

COLUMBIA COLLEGE

Columbia Learning Culture

NOTE:

Must; Shall; Will:

Should:

May or Could; Can:

Clarification of Terms

These words or phrases indicate actions or activities that are *essential* or *mandatory*.

This word implies that it is highly desirable to perform certain actions or activities, but not essential or mandatory.

These words imply freedom or liberty to follow an alternative to the action or activity being presented in a document.

Path to Academic Excellence

One of Columbia College's goals is to produce graduates who are assessed by employers and receiving institutions as above average to excellent performers both in their understanding of academic subject matter (concepts and theory) as well as their ability to perform in the workplace (problem solving skills, team work, professional approach, productivity, etc.). This is a challenging goal and one that receives a high level of commitment from our faculty, staff, and students and one we are continuously trying to improve on.

To achieve this goal the College has taken action in the following areas:

Faculty and Staff

Faculty and staff are hired who demonstrate five criteria. First, they are well educated in their discipline. For example, ESL and Academic Upgrading faculty normally have at least a Bachelor of Education Degree and formal certification to work with foreign language students. Professional program faculty who are facilitating in degree bound programs must have at least a master's degree from a recognized institution. This will ensure students are being led in the classroom by highly educated professionals.

Secondly, more than half the faculty in professional programs will be current practitioners in the discipline or subject matter they are assigned to facilitate. As such, they will be part time core faculty assigned to a number of relevant courses. For example, practicing professional accountants will facilitate accounting courses and practical and registered nurses will lead nursing courses. This means students will be learning from highly educated faculty members who are actively engaged in the field. These professionals will help the students learn the most relevant concepts. They will also help students understand what they mean and how to apply it in a real world situation.

Faculty and staff will be hired because they are passionate about helping students to 1) successfully complete their courses and program, 2) graduate from their program, and 3) achieve employment in their field of training. Their commitment must be about doing everything they can to assist, support, counsel, mentor, advise, listen to and help students deal with their challenges. While some students may find certain concepts and skills easier to acquire, they may find other ones more difficult. To assist them faculty will spend extra time inside and outside class to work with them and help them succeed. The commitment of our faculty and staff is to do everything they can to make sure every student is successful. They believe that when a student fails then they too have failed and failure is not an acceptable position. Faculty and staff realize that 80 percent of their time will be spent assisting 20 percent of our students.

The vast majority of our faculty and staff will be hired not because they have an education degree but because they have specialized training in the profession or occupation the program

is designed around. As such, they understand that they will need to spend a great deal of time understanding the structure and operations of this educational institution. They will also need to read, attend workshops, and participate in faculty and staff development activities designed to assist them in becoming highly skilled educational professionals.

Finally, our faculty and staff will take on active roles as members of the College community and engaged members of their program and/or department. As professional team members they will contribute to the development of the College, its departments, and educational programs. They will work with other members of the College community in a caring and respectful manner, and assist them in the successful completion of their roles.

Student Success

The ultimate success of Columbia College rests on the success of our key customers, our students. Their success is our success and their failure is our failure. As stated earlier, when we define student success we are really talking about the percent of successful graduates, the percent of students who passed their national exam (where applicable), the percent who are employed in their field of training, the degree of Employer Satisfaction, and the percent who applied for further education and were accepted.

To help ensure student success, the following measures have been taken.

- All students in our pre-career, certificate, diploma, and degree bound programs are required to complete an academic assessment. Columbia has developed a unique academic assessment for each program. The purpose of the assessment is to determine if the student has the prerequisite academic skills (eg., math, English, science) needed to complete the program he/she applied to.
- Students who score low on the assessment are required to upgrade their skills. To assist them the College offers free upgrading courses in math, English, science, etc. These courses are offered throughout the year and once the student achieves the academic marks needed he/she is referred back to his/her student services admissions advisor to complete the enrolment in his/her program.
- Since many of Columbia College's students are older and more mature adults (average age 35) and tend to lack many of the basic learning to learn skills such as computer skills, writing skills, study skills, test taking skills, etc., the College has developed a college foundation course that most professional programs require students to take prior to program start.
- Students also go through program orientation activities designed to help them understand their program related roles and responsibilities. They are also told about the structure of the program, method of delivery, and expectations of their performance and the various supports available to help them succeed inside the classroom, in their program and within the College. Next, students are shown a weekly planner designed to help them understand how they should manage their time between classes, labs, cooperative education, and homework. The course syllabus for their first semester course and textbook are handed out and reviewed. Students are also made aware of their homework assignment due for the first class and the fact that they will be given a formal evaluation such as a 15 to 20 minute test related to that assignment. They will also be told to bring up to 3 written questions related to their assigned readings that will be handed to the faculty member upon entering the class.

