

## The Integrated Goals of Critical Thinking and Communication

Critical thinking and communication comprise the foundation of any liberal arts education. The ability to articulate a question, identify and gain access to appropriate information, organize and present evidence, and construct complex, elegant, and persuasive arguments in written and oral forms are integral to the Colleges' vision to "explore, collaborate, and act."

Critical and creative thinking, and their expression through the media of writing and speaking are understood to develop over the course of a student's learning experience:

- The First Year Experience (FYE) introduces students to critical thinking and communication skills through introductory courses in disciplines across the curriculum. At the center of the FYE is the writing-intensive **First Year Seminar**, which introduces students to the intellectual community of the Colleges and provides academic mentorship. The First Year Seminar introduces and integrates within the seminar many of the Colleges' academic resources.
- The **writing-enriched curriculum (WEC)** builds on the FYE by further developing the key writing and thinking abilities characteristic of a student's major, as well as the ability to recognize key features of the major's discourse. WEC is built upon several premises: that writing can be flexibly defined as an articulation of thinking in a variety of forms; that writing is continually developed in new contexts and genres, rather than a skill to be mastered; and that writing instruction is the shared responsibility of faculty in all departments and programs.
- The **senior capstone experience** is both a continuation and culmination of the student's development in critical thinking and communication. Specific to each major, the capstone experience demands substantial understanding of the discipline's central questions and literacy in its modes of reasoning and communication.

## Aspirational Goals of the Curriculum

Along with our integrated goals of critical thinking and communication, the **aspirational goals** of the curriculum expose students to modes of critical, analytic, and creative thinking and communications found across fields of study; these goals thus underscore the imperative of a liberal arts education to provide a breadth of knowledge and the means to express that knowledge effectively.

**The ability to reason quantitatively.** *The ability to reason quantitatively is necessary for using and interpreting quantitative data or mathematical arguments in decision making. Quantitative reasoning fosters numerical literacy, and is best developed by working with numerical evidence to evaluate trends, patterns, and claims or by using mathematical concepts to create or assess complex arguments.*

**An experiential understanding of scientific inquiry.** *An experiential understanding of scientific inquiry provides the intellectual foundation for evaluating scientific claims about the natural world. Scientific inquiry involves posing and answering questions by testing hypotheses through observational studies, experimental testing, or modeling. Understanding the processes by which knowledge is gained in the natural sciences is best developed through the direct experience of the investigative inquiry that characterizes scientific practice, grounded in laboratory, field, or classroom experiences.*

**A critical and experiential understanding of artistic process.** *A critical and experiential understanding of artistic process emerges from engagements with art that are both expressive and reflective. The understanding of artistic expression may be cultivated through studies that are entirely performance-centered, studio-based, or workshop-based, as well as through studies that integrate performance or creative activity with topics related to the art form.*

**A critical understanding of social inequalities.** *A critical understanding of social inequalities will draw on evidence to analyze how wealth, power, and privilege are distributed unequally in human societies based on factors including, though not limited to, gender, race, class, religion, sexuality, age, disability, indigeneity, nationality, ethnicity, or language. This understanding can be fostered by examining the historical background, social conditions, and intersections of different forms of inequality; by acquiring a deeper understanding of the lives of individuals and groups who experience inequality; by scrutinizing ideologies and social constructions for justifying inequality; or by critically assessing past and present collective strategies for reducing social inequality.*

**A critical understanding of cultural difference.** *A critical understanding of cultural difference is necessary for thoughtful, cooperative, and productive communication in a global community. Global citizenship requires the ability to understand how and why human thought, expression, and action are constituted by differences of historical background, social context, cultural heritage, and linguistic tradition. This understanding can be cultivated through the critical study of a cultural heritage that is substantively different from one's own, or through the study of cross-cultural interaction and cultural change.*

**An intellectual foundation for ethical judgment as a basis for socially responsible action.** *An intellectual foundation for ethical judgment as a basis for socially responsible action requires the ability to think and argue rigorously about questions of how things should be. This foundation ideally incorporates a historically informed examination of one's values and an understanding of the role of particular circumstances in the context of ethical judgment and action. These skills can be developed by studying professional ethics, public service, social justice, human rights, environmental responsibility, and other topics that raise questions of how to engage in responsible action.*

The curriculum of the Colleges emphasizes the breadth of critical thinking and communication found across disciplines, as well as specific modes of analytical reasoning, communicating, and critical thinking within disciplines. Over the course of their studies at the Colleges, students develop the ability to examine and evaluate facts and phenomena, discern patterns and arguments, and understand and form connections between ideas, issues, and values. The ability to share one's discoveries, interpretations, or analyses is essential to becoming a creative and critical thinker and communicator. Our curriculum embodies the fundamental mission of a liberal arts education to develop, in all of its elements, each student's capacity for analytical, expressive, empathetic, critical, and effective reasoning and communication, which can be carried forward into life, work, and the world.