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## PRINCIPLES OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

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These principles provide the framework for teaching and learning in Gateway to College National Network (GtCNN) programs. They do not specify content. Rather, they are precepts based on research and best practices that should be used by faculty, resource specialists, and directors to guide the design, facilitation, and assessment of all learning in GtCNN programs. While, taken together, these principles describe an ideal, they articulate what each GtCNN program should strive to achieve. Like our students, GtCNN programs are at different stages of development. As instructional leaders, GtCNN directors should lead their teams in assessing how well they are meeting each of the principles and, in the spirit of continuous improvement, identifying areas and strategies for improvement. The Gateway to College National Network supports those improvement efforts through face to face training, webinars, brown bag trainings, referrals to resources, tailored data analysis, and peer learning.

### **Integrated, Outcomes-based Curriculum and Instruction**

Instructors work together to develop an integrated, coherent curriculum centered on interdisciplinary themes, enabling students to apply what they learn in one course to their learning in other courses. All instruction is designed around the essential question: *What do students need to know and be able to do to be successful college students?* Outcomes clearly define what students will be able to do “out there,” once they complete a class rather than what they will do *in class*. Students are able to articulate the intended outcome(s) for all learning experiences and describe how those outcomes are relevant to their goals. All instructional activities are intentionally designed to help students understand the concepts or develop the skills required to achieve the intended outcomes rather than to “cover” a body of information.

### **Rigor**

Instructors are aware of incoming student ability levels and tailor learning challenges to the student’s developmental level. Students build problem-solving and critical thinking skills including analysis, synthesis, and evaluation, as they engage in meaningful projects or explore driving questions. Instructors cultivate an “ethic of excellence” in which students develop habits and internal standards for producing high quality work which, in turn, serves as a source of pride. By holding students to high expectations while offering high levels of encouragement and support, instructors enable students to meet those expectations, gain confidence as learners, and view themselves as belonging in college, thereby setting the stage for success.

## **Relationships - Collaborative, Inclusive Learning Communities**

A caring, solution-focused approach to working with students is the foundation for all learning. Instructors develop personal connections with students and foster an environment that values and respects individual differences. Instructors design learning activities that teach and reinforce the skills and habits required for effective collaborative learning. They teach students how to build a supportive community that lives within and outside of the classroom (e.g., in study groups).

## **Relevance - Project-based, Active Learning**

Students develop knowledge, understanding, and skills through active engagement with meaningful, interdisciplinary, collaborative projects or driving questions, rather than through disconnected, isolated assignments.

## **Constructing Meaning**

Instructors teach students how to understand new concepts by adding to, modifying, or reorganizing existing knowledge and concepts. They help students solve new problems by drawing on previous experiences and they make the learning process explicit so that students are able to recognize the connections between new learning and existing concepts and skills. Instructional activities are flexible enough to provide students with opportunities to learn in ways that are meaningful to them.

## **Personal Growth**

Instructors help students overcome self-defeating beliefs by recognizing that academic success is attributable to controllable factors such as hard work, persistence, and resilience rather than innate ability or luck. By promoting habits such as setting SMART goals, organization, and self-advocacy, instructors help students identify themselves as independent, successful college students. In order to empower students to take responsibility for their own learning, instructors help students discover and understand their learning style, the conditions under which they best learn, and their role in the learning process. Instructors teach students specific strategies for learning, reasoning, and problem solving. They structure opportunities for students to reflect on and evaluate their learning and identify strategies for improvement.

## **Assessment**

Instructors design projects and other performance tasks that provide evidence that the student is capable of achieving the intended outcome(s). Through the use of rubrics, students can distinguish “what is good” for a particular project and can differentiate between high quality and poor work. Instructors structure opportunities for students to make their work public within and outside of the classroom and teach students how to give and receive constructive feedback. In the pursuit of excellence, instructors and student peers provide formative feedback on multiple drafts of projects, rather than a “one and done” approach. Feedback is solution-focused, helping students recognize how strengths and past successes provide keys to overcoming new challenges. Data-based decision-making guides the improvement of student and program outcomes. Instructors regularly and collaboratively reflect on direct evidence of learning (individual student performance on projects, tests, and other performance tasks) and indirect evidence of learning (student reflections and feedback). The *Cycle of Inquiry* is regularly used to analyze aggregate measures of student progress, including course success rates and student success on the comprehensive campus.