- Students will further learn during orientation that, during their theory classes, they will normally be expected to complete prior to their first class. To help them and their faculty member assess their acquisition of homework knowledge, students will be formally evaluated within the first hour of each four hour class. These evaluations will normally consist of a 15 to 20 minute test. This will be preceded by up to one hour of discussion and activities related to the written questions students will bring to class. Since each course normally consists of 10 four hour classes (40 instructional hours), students will experience a test during each of nine classes and a final exam (or related assignment). As the classes proceed, faculty members will be able to quickly identify at-risk students based on their daily test results. They will then meet privately with each student in order to determine what the student can do and what the faculty member can do to help mitigate the situation. If this first level of intervention does not work, they may also seek assistance from peers, their department administrators, staff, and other specialists within the College.
- In addition to writing, marking, and discussing questions related to tests, each of which helps to acquire new knowledge, faculty will actively and collaboratively engage students in almost every class by having them review, discuss, and solve a case that relates to the application of newly acquired knowledge. In solving the case faculty may have students role play, debate, discuss in small groups, present, demonstrate, simulate, observe, evaluate, and reflect on what they are learning. These activities will strengthen students' understanding of new concepts and move it closer to long term memory.
- Faculty will also encourage students to relate these new concepts to their personal experiences in life or at their workplace (eg., cooperative education).
- To assist students the College offers workshops on various topics, web based presentations and additional resources. While some services will be optional, others will be required for students at-risk or students on academic probation.
- To prepare students for employment the College requires all students in professional programs as well as most students in pre-career programs to take a cooperative education credit course during specified academic years of study. This is in addition to 9 or more academic courses per academic year in degree transfer programs. Student Services personnel and/or other designated leaders meet with students early in their program and assist them in preparing to contact suitable employers. Students may be assisted in establishing a cooperative education worksite. Once an agreement is signed by the employer, student, and College representative the students will either work volunteering or be paid to work between 5 and 15 hours per week. College representatives will assist our students and their employers with issues as they arise and will ask the employer to complete an evaluation of student performance at the end of each academic year. The evaluation will be used as part of the final grade for this course.
- College personnel will also assist students in obtaining employment upon completion of their program. In fact, the College's goal is to have every student employed in his/her field of training prior to his/her program graduation. To date generally 90% of graduates each year are employed in their field of training.

- Students enrolled in regional or national programs that include external examinations will be supported in establishing peer study groups. They will also be encouraged to study on their own and be encouraged to attend study sessions offered by program personnel. To date about 95% of Columbia College students pass their national exams.

As an institution the College established a goal to have 70% of the students who enroll in a program graduate. To date the College, as a whole, maintains close to a 90% completion rate.

Some programs at the College have asked students with high academic standing (or achieving a specific benchmark) to share their educational experiences while attending Columbia with others. This may take the form of a paper, product, or emotional experience. This sharing may be on special days when classes are cancelled, or at special events (e.g., graduation ceremony). This may include video clips, individual or group presentations, activities, or demonstration.

When Columbia College begins its degree programs, students will normally be required to complete a culminating activity. This may include one of or some combination of the following:

- A capstone course
- A comprehensive exam (already required by nationally accredited programs)
- A research paper
- A portfolio
- A project or product

To assess student engagement and satisfaction with each faculty member and the program as a whole, the College asks them to complete structured satisfaction surveys. Each survey requires a written faculty response and plan for improvement. As of 2011 the College will periodically ask students to complete an International Survey of Student Engagement. Each of these documents is designed to improve the quality of Columbia's programs and learning environment and assist students as they move down their paths to academic excellence.

Admissions and Supporting Students

At Columbia College we have created a roadmap designed to help ensure students succeed. This map is intended to communicate to students what is expected of them and what success looks like.

