

## **Appendix A: Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) Summary Findings**

The CLA assesses critical thinking skills in undergraduates independent of the field of study. A sample of 117 first-year students completed the CLA during their first semester at Elizabethtown, Fall 2012. Students were recruited from a range of first-year seminars.

Students completed one of two 90-minute critical thinking assessments: the Performance Task or the Analytical Writing Task. The Performance Task required students to give written responses to questions about the quality and credibility of various sources of evidence and to compare and contrast strengths and limitations of alternative hypotheses or points of view. The Analytical Writing task asked students to write a persuasive essay to “make-an-argument” in support or against a position on some issue. The same students were also asked to “critique-an-argument” that was presented to them.

Results showed that the first-year students scored in the 80<sup>th</sup> percentile on the CLA relative to a national sample of first-year, first-semester students. Performance task scores were stronger (83<sup>rd</sup> percentile) than Analytical Writing scores (75<sup>th</sup> percentile: 71<sup>st</sup> percentile for make-an-argument, and 77<sup>th</sup> percentile for critique-an-argument). This level of performance is similar to what would have been predicted based on the students’ entering academic ability as estimated from their SAT scores.

For reference, we can compare these results to the data from 91 Elizabethtown seniors who were tested in Spring 2012 on the same tasks. The seniors scored in the 85<sup>th</sup> percentile relative to a national sample of second-semester college seniors. Our seniors also scored higher on the performance task (86<sup>th</sup> percentile) as compared to the analytic writing task (81<sup>st</sup> percentile). Again, make-an-argument scores (74<sup>th</sup> percentile) were lower than critique-an-argument scores (86<sup>th</sup> percentile). In contrast to the results for the first-year students, Elizabethtown seniors’ critical thinking performance exceeded what would have been predicted based on their SAT scores. Given those scores, we would have predicted seniors to score in the 80<sup>th</sup> percentile on the CLA, a level very similar to the first-year students who were tested the following fall. This is preliminary evidence that an Elizabethtown education enhances critical thinking skills.