Fairfield University: Pathways to Core Integration

After a series of conversations among dozens of faculty, staff and students in retreats, meetings, online exchanges and other venues, six “pathways to core integration” were identified by faculty in 2009-2010. For full definitions, see http://www.fairfield.edu/documents/academic/cae_core_pathways_bro.pdf

What’s the point of the pathways?

Ultimately, the pathways and their associated student learning objectives aim to help get beyond fragmented learning, and see concrete ways to meaningfully connect curricular and co-curricular experiences. For students, the list names six frameworks to integrate learning across the core, within their majors and minors, and throughout their living and learning experiences. For faculty and staff, the list gives a variety of overarching learning objectives that different courses, co-curricular activities and learning communities can target as outcomes. Students doing a science experiment, for instance, can be asked to articulate how they communicated (with team members), used quantitative analysis, and took responsible action (as a citizen) based on their results, among other implications. The goal of the pathways structure is to illustrate the recurring themes of education at Fairfield University, and to guide students to identify these themes across their varied educational experiences.

Engaging Traditions

Liberal education in the Catholic and Jesuit tradition has always had, at its core, the act of retrieving the manifold traditions of human reflection – philosophical schools, religious traditions of faith and practice, historical accounts of peoples and cultures, and oral and literary traditions. The ability to engage a tradition in its own context is central to a credible and responsible engagement with the world as it is. Always ordered to a new day, however, we not only mediate past and present, but use this knowledge to freshly approach enduring questions and take creative and accountable action in the world. Learning outcomes in this pathway may include the ability to:

• Demonstrate knowledge of fundamental principles, generalizations, and theories behind religious, philosophical, historical, cultural and literary traditions
• Explain how traditions of reflection on life and meaning are worthy of engagement today
• Construct a clear understanding of and commitment to one’s own personal values
• Articulate how one arrives at one’s values by applying and evaluating traditions of wisdom and knowledge
• Analyze and critically evaluate traditions as systems of construction of knowledge and power

Creative and Aesthetic Engagement

Creativity is a process of transformation, of taking things, whether they are physical or intellectual, and turning them into something new. Aesthetic Engagement refers to the awareness, understanding, and judgment of the aesthetic properties of art and nature. Such appreciation promotes emotional development, refines ways of seeing, interpreting, and makes life experiences more meaningful. Learning outcomes in this pathway may include the ability to:

• Identify canonical works and aesthetic movements
• Employ an aesthetic perspective as a way of engaging with the world
• Experiment with course material to innovate and participate in any creative process
• Invent and perform with various media in art, music, drama, etc.
• Collaborate with others in creative processes or aesthetic engagement

Global Citizenship

Global citizenship encompasses identities and a sense of self-realization and belonging at many levels of participation and self-realization, from the individual, to family, society, country, the world, and planet earth itself. Even as tensions arise among our arenas of belonging, we navigate such obstacles to work constructively through differences and make the most of growing ethnic, cultural, racial, linguistic and religious diversity. The point is to reflect humbly on our privileges, connect with others, not only know the world but engage with the world, and work towards social justice by transforming society for the greater good. Learning outcomes in this pathway may include the ability to:

• Identify social, institutional and political forces that shape the world
• Interpret historical, political, scientific, cultural and socioeconomic interconnections between the U.S. and the rest of the world
• Recognize and examine cultural activity and communities different from one’s own
• Articulate a clear understanding of global citizenship.
• Describe and critically evaluate global and local perspectives and the interconnections between the two

Rhetoric and Reflection
As habits of mind, rhetorical action and reflection are key principles of Jesuit education. The focus of both is to use thought and language for specific academic, intellectual, and social purposes, and to develop the habit of mindful reflection. Learning outcomes in this pathway may include the ability to:
• Develop creative capacity and skills in oral and written expression using the full resources of language in a) invention (reading and writing as discovery), b) drafting and revision (writing as critical thinking), and c) editing for publication, presentation, or performance (writing as public communication and action)
• Demonstrate effective and ethical use of resources for answering questions or solving problems through inquiry: generating questions, evaluating research/information, and developing claims, using evidence and logical structures.
• Analyze ideas and arguments from multiple kinds of texts, understanding that all communication is rhetorically situated, and that different communities, cultures, and disciplines use varied and dynamic modes and genres to meet multiple purposes
• Practice working with others as a member of a team or group to illustrate the collaborative and social nature of reading, writing, and speech as both individual and social acts
• Apply course material to improve thinking, problem solving, and decisions in different settings
• Deploy the full resources of language in an ethical way for personal, academic, social, and civic work.

Quantitative Reasoning
In order to perform effectively as professionals and citizens, students must become competent in using, interpreting and presenting quantitative data; in understanding the power and limitations of quantitative reasoning; and in applying basic quantitative skills to support arguments and solve real-life problems. Learning outcomes in this pathway may include the ability to:
• Indicate factual knowledge of numerical concepts and skills
• Demonstrate specific skills and competencies that encourage habits of mind needed to think quantitatively
• Apply mathematical concepts and skills to solve real-world problems
• Critically evaluate data and quantitative arguments
• Describe the limits and value of quantitative reasoning
• Effectively explain the results of quantitative analysis and interpretations.

Scientific Reasoning
This pathway evokes the power and importance of scientific knowledge and analysis in daily life. The questions of science emerge from measured observation of patterns exhibited by the natural world. If the answers to a particular question do not agree with the prevailing model, then the model or representation will change. This also involves taking responsibility for the role of science, and the technologies emergent from the science, in creating a better world for some people, places, and species, but at the same time compromising living standards and conditions for others. Learning outcomes in this pathway may include the ability to:
• Demonstrate knowledge of fundamental principles, generalizations, or theories including the scientific method, falsifiability and contingency
• Apply specific skills and competencies needed in the field such as generating hypotheses, designing experiments, collecting, evaluating, and interpreting real data, and connecting to theory
• Analyze and critically evaluate data by using inductive and deductive reasoning
• Appraise the value of critically examining scientific claims and of differentiating between good science, pseudoscience, and non-science.

For more information about the Core Pathways, contact Dr. Lynn Babington, Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs, at lbabington@fairfield.edu.

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