



QEP Student Focus Groups

Conducted by

COM 4600 Advertising/PR Campaign Strategies

Background and Rationale

- Students enrolled in Fall 2011 COM 4600, a senior-level Advertising/Public Relations Campaign Strategies course, have been charged with the task of creating a communication campaign for the QEP, “Christ-Centered Critical Thinking.”
- Students are using a brand strategy approach originally developed by J. Walter Thompson that seeks answers to four questions:
 1. Where are we?
 2. Why are we here?
 3. Where could we be?
 4. How are we going to get there?

Background and Rationale

- Students have completed a situation analysis, using secondary research and information obtained from the following guest lecturers:
 - Dr. Sabrena Parton, Dean, College of Arts & Sciences & QEP Co-chair
 - Dawn Tolbert, Vice President of Public Relations
 - Emily Messer, Director of Student Life
 - Dr. John Head, Vice President for Enrollment Management
 - Cheryl Culp, President of Student Government Association
- The situation analysis is helpful in addressing Questions 1 and 2, but exploratory primary research among core constituents (students) will provide a more complete assessment.

Research Method

- Research purpose: Explore student thoughts and opinions relative to the QEP theme and solicit information regarding appropriate communication vehicles.
- Data Collection Method: Focus groups moderated by COM4600 students
- Timeframe: October 26 – November 3, 2011
- Six focus groups were conducted with Shorter students (both male and female), with a range of 7 to 18 students participating in each:
 - October 26th, 2pm: Upperclassmen
 - October 31st, 2pm: Upperclassmen
 - November 1, 2pm: Transfer students
 - November 2, 1pm: Freshmen
 - November 2, 2pm: Athletes and International students
 - November 3, 2pm: Business majors (conducted at Ledbetter College of Business)

Executive Summary

- Students expressed very positive support for the QEP theme, Christ-Centered Critical Thinking. They viewed it as a beneficial and valuable skill that would help give them a competitive edge after college.
- When asked about qualities that critical thinkers possessed, students listed positive descriptors such as patience, humility, self-discipline, patience, and adaptability.
- Students described the ideal course structure to include debates, discussions and seminars, and activities that truly engaged them in problem-solving.
- When asked how to communicate the QEP theme, every group heartily endorsed *The Toilet Paper*. Other media vehicles such as student media, flyers, and banners were mentioned. Free t-shirts were viewed as very effective. E-mail was problematic because of the sheer amount received daily. Many students claimed they read only on a “need to know” basis. Anything that comes from the students themselves is more likely to receive positive attention. Sabots Chalk, student videos on the TV monitors, and activities that engage the students in participating, were mentioned as being effective.
- Detailed responses to the research questions follow.

Research Questions

Each focus group session explored student responses to the following questions:

1. *What comes to mind when you hear the phrase, Christ-Centered Critical Thinking? Do any role models/famous people come to mind?*
2. *How do you define Christ-Centered Critical Thinking? If you heard the phrase, "Christ is the ultimate critical thinker," what does that mean to you?*
3. *What qualities do you think critical thinkers possess?*
4. *Describe a course that focuses on developing critical thinking skills. What kinds of activities? What topics?*
5. *Have you/How have you become more of a critical thinker at Shorter?*
6. *Would critical thinking skills be beneficial to you?*
7. *Why did you choose Shorter? What advantage does Shorter offer its students?*
8. *Would a Christ-centered critical thinking course give students a competitive edge? If so, how?*
9. *How do you receive information from the school?*

1. What comes to mind when you hear the phrase, Christ-Centered Critical Thinking? Do any role models/famous people come to mind?

- “Thinking of things from a spiritual standpoint.”
- “I think of somebody who is always making decisions backed up by Christian morals.”
- “Thinking for a purpose...if you think of something that takes a lot of time to go through, like a problem that has a solution that has to be found. It’s there, you just have to find it. You may have to take many steps and it could take a few minutes, or it could take years, but eventually you’ll reach it.
- “you can look at something one second and know what the answer is, but when you sit there and think about it, you start second-guessing yourself. When you start to critically think about situations, you’ll come up with a more solidified answer. You become more grounded on what you believe.”
- “I think that when you star thinking critically, you start to look at more than one answer to a question,. It’s looking at all these answer and figuring out which one is closest to Christ.”
- “I guess thinking with God in mind. Thinking that God is there with you. God is watching whatever you do, so basically, God is on your side.”
- “Thinking about how to relate everything back to Christ.”
- “It has more to do with what you believe and how it plays into your life.”

Role models?