The roadmap begins when a prospective student makes his/her first contact with the College whether it be direct contact with an Admission Advisor or by accessing the College website. Prospective students are invited to an Information Session designed to introduce them to the College and its unique approach to education.

The College Admission Advisors are not salespeople trying to sign up new students, but instead they are professionals who receive calls and are there to listen to questions and either answer them or find the right answer. Their role is to help make sure prospective students get all the information they need in order to make a more objective and informed decision. If an individual chooses to apply to the College, Admission Advisors put on their other hats and proceed to take the prospective student through the College's admission process.

Once admitted to a program, prospective students receive additional information about their roles and responsibilities as students at Columbia College and what is expected of them. Much of this is shared at a program orientation that is normally offered several days before classes begin.

By the start of classes, current students are asked by program personnel to provide peer support to new students in order to further help break the ice and make them feel more comfortable. In most programs, students also receive classroom visits from the Department Chair (or designate) on a weekly basis near the start of classes. This social visit demonstrates more personal interest and support to learners and faculty members alike. Often questions are answered that need clarifying and more conflicting issues get nipped in the bud before they become bigger challenges. This also gives department personnel an opportunity to assess classroom climates and student stress levels. Students and faculty are treated with equal respect which reinforces the family culture within the College.

One of the unique aspects of the College is its genuine commitment to educating non-traditional learners. One of the realities of this population is the fact that most non-traditional learners have not completed high school. This could create some real challenges for both the learner and faculty members if learners were simply enrolled regardless of academic background. However, this is not the case. Actually, students are required to write academic assessments in the subjects relevant to their program. They must demonstrate during these assessments that they have sufficient academic skills (e.g., math, English, science) to master program material and assignments. If their skills are too low in one or more areas, they are directed to the appropriate College department for upgrading. Once a prospective student's academic deficiencies are addressed, they are formally accepted into a program.

In addition to non-traditional learners being required to meet their program's academic skills requirement, many of them actually lack the self-confidence needed to complete their programs. Most of them feel they cannot compete with younger students who recently graduated from high school. This lack of confidence is one of the greatest barriers to non-traditional learner success. It will cause them a lot of stress and could lead to course failure unless faculty and staff recognize this and help students understand that, more focused mature learners actually do better academically in college and university than high school graduates because of their maturity and determination to succeed.

At Columbia College our faculty and staff take on the added roles of cheerleaders, supporters, and coaches. This will start to come after these learners see their marks on unit tests and assignments. This will also come as a result of students' determination to improve their life, their determination to complete their education, their willingness to work hard, and their attentiveness to their homework assignments. It is this set of emotionally laden behaviours that eventually turn most non-traditional learners into successful graduates. It is also this set of emotions that generally distinguishes older non-traditional learners from younger traditional learners.

Even though Columbia has eliminated a high school diploma as a formal entrance requirement, it has determined a specified level of competence in high school math, English, and science courses for each professional program. The College also maintains a higher expectation for graduation than most traditional institutions. This means that it expects its faculty to set higher standards of academic achievement for its students. It also means faculty will have to work more closely with students to ensure greater academic results. This is the primary reason that class sizes are much smaller at Columbia College than at traditional institutions. Columbia

College's maximum class size is 36 students, while public colleges and universities have many undergraduate classes of 50 to 100 to 500 students.

Columbia College believes that when you put determined students together with highly skilled and competent faculty in smaller classrooms, it has created a recipe for greater success. And our students prove it when they write national exams and achieve results much higher than the national average.

In order to assist our students on their paths to success, the College has incorporated a number of additional supports. First of all, Columbia has developed a college foundation course that all students are required to successfully complete. This additional course covers a wide range of topics such as study skills, time management skills, computer skills, research skills, writing skills, note-taking skills, etc.

The College also flags at-risk students early in their programs and meets with them to assess their challenges and to offer solutions. Some programs offer additional tutorial services or courses to assist students on their paths to success. Many faculty put in extra time meeting with individual students or small groups to assist them.

As a result of the various interventions, attrition rates between first and second year are less than 10% and program graduation rates are over 90%. However, this is not good enough in a culture that believes that when a single student fails, we have failed, and none of us want to fail.

