

Based on SRSU results from the NSSE and CLA tests, the QEP is requesting that faculty try to include a few of the following on your syllabi as you plan for the spring semester. We also remind you that QEP funding is available for undergraduate travel or pilot projects, if your ideas involve costs. Also, remember that our QEP broadly defines “outdoor learning” as engaging students through the distinctive qualities of our location in all of its diversity and richness: cultural, historical, social, political, economic, environmental, etc. Good assignments for outdoor learning can happen in the museum, the archives, online, in collaboration with local businesses, or by participating in local cultural events. The list is endless.

- 1) **Break-an-argument.** Give students a poorly reasoned argument (full of fallacies, emotional, radical, etc.) from within your discipline and help them learn how to critique it, or maybe peer critique some of their own arguments. Across the board SRSU seniors did very well on Make-An-Argument portion of the CLA (98<sup>th</sup> percentile nationwide!) but less well on Break-An-Argument (37<sup>th</sup> percentile nationwide). So we need to bring that score up. For an example from the CLA  
<http://www.sulross.edu/docs/qep/sample-cla-break-arg.pdf>
- 2) **Performance Task.** Incorporate one additional complex assignment where students must pull together “evidence from different sources; distinguish rational from emotional arguments or fact from opinion; understand data in tables and figures; deal with inadequate, ambiguous, and/or conflicting information; spot deception and holes in the arguments made by others; recognize information that is and is not relevant to the task at hand; identify additional information that would help to resolve issues; and weigh, organize, and synthesize information from several sources.” SRSU seniors did well (86<sup>th</sup> percentile nationwide) but we need to improve. For a model performance task  
<http://www.sulross.edu/docs/qep/cla-in-classroom.pdf> Or  
[http://www.claintheclassroom.org/task\\_library](http://www.claintheclassroom.org/task_library)
- 3) **Use the Critical Thinking words.** Explain to students what they are doing when analyzing a new situation, applying what they have learned, etc. As an example: when students are in the field “looking at” grazed and ungrazed grasses or “discussing” poems be sure to use critical thinking words (compare, interpret, applying, etc.). We feel sure our students are getting plenty of experience in CT, but when they answer the following NSSE questions, they respond negatively.
  - a. Worked on a paper or project that required integrating ideas or information from various sources. (Seniors scored 6-8% below peers)
  - b. Coursework emphasizes analyzing the basic elements of an idea, experience, or theory. (Seniors 5-9% below peers)
  - c. Coursework emphasizes applying theories or concepts to practical problems in new situations. (Seniors 7-8% below peers)
- 4) **Document, document, document!** Devise schemes to document student learning improvement. Simple pre-post quizzes for assignments, a pre-post test for the semester, or just a simple paragraph at the end of class answering “What have you learned today?” might work for you. This is especially important for any changes you have made in assignments or classes specifically for the QEP, such as to improve student engagement,

using outdoor learning opportunities, and/or increasing critical thinking. Share what works! For a few suggestions: <http://www.insightassessment.com/9teachtips.html#youget>

**Use student assignments to help us!** A good critical thinking assignment for any class might be to have students search for ways to enhance their own engagement in your class by searching the web, perusing the new books QEP has ordered for the library (see annotated bibliography at <http://www.sulross.edu/pages/6831.asp>), and researching the library. Then ask them to adapt what they find to your course. Use peer review to evaluate the suggested ideas.