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| • <i>Jesus</i> | - <i>C.S. Lewis</i> | - <i>Peyton Manning</i> |
| • <i>Martin Luther King</i> | - <i>Martin Luther</i> | - <i>Joan of Arc</i> |
| • <i>Luther, Calvin, and other reformers</i> | | |

2. How do you define Christ-Centered Critical Thinking?

- “I think Christ-centered critical thinking is more, instead of thinking how the world thinks, is thinking how Christ would think.
- “On the flip side, I grew up in a place where everybody was the same type of religion; everybody believed the same thing. There was a lot of debate, but mostly debating trying to be devil’s advocate for someone else, because you never really had anyone else to debate. ...I came to this school and learned more about what else is out there. Not just the worldly views, but also other religious views. I didn’t know anything about even other Christianity views, like I didn’t know anything about Catholicism, and I learned that from friends. I didn’t know anything about Calvinism or Methodists or Episcopalians, and I like being able to come to a place where everybody is gathered together with the center of Christ in mind, but with their own views. I can learn from that, see where everybody else is coming from. Other times, I feel like my own faith is more grounded in learning what others have said about certain situations.. I have always held that above other experiences here, is that my number one best experience is seeing everyone else’s views.” – (A transfer student)
- “ I feel like when you have the filter of Christ and that is what you think through and how you see things is through Christ, and I feel you would define it as how he sees life. Looking at life through His eyes.”

If you heard the phrase, “Christ is the ultimate critical thinker,” what does that mean to you?

- “It would make me think of all of the Parables, because there is a point in the Bible whenever Jesus asks a question. He’s going to answer it for you, but He’s going to answer in the craziest way possible, and you’re just like, ‘How dos He come up with that?’ Those are the best lessons of life. That’s just what I think when I think of him as a critical thinker because He knows how to not only understand a situation, but to make others understand it.”
- “It makes me think about how he knows everything when he gave us the freedom and choice to make our decisions about things, but he knows which situation we’re going to make, and how we state our choice.”
- “He had the ultimate problem, which was sin, and he came up with the ultimate solution for it, and the solution was for Him to be crucified. If you think about that in respect to our lives and our salvation, that is the greatest thing that could ever be thought.”
- “If you look at His teachings using the parables, they require so much critical thinking. To this day, people are still trying to figure out what does this mean, but it is always so simple in the end. “
- “ He knows every situation and created the situation, and he knows the way to go about approaching and handling the situation, and that is how we should do it because he is pure and all knowing.”
- “I would say that is that he thinks before he acts. Everything he did had a purpose; it wasn’t just like he did this just to do it, but he thought before he acted.”
- “Besides Him being the standard for how we should live, he was very brain-based. He went against the grain of what the time said to do. What do you do when your enemy hits you? Well, you turn the other cheek. That’s what Jesus said. If he asked for your cloth, then you gave him your tunic too. If he wants to walk a mile with you, go with him, too. He really broadened the spectrum on what love is. That's what really got me on how Jesus thought critically.”
- “It makes me think about how he knows everything. When he gave us the freedom and choice to make our decisions about things, but he knows which situation we are going to face and how we state our choices.”

3. *What qualities do you think critical thinkers possess?*

- “Self-discipline” - “Patience” “Leadership”
- “Analyze stuff more in-depth. Regular people don’t think that much. Critical thinkers take time to think about what they’re doing and analyze.”
- “It also gives you a sense of self.”
- “Willing to listen to other peoples’ opinions , because you can’t think critically unless you are willing to hear what other people have to say.”
- “Patience. You have patience to draw from your knowledge base to figure out a problem, even though it may take you awhile.”
- “Humility. Knowing that you don’t know everything. Knowing God is the Creator of all things with an infinite mind, and there is always an finite amount of things we can learn as humans with finite minds about God’s creation. So when you look at that in light of who God is, it really drives me to think critically and want to do so.
- “A lot of people who think critically think about other people first.t. When you make a quick decision, you usually only think of yourself.”
- “Adaptability. Like, every situation is going to be different, so you have to think on your toes. So when problems arise, you can think ahead and plan ahead.
- “I think creative and persistent, kind of together, because to solve problems, there’s not always a standard way to do it, and (with) critical thinking, you have got to open your mind to different opportunities. If you do get going on that path to get ideas and problems come, then you have to be persistent and determined to finish the task that you started.”
- “Overachievers. I mean, they do everything else.”
- “Durability. They are willing to stick it out and work through a problem. They don’t give up easily when they see a problem.”