Columbia College is committed to not only graduating students with academic educations but our intent is also to prepare our students to be responsible professionals in their fields of employment. In this regard, the College requires all students to enroll in practicum courses where they are able to experience what they are learning first hand. In order to help prepare them for their profession, the College hires academically qualified faculty who are, in most cases, practicing professionals. To go one step further, Columbia College expects its students to behave in the same professional manner in class as they do in the workplace. Finally, to assist students to better understand theory, the College faculty provides stories, case studies, and other relevant examples of how to put theory into practice. Our desire inside and outside the classroom is to move students from a position of dependency to one of independence.

Faculty, Staff and Student Relations

Introduction

There are many activities that our faculty, staff, and administration engage in that help forge the unique learning environment that students experience at Columbia College. The following describes some of those activities.

Institutional Approach

As opposed to traditional university practice and regardless of the number of degrees this college will eventually offer, it is and will always pride itself as a student-centered institution. This means that faculty concentrate their professional time and energy on keeping up to date in their disciplines and becoming more effective facilitators of student learning. The success of this institution, therefore, will not be measured in the amount of published research its faculty produce but in the degree of success its graduates experience in finding employment in their fields of training and in being enrolled in further education at accredited post-secondary institutions. We are committed to graduating responsible, knowledgeable, and skilled professionals who, like us, believe in the importance of continuous improvement, life-long learning, and who contribute morally and ethically to the welfare of mankind.

Columbia College encourages faculty, staff, and students to be both learners as well as teachers. We encourage our faculty to experiment with new pedagogies in the classroom to more actively engage learners. We are excited when we witness our students applying their newly acquired knowledge and skills to solve problems and challenges they will experience in their future occupations or professions.

To help students further connect their classroom activities with their future work, each student in our professional programs must complete one or more cooperative education courses. These courses are designed to give our students an opportunity to observe, interact, question, discuss, apply, experience, and better understand what is being taught in the classroom.

Columbia's faculty are highly educated professionals in their fields of training. They have a vast array of current experiences in industry that makes them valuable resources for our students. However, what most new faculty tend to lack is a clear understanding of how to create an exciting and meaningful classroom learning experience in which our students will benefit the most. To assist them in creating this experience, Columbia College has developed a Leadership Development Centre. The Centre not only consists of resource materials and handbooks but also offers workshops on facilitating techniques, learning methods, use of technology in the classroom, and methods of assessing learning. Among other services, Centre staff are available to observe faculty in their classrooms and provide them with feedback and advice on activities that could improve their effectiveness. The Centre places a great deal of emphasis on helping faculty understand how people learn, what creates a more effective learning environment, how to motivate, stimulate and reward learners, and what techniques enhance knowledge and skill acquisition. From these, faculty are able to better understand and develop more effective teaching methods and a greater range of student evaluation techniques.

To assist in faculty development, students are asked to fill out a faculty evaluation at the end of each course. These evaluations are summarized and a report given back to the faculty member after course grades are submitted. Faculty are asked to respond to the report with a plan of action they will take in order to improve their performance. This plan is given to their Department Chair or designate for review and possible discussion and then placed in their personnel file.

Toward the end of each academic year of study students are also asked to complete a program evaluation which is summarized and shared with all department faculty. The Department Chair then seeks input and advice from faculty in order to develop a written plan of action that will be followed in order to improve the program. This report is reviewed with the President for approval and further action.

To enrich our students' learning experiences a number of programs at Columbia College offer daily tutorials led by faculty. These Mastery Learning classes allow students to review class sessions and discuss topics where their performance is lacking. They provide learners with an opportunity to share their views, better understand new concepts and become more comfortable with a subject. Some Department Chairs set up special workshops or classes related to a specific course where students have historically experienced difficulty. Mastery Learning classes are also extended to computer and clinical labs where the issue relates to acquiring specific skills or getting more hands-on experience to build confidence. Nationally accredited programs also have structured faculty led study sessions for graduates who are preparing to write national exams.

In addition to all this our faculty make themselves available to individual students by coming to class sessions early and remaining after class to assist students with their course related questions. Most faculty also provide students with their email address to answer questions between classes.

To assist students and faculty the College has established a maximum class size of 36 students. This keeps the average class size small and allows much more face to face interaction to occur. This contributes significantly to the quality of our College's learning environment.

