

To: Deans Wilczenski and Liem; Provost Langley
From: CCT core faculty: Profs. Blum, Millman, Smith, and Taylor
Re: Response to AQUAD Review Committee's Report on the Critical and Creative Thinking graduate program
Date: 23 June 2011
Cc: C&I Chair Levy; AQUAD Review Committee: Profs. Michelli, Wooding, Saltmarsh, Sundaram

We are gratified to see the AQUAD review committee's recommendation that the Critical and Creative Thinking (CCT) graduate program "should be nurtured and supported and used to make a distinctive mark on the University," and to hear that they were "astounded as to what this program has been able to accomplish, the quality and innovative teaching and learning that occurs in the classroom and on-line, the co-curricular learning networks of students, faculty, and alumni, and the 'outreach' done to advance collaborative knowledge generation and reflective practice among faculty across the institution" (p. 11). We were also pleased that the Committee, in commenting on the evening community event they attended, noted "the quality and creativity of the part-time faculty involved with the program; the enthusiasm for the program expressed by former students as well as the life-long learning skills they had taken away from it; [and] the effective use of technology in promoting off-campus participation in these events" (p. 6). In this response, we address various concerns expressed by the Committee. However, we first note some points of disagreement with the Committee and introduce our current thinking about the future of the Program.

The Committee thinks that the Program is "not sustainable under the current set of circumstances" (p.11). We believe, in contrast, that, under the current partnership with University College, CCT can continue to pursue the accomplishments noted above even if resources are not increased—*provided the accomplishments expected of the Program are commensurate with the resources*. (More on this proviso later.) The Committee advocated a prominent institutional location for the Program, to give it "entre to work across the campus and the respect and recognition [it] needs," which "cannot come from a connection with one department" (i.e., Curriculum and Instruction) (p. 11). In fact, the Program has always been connected with more than one department and continues to draw on faculty across colleges. We

do agree, however, with the Committee's view that moving the formal home of the Program out of Curriculum and Instruction should be considered at this time when this Department seeks to focus solely on Teacher Education. Let us review three possibilities distinct from the central location in the Provost's office proposed by the Review Committee.

(Reviewing future possibilities might seem to invite a “cut to the chase” of what should happen *after* the AQUAD review process. This is not our intention—We look forward to completing the full AQUAD sequence of responses and discussions and doing so in a way that results in all parties feeling that their interpretations of evidence they see as pertinent have been heard and acknowledged by the others. What follows, however, highlights considerations that should help readers appreciate our responses to the Committee's concerns and overall recommendations.)

Honors Program/College: A pertinent principle enunciated by the Committee during the site visit was that the unit in which CCT is located should make sense from both sides—the partnership should further the missions of both the unit and CCT. In this light, we see the Honors Program—slated to become the Honors College—as having the closest fit with CCT and the new Science in a Changing World track: The Honors Program does not reside in any one college; faculty from all colleges teach in it; many of its courses are interdisciplinary, especially combining science and its social context. Selected CCT courses have, over the last few years, been designated to count for the Junior research colloquium requirement and Honors students have been given permission to register for other CCT courses. Of course, collaboration with Honors could continue wherever CCT is located and a graduate component has not (yet) been envisaged for the proposed Honors College. Moreover, because new faculty and staff lines would not magically arise through affiliation with the Honors Program, the slate of CCT face-to-face and online sections offered through University College would continue. That brings us to a second option.

University College: University College (UC) is another obvious location for CCT given that, since the last AQUAD review, UC has served as the only funding source for CCT (other than for the lines [and fractions thereof] of the core faculty). The Committee contends that such a move “would further marginalize a critical interdisciplinary program” (p. 9), but such a UC home could be seen in a different light, as follows: Despite CCT's cross-college composition, it is often depicted as a College of Education or a Curriculum & Instruction program. CCT-in-UC

would, in contrast, be seen as an incubator of innovation for the whole University and open for collaboration with interested parties. Note that, wherever the Program is located, it will continue to serve a significant number of students from programs other than CCT and in face-to-face as well as online sections; this situation would not be jeopardized by a formal move to UC. The income-driven nature of UC has supported, not deflected CCT from its mission while instituting a straightforward accountability—if there are not enough students, a course does not run; if there are not enough registrations overall, the UC-funded positions get reconsidered. Faculty governance by the core CCT faculty would continue under UC; no friction on this count has occurred as the CCT-UC partnership has developed. The quality of instruction through UC (again, involving face-to-face as well as online offerings) is not a problem. As the Review Committee remarked (p. 3):

We were... extremely impressed by the testimonials we heard from students who had participated in on-line courses and with the faculty who we met (in person and virtually) during our program review visit. Additionally, we were pleased to witness the reflective, self-critique by on-line faculty of their pedagogical practices and analysis of how to improve their teaching and improve student learning. Perhaps this is to be expected given the nature of the content; however, this kind of reflective critique we find rarely and is often not encouraged or valued for faculty.