3. (cont.) *What qualities do you think critical thinkers possess?*

- “Creative. From a song-writing perspective, if you are not creative, then you don’t have the desire to step out of the box and do research to find different words or rhymes to express what you are saying instead of just writing it down and saying, ‘good enough.’ If you are creative, you will be driven to step out of the box to make your writing come alive on the page, and as critical thinkers, your desire is to proud of your work instead of being like, ‘oh, I’m good enough; I’ll graduate eventually.’”
- “Needing to be able to organize ideas and analyze them. Understand what you’re learning and reading”
- “You have to be open minded and analyze different opinions so you can compare and find your own way.”
- “I think not only analyzing as part of thinking, but also application. When we break away from this college and graduate, how are we going to live out our education in the ‘Real world?’”

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- “I think not only analyzing as part of thinking, but also application. When we break away from this college and graduate, how are we going to live out our education in the ‘Real world?’”
- “Experience. Lots of experience. If you are never put in a situation and never have to make decisions, like they were saying at Lee (university) where you have so many rules, you can’t make a decision. You don’t think; you just do.”
- “Being on your own forces you to critically think because you think, ‘Why do we do this ? Why that?’ When you are young, you are told to clean your room, and you just do it. But as you get older, you realize that you do it because it’s gross and it stinks.”

4. Describe a course that focuses on developing critical thinking skills. What kinds of activities? What topics?

- “Debates – because you have to think quickly and in critical situations, defend what you stand for in debates.”
- “As an education minor, I would teach a class that is completely scenario-based. I would pull out every single, solitary scenario from the real world I could think of, and I would have you think how you react to it. A lot of times, people just react in the moment, and a lot of times we put definition on things before we think about the circumstances behind what happened or why.”
- “I think it would be a group discussion. If you want the students to think about it, then you don’t want the teacher to tell students how to do it. That’s the point of the class.”
- “In American business ethics, we study different films and relate to American business society and through that, we not only have to recognize the terms, but also recognize how they are being used in different board room situations and recognize what strategies are good for interviews, or just how to go through a situation and not explode; to just being calm and processing the situation the right way.”
- “I know in science, you learn most of the information in class, but in the lab, you take what you’ve learned to the next level. So, taking what you’ve learned in class and thinking about it critically. Also, working with partners in teams helps you to critically think.”
- “In nursing school, they push us to think critically because not only are our test questions really complex, but they want us to be able to take all the information they give us in a question and be able to pin it together and figure out how they all work together so we can answer the question, so when we’re in our clinical experience, we will be able to think through a patient’s disease process from tons of aspects, like, ‘why is this happening?’ to ‘what triggers it?’”

4. (cont.) Describe a course that focuses on developing critical thinking skills. What kinds of activities? What topics?

- “In middle school, we had to take Project Adventure, and we had a ropes course on our campus, and you had to go out and do teambuilding things, but there were also problem-solving teambuilding things. Like you were standing on a log, and you have to arrange everybody by birth date and you can’t step off the log. If you do, you have to start all over. There’s like 26 kids. So, stuff like that, where you have to think critically about how to solve, like the Human Knot.”
- “Pulling in various scenarios from everything that’s going on with the world. I think it would really cause people to be aware of what’s going on, and at the same time, cause them to think for themselves. I also think you should go back into history and contemplate the different paths that could have been taken before. My favorite one I’ve ever been a part of was whether or not the U.S. should have dropped the bomb on Hiroshima.”
- “Case studies that are made-up companies or made-up stories don’t really show the real world. I know my teacher, Donny Wallace, each day will talk about; he’ll pull up three companies about how the stock market fell 20 points, and why. They are current; they actually affect us in some way. They become more valid, and we can think critically about why it happened.”
- “I think the best way to make the class more interesting is how to use this knowledge in real life. “
- “Belief. I mean, different ways to see a Christian belief, and see other beliefs.”