Getting students to memorize facts and regurgitate theory has some value at Columbia College, but its value is limited. Instead, our faculty challenge our students to expand and develop their minds in broader and deeper ways as investigators, inquirers, questioners, analyzers, evaluators, hypothesizers, collaborators, team members, tutors, mentors, and writers.

Assessment of learning at Columbia College goes well beyond simply reciting theory on exams. It may involve any number of the following: solving problems presented in cases, demonstrating skills, applying theory to real life situations, evaluating the behaviors of others, designing new methods or procedures, preparing portfolios, completing logs and self analysis. It may also include systematic assessment of authentic student learning such as that which takes place in the cooperative education course(s).

Faculty are also encouraged to accept different types of evidence of student learning, for example, the creation of a product, model, mold, tool, software program, device, form or procedure. It is hoped that the item developed is one that may be used in an actual workplace. In some courses students are asked to recommend the method that faculty will use to assess student learning. In other courses students may assist in developing and administering the

assessment tool that will be used by peers to assess each others' learning in a course. Columbia believes that the more students can be engaged in developing evaluation techniques and participating in assessment activities, the better they will understand what is being taught, why it is being taught, how people learn and retain knowledge, and how objective measurement tool may be designed. This experience may then be transferred by them to their future professional work. This broad based approach to assessment increases student-faculty interactions and also promotes active and collaborative learning.

Faculty Practices

At Columbia College our faculty consider themselves equal to students and staff. Although our faculty have different roles and responsibilities than the other two groups, they realize that the best way to approach their work is to present themselves in a personal manner as a member of a team. They are committed to delivering the best educational services possible to assist other members of the group achieve their educational and employment goals. This attitude creates a learning and working climate of mutual respect and cooperation in which all partners take more time to listen to other members of their team, try to understand their needs, and work together to assist them in meeting their needs.

Our faculty plays multiple roles including skilled facilitator, career counselor, coach, advisor, mentor, model, cheerleader, confidant, administrator, monitor, evaluator, assessor, as well as caring and supportive supervisor. They take on a holistic learner centered approach to their work by trying to understand each learner's background, learning challenges, learning goals, and career ambitions. Their center of attention, therefore, is not simply on their assigned course and related professional experience but is on how they can help their students effectively acquire the learning objectives associated with their program of study as a whole, as well as the specific course they are teaching. They recognize that coming to class and simply lecturing to students is the least effective method of student learning and, therefore, minimize their use of this method of instruction. Instead, they adopt a facilitation style of instruction that engages learners actively in classroom activities. They also adopt an instructional style that collaboratively engages learners with other members of the class in discussions, debates, presentations, observations, analyses, syntheses, and evaluation activities.

Our faculty recognize that students better understand and retain a new concept when they are able to relate it to something from their personal life. It is for this reason that they attempt to help students connect their personal life experiences to the new theories, concepts and skills being taught. They further realize that one of the keys to retaining students in their program of study is to have the most experienced and skilled faculty teach first year courses where many students have the most difficulty in adjusting to the educational environment, their new learner roles, and their ability to acquire foundational subject knowledge, skills, and professional behaviours.

To further assist students, many faculty rely on email and voice messaging to connect with students out of class. Faculty encourage students to submit papers and then provide numerous feedback statements to help the student learn. For example, they record a grade for the paper and then assign the class to rewrite the paper using the feedback provided. Students are expected to then hand in both papers so the facilitator can compare the two and provide further feedback as they grade the second paper. Feedback is respectful but very direct and given in such a way as to reinforce the high expectations faculty have of student performance.

While many universities and colleges have developed specific seminar courses designed to engage students in developing their listening and speaking skills related to their course of study, our faculty at Columbia College have been encouraged to integrate this practice into each of their specific courses.

Our faculty often experiment with new instructional approaches designed to further engage students in active and collaborative learning. One approach that some faculty find useful is to help students learn how to objectively evaluate one another in class. Assigning a student the role as an evaluator of his/her peers is a new and challenging experience for most students. Initially it can be an uncomfortable situation for the student being evaluated as well as those assigned to evaluate. It can also be challenging for the facilitator. Rubrics are developed to assist in the evaluation and are provided to the student when an assignment is given. This approach to education often puts students in a position very new to them and challenges them to experience and see a learning situation from a whole new perspective. One of its most challenging aspects is to help the evaluator not just learn to assess or rate a peer, but even more challenging, to help them learn how to give and take constructive feedback.

