

Educational Philosophy

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Rationale and Goals

UCO adopted the Seven Principles of Best Practice in Undergraduate Education after administering the National Survey of Student Engagement several years ago. The principles, however, were never widely discussed or interpreted in terms of their meaning for us as educators. As the academic community at UCO has grown and developed an articulated mission, vision and core values, the issue of a clear statement of educational philosophy has become more and more important to us.

The Academic Affairs Executive Committee at its March 14, 2007 planning retreat asked "What is important to us in terms of educational philosophy? If we were to describe our sense of what matters in education to a prospective faculty member or student, what would we tell them? What concepts and practices in terms of educational philosophy do we share regardless of discipline or administrative division within the university?"

What follows is a set of underlying principles that share much in common with the Seven Principles and are based on the discussion and ideas offered at the planning retreat. Following these underlying principles is a philosophy statement that reflects the principles.

It is hoped that we can find some common ground and create something that speaks to us at UCO and that can be used to help guide our practices in both the curricular and co-curricular interactions on our campuses. Once completed and adopted, the principles and philosophy statement should be used to guide our practices of helping students learn. While we embrace the beliefs in what follows, how they are implemented in courses and programs will vary across academic units.

General Philosophy Statement

Education at UCO involves the **active and intentional participation** of both students and faculty members. Learning is most meaningful when **students take responsibility for their own education** by **committing the time**, effort and thinking necessary to succeed, **interact** with faculty members inside and outside of class, **engage** with other students in the learning process, and pursue opportunities to **apply their learning** in communities outside the classroom. Faculty create meaningful learning environments when they provide intellectually challenging opportunities, **interact** with students inside and outside of class, provide **timely evaluation** of student performance, maintain and communicate **high expectations** for all students, demonstrate **concern for the well-being of students**, **reflect upon their own practices**, and **participate** in the design and continuous improvement of academic programs.

Underlying Principles

1. Student–Faculty Contact and Interaction

Learning is enhanced by frequent student-faculty contact in and out of classes. This is an important factor in student motivation, involvement and success. Knowing a few faculty members well enhances students' intellectual commitment and encourages them to think about their own values and future plans. A faculty member's interest, availability and responsiveness are critical in fostering these changes in students.

2. Cooperation and Collaboration

Learning is enhanced when students are engaged in cooperative and collaborative activities. Good learning, like good work, is collaborative and social, not competitive and isolated. Working with others often increases involvement in learning. Sharing one's own ideas and responding to others' reaction improves critical thinking and deepens understanding. Learning to work well with peers of diverse background through team activities and projects develops in students the necessary set of skills required for success in life, the workplace, and in global societies.

3. Active Learning

Learning is enhanced when students are required to become mentally active participants in the learning process. Examples of active learning include requiring students to talk and write about what they are learning, what it means to them, how it relates to past experiences, and how they can apply it to their lives. The ability to reflect about learning and experiences enables students to make what they learn part of themselves.

4. Feedback and Evaluation

Learning is enhanced by feedback that is prompt, specific and related to articulated learning outcomes. Students benefit from assistance with assessing existing knowledge and competence. Students need frequent opportunities to demonstrate what they know and have learned. Feedback that includes suggestions for improvement at various points of the semester and throughout their college experience enables them to further reflect on what they have learned, what they still need to learn, and how to become responsible for their own learning including self-assessment and peer evaluation.

5. Time on Task

Learning is enhanced by maximizing the time that is available. Learning to budget one's time well is critical for students and professionals alike. Students need help in learning effective time management. Allocating realistic amounts of time means effective learning for students and effective teaching for faculty. How an institution defines time expectations for students, faculty, administrators, and other professional staff can establish the basis for high performance for all.

6. High Expectations

Academic excellence is ensured by having high expectations for students and faculty members. Students are expected to make a significant effort and to demonstrate their responsibility for their own learning how to become productive, creative, ethical and engaged citizens. Faculty and staff are expected to model and support student efforts towards those ends and to demonstrate the importance of life-long learning.

7. Diversity

Learning is enhanced by embracing the diverse talents and approaches students and faculty members contribute to the process. Students need the opportunity to show their talents and learn in ways that work for them. Then they can be encouraged to develop a more robust array of approaches to learning. We should expect students to learn in multiple ways, as we expect faculty members to approach the art and science of teaching in multiple ways.

8. Modeling Professional Behavior

Learning is enhanced by faculty members modeling professional behavior for students. These behaviors include acting with integrity and by being organized, well prepared, respectful, collaborative, reflective and passionate about one's discipline and learning in general. Modeling the importance of life-long learning and being responsible for one's continued learning and development is crucial.

9. Inquiry, Research, Creative and Critical Thinking

Learning is enhanced by engaged students in transformational activities related to understanding the existing theory and knowledge base of their discipline, learning and using tools of inquiry and research and further developing their ability to think creatively, abstractly, and critically. Students must also learn the importance of the nexus between theory and practice.

10. Learning-Centered

In a learning-centered organization, students, faculty and staff are simultaneously challenged and supported by a community of colleagues who demonstrate care, respect, empathy and passion for learning.