We would not claim that part-time CCT faculty members have overcome all the challenges in teaching online and in shorter summer face-to-face sections, but it should be noted that our instructors have been chosen because of their ideas about how to generate the intensive interaction and student-directed learning that characterizes regular-semester, face-to-face CCT courses. No obvious correlation is evident in courses evaluations between the quality of instruction in UC-funded courses and the highest educational qualification of the instructors.

Depending on part-timers who do not have doctorates (i.e., only 40% have doctorates) does point to a significant issue: Can CCT be expected to advance scholarship furthering the field of critical and creative thinking (and reflective practice) when the Program operates with so few regular faculty members? In effect, this issue was decided by the College of Education a decade ago when the line of the retiring CCT director, Delores Gallo, was assigned to another program and an untenured faculty member was left to run CCT without course releases—even as student numbers grew to a record level. While the core CCT faculty members continued to

produce notable scholarship—linking disciplines of psychology, philosophy, science, and education—the programmatic focus of CCT has been on teaching, curricular innovation, and community outreach, not on establishing a distinct brand of CCT scholarship that UMass would be come known for. In this light, a formal move of CCT to UC would signify that the productive research and writing of individual faculty members was as much as can be expected given the level of faculty resources that has been committed to this graduate program.

Within the College of Education and Human Development: If the College of Education and Human Development remains the formal home of CCT, the Program could fit well as one of four comparably sized, mid-career programs in the Leadership in Education Department (for reasons more or less as proposed in 2000—<http://www.cct.umb.edu/CCTtoLeadershipInEd.pdf>). Alternatively, CCT could be given autonomy in a formal or ad hoc unit in which programs not involved in teacher licensure or accreditation collaborate closely.

More discussion is needed for everyone to be clear about which of these or other options to opt for and how to translate it into an acceptable memorandum of understanding. Whatever ends up being decided, the CCT faculty will continue to do the best work they can with the resources available to us—grounds for confidence in that should be evident in the Self-study, the Committee’s review, and the responses to follow.

Concerns

We respond below to each of the issues noted in the Committee’s review, always in a constructive spirit although sometimes presenting a different view of the relevant evidence. It should be noted that few of the items marked as “concerns” by the Committee were linked to evidence gained from the Self-study or the site visit. To be true to evidence-based development of practice, these items are better seen as recommendations about issues for the Program to monitor as we go forward than as assessments of CCT’s academic quality and capacity for development.

The responses here should also be viewed as supplementing or affirming the proposed revisions to the goals and objectives that were generated from the faculty review of mission, goals and objectives from CCT’s AQUAD plan (see section II.A of the Self-study and Appendix C, which also provides rationale for the changes).

Issue	Response from CCT Core Faculty
Students and student learning	
<u>1) Knowledge, skills, competencies, and values appropriate to the academic program</u>	
Clearly defining the program dimensions of critical and creative thinking (p.2)	Curriculum mapping (see next issue) will involve the dimensions of reflective practice given that CCT has always been about students applying a range of tools, not only critical and creative thinking, to change their practice and take stock of outcomes.
Aligning course goals and learning outcomes more intentionally across the curriculum (p.2)	A curriculum mapping process, which had begun in January 2008 but stalled, will be re-started as soon as possible.
Increasing the number of electives available (p.3)	No action is needed: All the electives listed in the Graduate Catalog have been offered over the last two years (except CCT652, which will be offered this fall, and CCT646, which is a cross-listed course no longer offered by its home program, Special Ed.). The plan for the future (http://www.cct.umb.edu/futureyears.html) continues yearly or bi-yearly offering of electives (except CCT640 and 645 may alternate, being offered once every four years, and 646 may lapse).
Need for more structured advising (p.4)	The core faculty will not provide more structure, but will work to make sure every student uses the current advising structure, which consists of an online handbook taking students step-by step from joining the Program to graduating, a general advisor for each student, a required course plan after admission, an entrance interview, monthly news and email reminders of key dates and opportunities, a mid-program check-in, advising-intensive capstone seminar, and faculty discussion of problem students each semester.

