



36% of College Graduates Unable to Think Critically: BrainWise Needed STAT!

A recent front page story in the Wall Street Journal presented findings from a study that followed 2,322 students at 24 U.S. colleges and universities from the fall of 2005 to the spring of 2009. After the first two years of college, 45 percent of these students made no significant improvement in their critical thinking, reasoning or writing skills. After four years, 36 percent still could not demonstrate that they could think critically. They showed "no improvement in separating fact from opinion, taking an objective point of view, communicating effectively, asking the right questions, and using other complex reasoning and writing skills."

These findings, reported in a book by Professors Richard Arum and Josipa Rolosa, have been hailed by reviewers as provocative, groundbreaking, important, shocking, and serious scholarship. Bill Gates said, "Before reading this book, I took it for granted that colleges were doing a very good job" (see [Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses](#)).

As part of the study, students answered the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA), a 90-minute essay-type test that measures real-world, problem-solving tasks to measure critical thinking skills. Below is a demonstration CLA sample problem.

Collegiate Learning Assessment SAMPLE PROBLEM INSTRUCTIONS.

This is an example of a CLA+ Performance Task. Students are asked to prepare a written response to a hypothetical but realistic situation. The Performance Task is made up of an introductory scenario, a question, and seven documents/information sources. The student will use information from the documents to carry out the task. Students are told that while their personal values and experiences



You are the chief marketing officer of SportsCo, an athletic equipment company. The most profitable sector of the company is its new line of inline skates called HotSkates. Given the success of the current HotSkates advertising campaign, the company has planned to continue with it for the next three months. However,

are important, they should base their response solely on the evidence provided in the documents. Although the sample problem presented here was designed for college students, BrainWise instructors will recognize that their middle school and high school students can analyze it using the 10 Wise Ways. In fact, the BrainWise CPR problem solving worksheet and BrainWise checklists contain all the thinking skills necessary for students to access resources and present a fact-based proposal that supports or negates whether SportsCo should invest in a HotSkates ad campaign. Wouldn't it be interesting to see how young graduates of BrainWise compare with college students assessing the same problems? Additional CLA practice tests are available [here](#).

after a recent skating accident in which a teenager was seriously injured, SportsCo is now the subject of negative press relating to possible safety hazards associated with its products. Critics are saying that the HotSkates advertisements do not adequately convey the advanced skill level necessary to safely perform tricks on the skates. If SportsCo continues with the current campaign, it risks facing lawsuits as well as increasing negative public opinion of the company's ethical standards. However, instituting a new advertising campaign will require a great deal of time and money, and the new campaign may not be as successful as the present one. It is your job to decide whether to continue with the present ad campaign.

As instructors already know, BrainWise graduates of all ages learn to use critical thinking to solve problems. Here are a few examples they have shared:

- The kindergartner who recognized that the fox "used his Wizard Brain to trick the Gingerbread Boy to ride on his back across the river and then used his Lizard Brain to eat him;"
- The teen who said she thought about the consequences later and the consequences affecting others when she sought help for suicidal ideation;
- The parent who had the family use "I" messages at the dinner table to set a respectful tone, and used "popcorn" as a mantra to defuse tense situations.

The BrainWise program's 10 Wise Ways teach concepts that underlie both "executive functions" and "critical thinking" -- skills that need to be in greater supply.

Featured BrainWise Instructor: Gary Brayton



Dr. Gary Brayton

Gary Brayton, PhD, RSW, MSW is a clinical social worker and BrainWise instructor and trainer in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. He learned about BrainWise from a colleague who had successfully used the program to help youth develop executive functions. Dr. Brayton started teaching BrainWise in 2013 and has introduced the program throughout schools in Alberta, including in the Medicine Hat and Brooks school districts. He also teaches BrainWise, trains staff at residential treatment facilities, and works with mental health professionals, foster parents, and parents of

youth in treatment. His efforts have introduced BrainWise to thousands of children, youth and adults. The BrainWise Team gratefully acknowledges his dedication to youth, and his support and work improving lives.

Thanks to all BrainWise instructors for making a difference and being part of the solution!



Dr. Pat

On a lighter note . . .

"Men in Black" Critical Thinking



The BrainWise Program

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