Critical Thinking Operational Definition: Process Summary

**Committee work to define CT.** Before outlining key learning outcomes for our students in the area of critical thinking, the committee paused to define critical thinking in a way that made sense operationally for our task. After much research, analysis and deliberation (see Moodle site for more information on this), the committee decided to combine parts of Bloom’s revised taxonomy (see Anderson and Krathwohl) and the outcome of critical thinking stated in the Delphi Report (see ERIC doc 315 423). Agreeing on other appropriate keywords, the committee’s final operational definition is: "Critical thinking is an evolving process of applying, analyzing, and evaluating information to decide what to believe or what to do."

**Stakeholder support for definition.** To ensure that we had not veered from the intent of our stakeholders, the QEP committee decided to again survey the college community. Using the all COA email, we had about an 11 percent response rate. Of the responses we received 88.8 percent agreed that this definition of critical thinking would be supported as our operational definition for the QEP. Of those who responded to the survey, 11.2 percent had comments about the definition, although no one refused to support the definition. Comments mainly focused on the order of the processes, the end of the definition and understanding of all stakeholders. In order to begin to seek out perspectives of future employers and transfer colleges, the QEP committee also surveyed the employers and colleges that were in attendance at the college and career fair March 30, 2012. Thirty-five surveys were distributed. We had a response rate of 74 percent. Of those who responded, 96 percent supported our operational definition with only one survey being returned that commented that critical thinking, as we defined it, was not relevant in this career field. However, through email and personal conversations with others in this field, it was determined that critical thinking was relevant in this career field. No survey from either group was returned marked to show “no,” which means that no one stood opposed to this operational definition of critical thinking.

**Committee decisions about revisions.** After discussing many of the comments that were received in the survey, the committee decided to keep the definition as previously stated. The committee wanted to keep the definition succinct enough to be memorable. Because many comments were made around the cognitive levels of apply, analyze, and evaluate, the committee decided that in the future, we would include with the definition an explanation of apply, analyze, and evaluate as found in Bloom’s revised taxonomy.

**Proposed Definition of CT.** Since no surveys were returned from either group showing the definition could not be supported and surveys showed consensus levels above 80 percent, the QEP committee has decided to move forward with the following operational definition of Critical Thinking:

"Critical thinking is an evolving process of applying, analyzing, and evaluating information to decide what to believe or what to do."

On April 26, 2012, the President’s Leadership Team was sent a memorandum informing them of the committee’s decision to move forward with the purposed definition of critical thinking including the committee’s process to validate our definition by soliciting feedback from faculty, staff, future employers and transfer universities.Thus, the committee proceeded with this operational definition of Critical Thinking.