In some classes faculty rearrange the tables and chairs to allow students to work more effectively in small groups with their peers. This allows students to discuss topics in small groups, work on projects together, contribute their views to a discussion, listen to the views of others, develop a group consensus, and prepare to share their thoughts with the larger class. At times the facilitator may assign selected students to go around the class, listen in, and evaluate what is going on. It is not unusual for the facilitator, in some classes, to not only evaluate the groups on what they have presented as a project but to also have each group evaluate other group presentations as well as evaluate the performance of members of their own group. Again, facilitators use rubrics as an evaluation tool where groups and individuals are not only evaluated on the degree of involvement in activities but more importantly on the depth and breadth of the content they present.

Many faculty members also incorporate electronic technologies for students to use both inside and outside the classroom. By using appropriate instructional technologies faculty encourage students to utilize many more resources than simply the textbooks assigned to the course. These additional experiences help the learner to recognize that a great deal of resources and materials are available in periodicals and journals, on the web, and in other forms that provide more depth and breadth to their learning. Often students spend considerable time utilizing these resources and these experiences strengthen their learning by allowing new concepts to move from short to long term memory. By incorporating multimedia in the learning process, faculty provides more opportunities for students to practice and apply new concepts and skills. For example, by using digital technology, students are able to access subject materials in faraway locations.

Columbia's faculty does whatever they can to help students learn and grow. This ranges from providing clear detailed homework assignments including a lot of reading and writing, to private meetings before and after class, to clear written notes on assignments and papers being handed back. They communicate with students on a first name basis and are always warm, cordial, respectful and informed. Their investment in student success further stimulates students' personal effort to do better and work harder. Their feedback tends to always be constructive, relevant, and meaningful, and often relates to how this will affect the student as a practicing professional. Constructive feedback is often accompanied with worthy notes of praise and encouragement.

In addition to students receiving evaluation feedback from their facilitator, they may also receive it from their peers and cooperative education employers, as well as engage in self-evaluation. Faculty may also encourage or expect students to tutor other students inside or outside the classroom. This activity is not only beneficial to the one being tutored but helps the tutor as well to more thoroughly understand a subject.

Our faculty along with our staff and administration work in a culture where all decisions are made in the best long-term interest of students, where administrators, faculty members and staff go out of their way to listen to, understand and try to help each other as well as each student, and all work together to create the best working/learning environment we can make. And our diverse student body contributes greatly to our unique culture of learning.

Supporting Learners

The relationship that develops between our faculty, staff, and students is very special because our College representatives are caring, supportive, and sincere individuals who interact with students on a first name basis. Our faculty go out of their way both inside and outside the classroom to assist students. They act much more as mentors and advisors than teachers. Both faculty and staff get to know students more personally and still maintain a professional relationship. Most faculty provide students with their contact information. Most faculty are part time core faculty members who take their work, their teaching, and their students seriously. They normally come to class fifteen minutes early to set up and talk with students regarding their future careers, their educational plans, employment related challenges, program concerns, and course related questions. Many faculty play an unofficial student advisor role. Faculty also talks with students during breaks and after class.

In some programs students meet regularly with the program coordinator, assistant chair, or program chair while in other programs they may be assigned to a specific team member who meets with them as a program advisor.

Our faculty and staff believe that it is important to develop meaningful relationships with Columbia's students, and this is a critical ingredient in the College's high quality education. Our goal is to produce highly competent graduates and therefore we set high standards of performance for our students. However, we communicate this in a respectful manner and then do our best to help our students achieve greatness, and when our students see how much we care about their success it makes them work even harder to achieve it.

Our faculty members realize how important it is to our students to get prompt feedback on assigned papers and reports. As a result, they return these documents within one week and rather than a simple grade provide written constructive comments designed to help them improve.

Some faculty members will also meet outside class to discuss specific questions from a reading, class activity, or grade assignments. Much of their focus both in and out of class is to help students become independent thinkers who can assess a situation from many sides and become effective problem solvers in an occupation or profession. It is not unusual for faculty members to assist students with future employment possibilities and provide professional references for employment.

