Project Title: “Evaluating Critical Thinking Skills for a Global Perspectives on Women and Change Course”
Project Type: Pedagogy Assessment and Course Development
Term of Re-Assignment: Fall 2007

Project Abstract
The effectiveness of critical thinking activities in relation to student learning outcomes will be assessed through student assignments and exams. By utilizing an evaluation rubric, course materials will gauge the degree that students improved their critical thinking skills. This information will be used to re-develop the course and media literacy activities.

Project Outcomes
Two of the main goals of this project were not only successfully accomplished, but also resulted in student growth and development. These were the development of media literacy and critical thinking skills in students through the evaluation of global newspaper articles and the submission of an article to Feminist Teacher.

The first goal was accomplished through directed study and support of an undergraduate student’s research project for the Undergraduate Research Conference. The student, who also successfully served as my teaching intern for the semester in which the course was offered, helped to plan, implemented and evaluated a newspaper assignment. We began to conceptualize the project during fall 2007. The student who had successfully completed the WOST 220 “Global Perspectives on Women and Change” course with me in spring 2006 was familiar with the course. She was also interested in utilizing this project to fulfill the requirements of the Feminist Research and Action course I was teaching in spring 2008.

Students in the WOST 220 course were assigned to groups which examined a specific geographic area of the world. Each week, one student in the group would find and post to a specific discussion area in D2L, an article that related to course concepts and topics. The other members of the group would post a comment to D2L, either to their specific group’s article or to another group in the class.

The student teaching intern developed the IRB protocol and administered a pre and post test assessment to any student in the course who gave consent to participate in the study. The purpose of the study was to determine if student’s perceived knowledge of women in a global context stayed the same, increased, or decreased as a result of exposure and dialogue with international news sources. The student found that many of the students initially rated their knowledge of gender and global issues fairly high. By the end of the
semester, students perceived knowledge on global gender issues were found to increase. Interestingly, many students post tests decreased. The student intern hypothesized that students’ pre-test scores may have been higher and throughout the course of the class, these same students recognized that their initial assessment was inflated.

Also as a result of the newspaper assignment, along with previously development media literacy assignments, students developed their own media assessment activities (See, Hear, Do’s) based on topics and information gathered through the newspaper assignment.

The second accomplishment of the teaching re-assignment was the submission of a paper to Feminist Teacher. Barbara Bergman (MSU Memorial Library) and I submitted Global Perspectives: developing media literacy skills to advance critical thinking on April 1, 2008. A copy of the paper will be attached to this report. In an August 2008 email from one of the editors of Feminist Teacher, we were notified that our article was being considered for publication.

In addition, Barbara Bergman and I evaluated a series of student discussion board postings per the elements of an evaluation instrument (e.g. Washington State University Guide to Rating Critical and Innovative Thinking or the Holistic Critical Thinking Scoring Rubric) as suggested by Dr. Tracy Pellett (former MSU-Mankato Executive Director of University Assessment). No identifying information was collected and or disseminated when examining and evaluating the posts. After examining the information, we submitted our cursory results to the IPSEL administrators. The IPSEL grant initially funded our critical thinking research project.

Another element of this teaching re-assignment project was initiated, but not completed. IRB permission was obtained to examine examples of change in critical thinking from spring 2007 student course assignments: the midterm exam, writing activities, and a final group project. Unfortunately, while many students consented to participate in the study, many had left for summer break before donating their graded assignments back to the primary investigator. Thus without material to evaluate, I was only able to make changes to assignments based on student comments as obtained verbally and or as posted on D2L.