

Critical Thinking Survey Results Spring 2006
The University of Virginia's College at Wise

Departmental Results	% Less Than Competent	% Competent	% Highly Competent	Average Score
Accounting	0	80	20	2.2
Business Administration	0	100	0	2.25
Admin. Of Justice	28.5	71.5	0	2
Biology	25	50	25	2.25
Chemistry	0	100	0	2
Communications	0	50	50	2.3
Computer Science	0	100	0	2
English	0	100	0	2
History	0	80	20	2.35
Liberal Arts	0	75	25	2
Math	0	50	50	2.75
Medical Technology	0	100	0	2
Nursing	33	67	0	1.833
Physical Educ.	25	75	0	1.75
Political Science	33	67	0	2
Psychology	33	33	33	2.33
Sociology	0	100	0	2.25
Spanish	0	100	0	2
Theater	0	100	0	2
Undeclared	0	100	0	2

Overall College Results	
%Less Than Competent	8.875
%Competent	79.925
%Highly Competent	11.15
Average Score	2.133

The University of Virginia's College at Wise administered the Critical Thinking Survey to 60 juniors in three separate sessions during the spring of 2006. Students were provided with a hypothetical question (see attachment), asked to think over but not attempt to research the issues involved, and return on a selected to date to write out a response. Responses were scored in accordance with a holistic rubric (see attachment). Training in the use of the rubric was provided by the Chair of the Department of Language and Literature, who has extensive experience in the use of rubrics and whose department has routinely used a holistic approach to the evaluation of student writing over the past several years.

Each essay was scored by at least two separate evaluators as less than competent, competent, or highly competent. In the scoring process, evaluators looked for students to define or discuss the issues involved, to posit their answer to the question posed (yea or nay), to explain their reasoning, and to evaluate their own reasoning process and information issues. Answers deemed highly competent included unusually fulsome, complete, or distinctive definitions/discussions/analogies, posited solutions that moved beyond the norm, reflected especial awareness of bias and/or reasoning, and/or reflected an unusually complete awareness of the questions. Answers deemed as less than competent generally skirted the issues, failed

of the questions. Answers deemed as less than competent generally skirted the issues, failed to define, and in some cases only restated the question provided to the student. Competent answers attempted to define/discuss the issue, posited a solution, explained in varying degrees the reasons the choice was made, and/or may have evaluated the information provided.

Evaluators noted several points with respect to the essays. Most students understood that the basic issue was racism and how questions of race were and are applied to different groups, but defined/discussed racism at varying length and depth and differed in their view as to whether racism ought to be the basis of decision in the problem presented to them. In some cases, students sought to make distinctions of judgment that were not felicitously conveyed to readers, but which were nonetheless clearly the intent of the writer; thus, the College may want to continue to help students define and clarify their thoughts as they write. Further, only a few students proved exceptionally able to distinguish nuance within the question; for example, the question notes that a civil rights group erected a statue and that Congress was petitioned for its removal, but only a few indicated that since Congress did not erect the statue, the issue ought to go elsewhere. This is an issue of care in reading and analysis of questions. And while the question was hypothetical in nature, only a few demonstrated an ability to contextualize or to apply their own experience to the issue--self-identified combat veterans and African-Americans, for example, demonstrated a specifically different approach to the problem from many other students and pointed out to the reader how their own experience or identity impacted their reasoning.

Results for the college reflect a general level of competence at an average score of 2.13 with just under 80% of students classified as competent, just short of 9% classified as less than competent, and 11% deemed highly competent. Naturally, the College would like to see the overall numerical average rise from its 2.13 level, and should seek to address in writing experiences those issues noted above. The College's upcoming Quality Enhancement Plan, focusing on student reading, writing, and engagement in the first year, is one place to start senior-research and junior-level assignments provide others. However, the distribution of scores is also of interest--the lowest averages were found in the Physical Education and Nursing majors; the highest, in mathematics and history. Given the number of students surveyed, these results should not be taken as a reliable index to the level of student performance in all these fields; nonetheless, the results merit observation. Evaluators certainly felt that most students approached the survey with seriousness of purpose; in some cases, however, students clearly did not truly make an effort, and the college will continue to seek ways to encourage the students to approach these assessments soberly. This is their opportunity to shine.