5. *Have you/How have you become more of a critical thinker at Shorter?*

- “In the area of critical thinking, I transferred from a State school, and all the questions were, ‘state the answer,’ but since I’ve come to Shorter, I’ve had to answer, ‘Why’ a lot more. It has challenged me a lot to know what I’m talking about, because you can’t just weasel your way through stuff.”
- “Mine is the opposite. I went to Georgia Tech, and everything was so different because I had to critically think a lot to decide what I believed in and what I thought because everyone had completely different views, and you had to critically think about what is real and what is not.”
- “I think that in the essays that I’ve written. I have been able to analyze and understand, but the tests here, you do not have a choice of critical thinking because everything is multiple choice. They give you a statement, and you are already accepting their ideas, so you don’t need to think. You can say, ‘This is not the topic, so it’s D.’ You don’t think. I think that is one of the weaknesses here. That most of the exams are multiple choice, and that doesn’t allow you to think by your self.” (international student)
- “Golf involves critical thinking because every shot that you stand in front of, you have options. You can hit it towards the flag. You can lay it off short, so you have an easier second shot. You can do anything, so then you have to think about risk and reward. Is it worth aiming at the stake, etc. You have to think about what is best, and what is best for the future. It’s the same with studies.”
- “Maybe you realize that you are not the best at everything. You can always get better in anything and find new ways to do stuff.”
- Athlete’s response: “I think it has, because you need to organize your time. It’s not all about learning, but also organizing your time to be able to play, go away for the tournaments, and catch up with all of the subjects. Organizing my time and developing the skills to be efficient.”

6. *Would critical thinking skills be beneficial to you?*

- “Whenever you think critically, you not only have an answer, you also know why. If you are thinking critically, you should know why you believe what you believe. Since we are about being Christ-centered, it would help people in their faith. That would probably lower the percentage of people who profess faith, then leave the faith once they get to college. “
- “These days we have multiple-choice tests, but problems aren’t really solved through multiple choice. You have to critically think about how to solve a problem in the world. If you are just memorizing from a text book and regurgitating that for a test, then you are not even using your own brain; it’s someone else’s brain. We are dumbing ourselves down and not reaching our full potential.”
- “Critical thinking is something our culture does not do enough of, but it is something that is vital to our survival. We do not think about anything; we go with what we feel or nothing, and whatever we see, we just react.”
- “...you have to realize at the college age, those skills are not necessarily fully developed as they should be. Not that they should be; they’re just not there. You have to through the trials and tribulations of life in general, and as you go through those, critically think about the decisions you are making; and sometimes those don’t come until you have done. That is a big part of critical thinking in a Christ-like way is trying to make sure. If you get a gut feeling that you’re in a wrong place or doing something, you should then be walking away.”
- “It’s easier to be confident in the decision you made if you thought about it. It’s easier to be able to defend it to other people and convince other people of your point of view. When you think about people in leadership, the President has to think critically before he starts a way. There is no downside to critical thinking, only benefits.”

6. (cont.) *Would critical thinking skills be beneficial to you?*

- “I would probably make better decisions. Better grades.”
- “It also gives you a sense of self, which I think is the whole point of Christianity...I’ve had people ask me if there’s really a God, and do we all love Him, and that’s the beauty of it. We are built to be these creatures who think like Him on our own, come to our own conclusions about Him, and we love Him because we want to. And that’s what makes it so beautiful.”
- “I have a deacon at St. Mary’s; he gives really good sermons. There was one sermon, and he said it’s not completely awful to have doubts. What you do is have doubts, and then you look to God and find your answers. That way, you’re delving more into it, you’re going into the Bible and looking this up. You’re finding out what it means, what you were doubting before, and your faith grows stronger.”
- “The future is kind of a big wide-open, gaping hole to me right now because I’m graduating in May, and who knows what I’m doing? But being a Christ-centered critical thinker, it’s like you’re giving your life over to God and following Him...You have to do your job and plan stuff out and work hard on what you want to do, but ultimately, God has a plan for you. I think a lot of that is just trusting in Him to make that plan happen, because if God wants it done, it’s going to happen.”

7. Why did you choose Shorter? What advantage does Shorter offer its students?

- “Scholarship. Free school.”
- “I wanted more one-on-one attention; smaller classrooms, smaller student body.”
- “...It’s a close, family-oriented college. Coming here, we develop from high schoolers into adults.”
- “I think it looks good on a resume. You look at Shorter and know it’s a Christian school, and that you have Christian-based ethics in your teachings. “
- “Focus on education and the fact that we would get smaller class settings.”
- “My best friend came here, and he told me how Christ-centered this place was, and I was like, ‘Okay, I’ll come visit.’ And once I visited, that was it. It was a done deal. The people here were just friendly. They had a small student-teacher ratio; this place was just filled with Christ. That’s basically what brought me here.”
- “The biggest reason that I chose Shorter...I was a student here in 2002, and then I came back because of the openness and people not forced to be somebody they weren’t.”
- “One benefit of Shorter for me is that I haven’t heard anything bad about it. That is something that influenced my decision; that I only heard positive things. It could be because it’s a Christian school, and also because it is pretty safe. You hear about Kennesaw and UGA having stuff happen, and I know my parents were worried about that, and you don’t hear about that at Shorter. And the fact that it is Christ-centered. I have a cousin that goes to KSU, and going there, he doesn’t see Christ outside of his own going to church.”
- “Music and Shorter; they are top notch. All of the professors are well-educated and know what they are doing, and you want to get into that school that you know is competitive. You want to go somewhere where the professors are respected nationally, and your degree will have some weight.”

