The majority of data related to assessment of students’ critical thinking scores collected up to this point is baseline data that provides information about critical thinking skills and related constructs for students who have not yet participated in the Inquiry ARC program. This data will be key to determining the impact of the inquiry ARC on student learning. The direct baseline measure is the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA). In the 2007-08 administration of the CLA, seniors scored slightly better than freshmen on a couple of the tasks, but freshmen outscored seniors on the critique an argument section. After developing the Inquiry ARC we received data from the 2010-11 administration of the CLA, which demonstrated seniors scoring significantly higher than freshmen on all measures. Together these show that UNC Asheville provides a value added education in critical thinking and that a program on critical thinking might vary in its impact on student learning as a function of students’ incoming skills.

Indirect measures include the CCTDI, NSSE Deep Learning Scale, and Student Ratings of Instruction (SRI). The CCTDI shows remarkable stability in critical thinking dispositions between freshmen and seniors. NSSE deep learning scale indicates a clear change in attitude about students’ self-reported experiences with integrative learning but little change in their self-reported experiences with higher order learning or reflective learning, areas we might enhance through the Inquiry ARC program.

Finally, historical data on SRI’s indicate remarkable stability but somewhat lower scores in “developing creative capacity.” Two important points can be found in these data. First, our students are doing well in critical thinking compared to those at other institutions nationally. Second, several aspects of critical thinking might be improved through participation in the Inquiry ARC such as developing creative capacity (an item from the SRI) and Higher Order Learning and Reflective Learning, (two “deep learning” subscales of the NSSE).

We currently have two pieces of data on students who have experienced Inquiry ARC: SRI data and course-based assessment of critical thinking. The SRI data show that students in Inquiry ARC experiences are doing better at developing creative capacity. The gains are small, but given the restriction of range and remarkable stability of these data at UNC Asheville, small changes are important ones. The course-based assessment shows that students who have experienced Inquiry ARC seem to be doing well at communication, approaching questions from multiple perspectives, and gathering information from a variety of sources.

During the pilot year, we tried three rubrics and two procedures for course-based assessment of critical thinking, none of which generated the kind of data we want and need. These experiences have led us to make adjustments to the assessment plan to ensure we are collecting data that we can use to improve the program. The new plan for course based assessment involves using pre-post-design writing samples where students analyze instructor-selected objects that are appropriate to the course content. Writing samples will be assessed using the AACU Value Rubric for Critical Thinking. This procedure was approved by the three Inquiry ARC Committees in November and will be used for the remainder of the project.