From time to time, program chairs, faculty, and staff will invite students to a focus group and encourage them to provide advice on areas where programs and services can improve. Students are also asked to complete evaluation surveys on faculty at the end of each course. They are also asked on a semi-annual basis to complete a program satisfaction survey. Each of these instruments is designed to help faculty and department personnel identify areas needing improvement. From time to time students in focus groups will be asked to provide recommendations on alternative courses of action that could be followed by members of the College community. This involvement of students helps to develop mutual respect and trust between the College and its student body.

To assist students in communicating with faculty members, staff and other students email addresses are encouraged. Students are also engaged with faculty and other students through use of other electronic means such as using Moodle. In some programs each student receives a mobile device in order to increase their interaction with the world around them and better prepare them for the world they will soon be entering.

Establishing a Supportive Learning Culture

The vast majority of students attending Columbia College are individuals referred to as non-traditional learners. Whereas the traditional college student is an 18 to 22 year old high school graduate, this is not the case at Columbia College. At Columbia, students normally range between 22 and 62 years old. The average student is close to 35 years old. Most have children and home mortgages. Over seventy-five percent of our students are new Canadians with both language barriers and the challenge of understanding a new culture. The vast majority of these learners have not completed high school, but they make up for their academic short-fall in their maturity, life experiences, determination to succeed, and willingness to work hard.

Columbia's administrative personnel, faculty, and staff recognize what makes our students unique learners and realize the moral and educational obligation they have in helping these learners achieve their educational goals. They further realize the College's intent is not to lower its academic standards but to provide the necessary systems and supports needed to ensure a strong academic success for its non-traditional students. In fact, Columbia's history has been not to graduate students who perform poorly academically, but students who perform above average on regional, national, and international exams.

In order for our students to achieve high academic standards, Columbia's administrative personnel, faculty and staff provide additional supports prior to the start of classes and during the first year of studies, both inside and outside the classroom, and where needed, prior to the students writing external exams. Columbia has a strong culture of support for its learners.

Our administration, faculty, staff and students have mutual respect for each other that is displayed through their positive attitudes and spirit of collaboration. We have created a caring community for students in this learner-centered organization. Our commitment is to help each other and our students to achieve our primary goal: their academic success.

Each new member of the College community is chosen based on the alignment of his/her philosophy, values, and attitudes with the College's mission, philosophy and educational purpose. Each student is primarily chosen based on his/her motivation to succeed and his/her commitment to work hard.

Leadership at Columbia College is shared among administrators, faculty, staff, and, at times, students. Interaction among this group is both formal and informal with discussion constantly focused on individual student success as well as collective student success. Issues and problems are seen as challenges and opportunities to grow, learn, and modify systems and procedures that increase students' motivation to learn and opportunity for success.

Effective recruitment of faculty and staff at Columbia is achieved when their values, educational philosophies, and pedagogical skills match our students' needs and learning styles. Columbia is proud of the diversity in its faculty and staff. For example, our Student Services team speak more than 25 languages and our faculty close to the same.

Our administration, faculty, and staff work together as a team, identifying students' needs, sharing insights, considering alternative approaches, and agreeing on specific actions in order to help students succeed. This is not an environment for individual decision and action but instead, it's a place for collaboration, cooperation, communication, consultation, and concentrated actions intended to increase student success. Although formal positions of authority exist, they are filled with leaders who share authority, as much as possible, and who often do not lead from behind through coaching, mentoring, modeling, counseling, and advising team members. So when it is time to take credit for student success, such as during the convocation ceremonies, all members of the College community who contributed to the students' success are encouraged to stand on the stage and congratulate graduates as they receive recognition. Likewise, when students are not doing well, each member of the team stands ready to do his/her part in assisting students to acquire the skills needed to achieve his/her success. This may involve numerous activities such as one-on-one tutoring, small group work, special meetings, coaching, guiding, counseling and advising students as they seek solutions to their challenges.

