

**AILACT Resolution, in Context as Distributed in July, 2007,
with Final Vote of Approval Declared on November 24, 2007**

Whereas:

- 1) The Spellings Commission recommends testing for critical-thinking in higher education institutions in order to see the “value added” so that the public can tell whether it is getting its money's worth, and so that parents, students, and policy-makers can numerically compare institutions; using the transparent results of this testing, which are to be collected and made available by the United States Education Department;
- 2) Commission-inspired transparent critical thinking testing can be expected to produce:
 - a) attention to critical thinking in individual courses and in the total curriculum;
 - b) a check on whether critical thinking in the everyday sense (the epistemic sense) is being taught;
 - c) a check on the effectiveness of critical thinking instruction; and
 - d) helpful information for prospective students and parents about an institution's effectiveness in promoting critical thinking;
- 3) Although the Commission did not explicitly recommend a single nationwide required critical thinking test, its insistence on numerical comparability of institutions exerts strong pressure in that direction;
- 4) A single nationwide required critical thinking test would have overwhelming political and economic problems; and
- 5) There are various other significant problems and dangers in the implementation of the Commission's recommendations.

Therefore, be it resolved that:

- 1) The Association for Informal Logic and Critical Thinking (AILACT) recommends cooperation with the Commission's recommendations for the most part, but also recommends strong opposition to having one nationwide standardized critical-thinking test, although it realizes that a variety of assessment procedures will result in less comparability than is desired by the Commission;
- 2) AILACT recommends more transparency than the Commission requests, in the form of open availability of a) the critical-thinking conception employed, b) outdated or comparable forms of the test used, and c) the argument for the claimed extent of situational validity of the test; and
- 3) AILACT recommends that its members and other endorsers of critical thinking be vigilant in monitoring the extent to which various problems and dangers occur in testing for the “value added” by higher education institutions to students' critical thinking, and take appropriate action when they do occur; and
- 4) The above recommendation for cooperation holds only to the extent that the problems and dangers are well handled.

The major problems and dangers to which reference is made in the above resolution are listed in the “Summary and Comment” section of Robert H. Ennis' “Nationwide Testing of Critical Thinking for Higher Education: Vigilance Required” (2007) on the AILACT website (<http://ailact.mcmaster.ca/papers.htm>) (PDF and Word) and include:

- a) neglect of the everyday (epistemic) concept of critical thinking, the nature of the test used, and the argument for situational test validity;
- b) neglect of the distinction between psychometric reliability and situational test validity;
- c) overemphasis on psychometric reliability at the expense of situational test validity;
- d) the possibility that internal-consistency methods of determining psychometric reliability will be biased against multi-dimensional critical-thinking tests;
- e) the possibility that in order to keep up the psychometric reliabilities, a critical thinking test will be limited to deductive logic;
- f) manipulation to make an institution look good to the public, policy makers, and accrediting agencies;
- g)) the common neglect of other possible explanations of “value-added” evidence, pre-test/post-test differences, and “student learning outcomes” evidence;
- h) variation in standard deviations used to exhibit practical differences in test results;

- i) failure to satisfy the need for fairly large organizations for administering, scoring, and providing test security; and the concomitant need for qualified personnel for making and supervising the use of a critical-thinking test;
- j) sacrifice of test quality for the sake of economy;
- k) penalization, because of ceilings and floors of tests, of institutions with a preponderance of students at either a high level or low level of critical thinking prowess;
- l) the use of computers to do the grading of essays solicited in order to assess critical thinking;
- m) the wrong kind of teaching to the test, the kind that destroys a test's situational validity;
- n) the lack of comparability among different tests, resulting in pressure for a single, required national test; and
- o) the severe political and economic problems of a single required test, as well as the exacerbation of the above-listed problems and dangers resulting from the extra pressure on institutions that would result from the comparisons among institutions that would be an inevitable consequence of having only one or a few alternative required nationwide tests.