United States?) and understanding (If the first US President was alive, what three things would bother him the most about government today.) <http://bridgemi.com/2015/01/what-michigans-switch-to-the-sat-means-for-high-school-students/> Your students will be the first to take the PSAT (pre-SAT) next fall when they return to school to prepare them for the actual test next spring.

Your high school teachers will need to change their preparations for testing. Jim Cotter, director of admissions at Michigan State University, says that “historically, the ACT was been more driven by curriculum and more broad while the SAT is driven by math and critical reading.” [www.mlive.com/lansing-news/index.ssf/2015/01/switch\_from\_act\_to\_sat\_momumen.html](http://www.mlive.com/lansing-news/index.ssf/2015/01/switch_from_act_to_sat_momumen.html) Another change is taking place in the redesign of the overall test to better align with the Common Core State Standards. These standards are the expectations of what students should know to be college ready.

Cyndie Schmeiser, chief of assessment for the College Board, says that Michigan students will be offered free, personalized test practice and will benefit from scholarship opportunities. [www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/2015/01/07/michigan-replaces-act-sat/21385299/](http://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/2015/01/07/michigan-replaces-act-sat/21385299/) However, she did not elaborate on what those scholarship opportunities might be.

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This newsletter and past editions are available at:  
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