It is clearly understood that our goal at Columbia College is to help each student achieve success (i.e., graduate and obtain sound employment in his/her field of training). Our intent is to help each student achieve his/her goal through as much independent action (vs. dependent behaviour) as possible. As each student is uniquely different, we realize that some students need more hands-on support in some areas and less hands-on support in other areas. It is our responsibility to understand the unique differences in each learner. It is further our responsibility to provide as much support to each learner as is needed to achieve his/her education goal. And finally, it is our responsibility to encourage learners to step beyond their comfort zones in order to develop new skills and thereby learn and grow. Part of this is to challenge students to take responsibility for their own learning and in so doing, to develop a life long learning attitude, which is critical for life long success in an ever changing world. For example, most programs require students to complete at least one cooperative education/practicum placement per academic year of study. These placements go from observing current practitioners in the workplace to performing specific duties and responsibilities. Wherever possible, each student is encouraged to actually become a part-time employee in a position related to his/her education. This causes the employer to see him/her as something more than just a student but actually an employee who must perform real tasks in a meaningful and productive way each day or stand to lose his/her job. This co-curricular approach to learning helps students see real connectivity between theory and practice, causes them to be more committed, and results in greater accountability than would be found in a volunteer cooperation placement.

At Columbia College students are encouraged to help and support other students starting from the time they make their first contact with each other during student orientation activities. This assistance may take the form of assisting, mentoring, coaching, advising or supporting others

inside and outside the classroom. Students are encouraged to see each other as members of the same team, working together to ensure success.

The College encourages students to study together, work in groups, complete group assignments and perform other activities where they learn the value of teamwork, cooperation and collaboration. Students are often engaged in a wide variety of classroom activities where the classroom facilitator creates opportunities for them to work together. These activities may include case studies, small group discussion, presentations to large groups, debates, role playing and some 60 other such activities designed to put students in problem solving situations where they have an opportunity to apply concepts and theories presented in their readings and classroom facilitation.

Students may informally tutor others inside or outside the classroom and even in the community. They are also asked to critique the work of other students by providing constructive feedback and recommendations for improvement. This form of activity, if set up properly by the facilitator, can provide a great learning opportunity for students. To assist faculty and students, the College has prepared a poster on ground rules for group discussion and placed it in each classroom. In this regard students hold one another accountable for learning. This helps students to realize they too have something to contribute to the learning of others. It also helps to prepare them for the work world where they may find themselves trying to help others learn on the job. They clearly realize that they must not only know what they are talking about, but also must find an effective way to present it to others. Departments are encouraged to get students involved in department committees where actual decision making takes place. This helps students gain meaningful experience related to committee work and decision making.

Each program at Columbia College is committed to its students' success. This is demonstrated both inside and outside the classroom. Faculty assess and measure student learning at every class through daily tests as well as by observing their participation and behaviour in case studies, group work, and contribution to class discussion. When needed, students who are experiencing difficulty are often given extra attention and support within the class or at selected points during the semester. These students are flagged by the faculty member, department chair, or student services personnel. Special sessions are arranged one-on-one or in small groups to assist students who need additional support. This support may relate to academic or social issues.

All support to students is given in a positive, constructive, and encouraging manner that serves students with specific and wide ranging needs. Academic standards are not compromised. Columbia College has set reasonably high levels of academic achievement and all students are in the end expected to meet them.

The message we constantly give to the students is that we believe in you and we know you are capable of learning anything and achieving success as a professional (Expectancy Theory). We further understand that, at times, learning can be difficult, so we may need to allow you additional time or an opportunity to approach it from a different perspective, and we are here to understand and help you succeed because failure is not an option. This ethic of care and commitment is the glue that binds together the many different aspects of support found throughout all the units, programs, and departments within this College.

In addition to free part-time upgrading in such academic areas as high school math, English, and science, Columbia College also provides prospective students with a wide array of services such as in-depth workshops designed to help prepare them for academic rigor. These

workshops cover such areas as computer operations, searching the internet, doing research in the library, preparing papers, studying for exams, organizational skills, stress management, etc.

In the future, more advanced students who have completed the foundation course are encouraged to attend these workshops as peer tutors. More advanced students are also encouraged to provide support to first year students as administrative mentors. These students may meet with new students during their orientation, attend or host social gatherings throughout the first year, and meet with new students individually or in small groups to help them better understand the College and/or their specific program requirements. Support also comes from the department head, faculty members and student service personnel, in essence, providing a network of competent supporters providing good, timely advice, guidance, social, and where needed, emotional support. It is ingrained in the culture of this institution that we are all here to help each other succeed and we do not succeed until those around us succeed. At the first sign of difficulty, any member of the College community may initiate an action that may involve several other team members, including student mentors to support an individual.