<p>More attention to developing students' research and writing skills (p.3)</p>	<p>Many steps have been taken in recent years (see http://www.cct.umb.edu/SupportToCompletion.html), including the addition of a 4th elective with a view to this issue and a Writing Support Group. The mid-program check-in is now required; the core faculty will use that check-in to take stock of areas needing development for each student.</p>
<p>Attention to the difficulties of collaboration with an online format (p. 3)</p>	<p>Online instructors have been chosen because of their ideas about how to generate the intensive interaction and student-directed learning that characterizes face-to-face CCT courses. The online instructors will continue to experiment and share ideas about this issue through one-on-one discussions with the Program coordinator and assistant coordinator and through occasional conference calls. A supplementary narrative course evaluation will continue to be administered to inform ongoing development of online instruction. (To compare the official and supplementary evaluations, see, e.g., http://www.cct.umb.edu/courses.html#692.)</p>
<p>There should be foundational courses that provide the core knowledge, competencies, and values for all students who participate in any of the course or degree options provided (p. 3)</p>	<p>There are required foundational or core requirements for Certificate and Master's students. For several years, however, these have not been prerequisites for students from other programs or non-degree students who want to CCT courses. It might be valuable to conduct a survey and/or focus group discussion among part-time instructors to develop ways to achieve the grounding in CCT recommended by the Committee.</p>
<p>Coherence and clarity about the knowledge, competencies, and values that are foundational to the academic program may become a concern as the program develops new curricular options (p.3)</p>	<p>The current two tracks share the same research and study competencies and values (e.g., "using critical and creative thinking to develop reflective practice as we change our schools, workplaces, and lives"). The knowledge bases in the tracks' core courses differ, but each original core course has a parallel in the new track (e.g., "Critical Thinking" and "Biology in Society: Critical Thinking"). The Program has no plans to expand options.</p>

<u>2) Instructional methodologies and content delivery systems</u>	
Predominance of online courses not the most effective format (p. 4)	Face-to-face sections continue to predominate over online (60%: 40%) in the planned course offerings (http://www.cct.umb.edu/futureyears.html). CCT M.A. students who live locally are expected to take face-to-face sections.
Concerns about the quality of instruction and depth of student learning given an increase in on-line courses taught by faculty without doctorates (p. 4)	The new online sections in recent years include ones designed by the Program coordinator, an experienced online instructor who will receive his Ph.D. soon, and the assistant Program coordinator who is an experienced and highly rated online instructor. In any case, lower quality of instruction through UC has not been observed. (See also our response above to concerns about the online mode of instruction.)
Data are needed related to costs, student diversity (racial, ethnic, cultural), and student success in UC sections (p. 4).	The course costs for UC sections are very close to costs for state-funded sections for in-state students. Student diversity of matriculated students is tracked by CCT. Student diversity of other students registered in CCT courses is not released by the administration, but the pros and cons of asking online instructors to estimate this informally (and thus imperfectly) will be explored. Grades and completion rates of students in UC sections will be monitored and compare with state-funded sections.
<u>3) Student learning outcomes and their assessment</u>	
Articulate learning outcomes for individual courses (p. 4)	All faculty members will make explicit in their syllabi the learning outcomes that are relevant to inclusion in the portfolios (see next issue).
Implement a portfolio (perhaps electronic) (p. 4)	The Program has an electronic Reflective Practitioner's Portfolio (http://ctrpp.wikispaces.umb.edu/). Now that this has been made mandatory, the Program coordinator and assistant coordinator have efforts planned to coach students to keep it up to date.

Other issues	
Nina Greenwald brings some unique skills to the classroom, but her continued participation as a full-time member of the program has become increasingly uncertain (p. 6)	Dr. Greenwald is no longer a full-time member of the program. She was a full-time lecturer for CCT from Fall 2004-Fall 2006 and fractional time from Fall 2007 to Spring 2010. Since Fall 2010 she is teaching occasional face-to-face sections during fall and spring semesters: required courses when they cannot be covered by regular CCT faculty and creativity electives when student numbers are sufficient.
Secure more physical space for the Program (p. 12)	On a commuter campus with most classes taught in the evenings and much advising done by email and phone, more office space for the Program is not seen as a priority.
Secure a seminar space for courses (p. 12)	Through collaboration with the Psychology Department, seminar space is arranged for most CCT courses, but this is often not possible for 4pm Tuesday classes.