

Defining Characteristics Of Basic Intellectual Competencies In The Core Curriculum

The core curriculum guidelines described here are predicated on the judgment that a series of basic intellectual competencies -- reading, writing, speaking, listening, critical thinking, and computer literacy -- are essential to the learning process in any discipline and thus should inform any core curriculum.

Although students can be expected to come to college with some experience in exercising these competencies, they often need further instruction and practice to meet college standards and, later, to succeed in both their major field of academic study and their chosen career or profession.

READING: Reading at the college level means the ability to analyze and interpret a variety of printed materials -- books, articles, and documents. A core curriculum should offer students the opportunity to master both general methods of analyzing printed materials and specific methods for analyzing the subject matter of individual disciplines.

WRITING: Competency in writing is the ability to produce clear, correct, and coherent prose adapted to purpose, occasion, and audience. Although correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation are each a sine qua non in any composition, they do not automatically ensure that the composition itself makes sense or that the writer has much of anything to say. Students need to be familiar with the writing process including how to discover a topic and how to develop and organize it, how to phrase it effectively for their audience. These abilities can be acquired only through practice and reflection.

SPEAKING: Competence in speaking is the ability to communicate orally in clear, coherent, and persuasive language appropriate to purpose, occasion, and audience. Developing this competency includes acquiring poise and developing control of the language through experience in making presentations to small groups, to large groups, and through the media.

LISTENING: Listening at the college level means the ability to analyze and interpret various forms of spoken communication.

CRITICAL THINKING: Critical thinking embraces methods for applying both qualitative and quantitative skills analytically and creatively to subject matter in order to evaluate arguments and to construct alternative strategies. Problem solving is one of the applications of critical thinking, used to address an identified task.

COMPUTER LITERACY: Computer literacy at the college level means the ability to use computer-based technology in communicating, solving problems, and acquiring

information. Core-educated students should have an understanding of the limits, problems, and possibilities associated with the use of technology, and should have the tools necessary to evaluate and learn new technologies as they become available.

Some of these intellectual competencies have traditionally been tied to specific courses required of all students during their first two years of college. For example, courses in college composition, together with mathematics, have long been the cornerstone experience of the freshman year. But a single course or two-course sequence in college composition can do little more than introduce students to the principles and practices of good writing. Within the boundary of three to six semester credit hours of course work, neither of these sequences can guarantee proficiency. Moreover, in most curricula there are no required courses specifically dedicated to reading or to critical thinking. Thus, if a core curriculum is to prepare students effectively, it is imperative that, insofar as possible, these intellectual competencies be included among the objectives of many individual core courses and reflected in their course content.