7. Why did you choose Shorter? What advantage does Shorter offer its students?

- “...I saw that for science graduates that they have a 92% acceptance rate into grad school, so for me, I wasn’t going to find anything better.”
- “The first reason for Shorter is that I’m a Christian ... Second, because the size of the science department is very strong here, and it is a good chance that I will enter med school after Shorter.”
- “Originally, I was a vocal performance major, so for that, but then I stayed because of the relationships and small numbers. You’re not afraid to speak out in classes because of the small numbers.”
- “Relationships with professors. We are welcomed into their homes. We are friends on a professional level, and it makes you want to come to class because they’ll know you aren’t there.”
- “The community and the people. For me, it was so welcoming, and I could see myself fitting in with this group of people. I just loved how everyone was so happy, friendly, and welcoming.”

8. Would a Christ-centered critical thinking course give students a competitive edge? If so, how?

- “If you take that class at the start, it gives you a building block for the rest of your college career...you develop skills and learn.”
- “You would be able to apply what you learn to any circumstance. It could get you ahead if you were given the opportunity to prove yourself. You wouldn’t have to gradually learn it. You already possess the skills and be ahead of other people.”
- “Critical thinking allows you to have a broad idea to how things are, so if you took the class, and for instance a student from another school didn’t take it, you’re going to have the ability to explain and understand in a better way because you took it.”
- “If you took that class at the start, it gives you a building block for the rest of your college career rather than coming in blind as a freshman.”
- “I would say experience-wise, it would be a big benefit.”
- “It’s going to help us in our careers and anything we get into, because you have to use critical thinking in anything that you do. ..You have to take every little aspect of what you’re doing into consideration when you’re actually doing it, so you technically need critical thinking experience throughout your whole life.”
- “The world is constantly changing, medicine is changing, culture is changing, and inevitably, everyone is going to come to a point in their life of something major, and they don’t know what to do because they’ve never encountered it before. They’re going to have to start thinking critically and get through that.”

8. (cont.) Would a Christ-centered critical thinking course give students a competitive edge? If so, how?

- “I want to be able to go to an employer and say, ‘Hey, I’ve had to deal with problem-solving, issues that have been going on in the last couple of years,’ and it shows them that they want someone that’s up-to-date on what’s going on. Maybe not in our field, but in general.”
- “...the recession we’re going through now; it’s like the Great Depression, but not a lot of people are alive from that...We don’t know what to do with it, and neither do other people, like our leaders. They’re trying the best they can to fix it. The thing with that was that we didn’t even bring ourselves out of it. World War II was what brought us out of it. So we never, in the first place, found out how to fix it. We need people who are going to be critical thinkers to figure this out.”
- “...You could be working, and if you have more critical thinking skills, then you can think of an innovative solution to a technical problem and work your way up a bit quicker.”

9. How do you receive information from the school? How do people find out about the QEP?

- “I usually check my email, but posters are nice, too.”
- “Maybe do something with Facebook.”
- “I always notice the banners...and the TV screens.”
- “Do a video segment on the TV’s. That way, we can see the people behind it, so we know who’s presenting these ideas. It’s not just a flyer with no personality to it. It’s like this. Since I know you guys are doing this, and I know you, I want to come support what you’re doing. It’s information I wouldn’t get from a piece of paper.”
- “I always notice the flyers going into the cafe on the door. You’re technically not supposed to put them on doors, but I feel like doors would be the best way to do it.”
- “Chalk, like the Sabots. I usually read whatever the Sabots write on the ground in the chalk.
- “T-shirts!”
- “FAB has actually started something called *Our Voices*, and it’s a discussion group. There’s a topic for each one...It’s a really cool thing, and we had a really good turnout. It’s a good discussion going on, too.”
- “*The Toilet Paper* in the stalls. Like everyone goes to the bathroom, and it’s right there. You’re going to read it.”
- “Syllabus. I think it is one of the most important parts because he (professor) can say something or give you something, and you lose it or forget about it. So syllabus is one of the most efficient ways.”
- “I look around, so if something is hanging on the door, I will stop and read it. And especially if it’s bright.”