

COLUMBIA COLLEGE

The Philosophy of Learning at Columbia College

The following statements describe the principles and philosophy of higher education at Columbia College. The College has clearly expanded the traditional college focus of a younger more traditional student body of eighteen to twenty-two year olds to include a much larger number of previously under-represented learners such as older adults and immigrants. This section begins with a broader interpretation of intelligence than what may be conventionally viewed by traditional educators.

- At Columbia College we believe that intelligence is what is acquired when we either formally (in school) or informally (out of school) acquire more knowledge and/or skills, or modify our current attitudes or behaviors.
- Intelligence not only relates to mental knowledge but also relates to physical skills as well as artistic skills, talents, gifts and abilities. For some people, acquiring some forms of intelligence occurs more naturally. However, for most people the ability to acquire intelligence develops more gradually inside and outside of the classroom. It will occur best, however, when the individual feels supported, comfortable, respected, valued, stimulated, and challenged to grow. In this regard we believe at Columbia College that one's physical, psychological, and experiential surroundings greatly influence learner development and, therefore, the development of intelligence. The development of intelligence at Columbia College will also be affected by access to quality facilitation as well as support inside and outside of the classroom in the form of guidance, coaching, counseling, and mentoring.
- Each individual will develop and demonstrate different forms of intelligence in different ways. This will be determined or affected by the nature of the environment the individual is exposed to and the degree the environment recognizes, values, and respects the various forms of intelligence. Western society, and especially the western education system, tends to view intelligence as a mental ability. Children in western societies learn quickly that education is primarily focused on mental ability and those who perform well in this environment are highly valued. Children who do not do well in this environment tend to form lower self-esteem that can affect their development and performance throughout life. A greater number of individuals will grow up and develop a more positive view of themselves when the society in which they live values and respects the various forms of intelligence. We at Columbia College recognize the various forms of intelligence.
- Most individuals are born with the innate desire to learn and therefore develop their intelligence throughout life. We further understand at Columbia College that each of us learns throughout life and develops in different ways and at different rates. At times individuals find some knowledge and/or skills harder to acquire and others easier, even if the new knowledge and/or skills seem very similar to that which was just acquired.
- Some individuals may blame themselves for not acquiring new knowledge and skills when this could have been caused by such external factors as a teacher, parent, employer, or as a result of a particular situation. It is, therefore, important for those responsible for education at Columbia College to question themselves as well as their methods and approach to facilitating learning when one or more individuals are not successful.

- Although some individuals learn better by hearing sounds, a greater number learn better by seeing the world around them. However, most individuals learn and develop best when they are able to engage more of their senses, by doing or experiencing things for themselves. At Columbia, our faculty creates learning environments that engage learner senses by actually doing and experiencing.
- We at Columbia College believe that individuals will enhance their knowledge and skills as a result of interaction with others through cooperative and/or collaborative learning. This interaction may occur inside or outside a formal learning environment such as a classroom. Often this interaction allows individuals to experience, apply, adapt, modify, reinforce, strengthen, solidify, and retain specific concepts and/or critical thinking skills. These more in-depth experiences may increase the individuals' ability to move what they have learned from less useful short term memory to more valued long term memory.
- At Columbia College these experiences often take the form in classrooms of personal reflections, discussions, presentations, role playing, debates, simulations, group work, panels, and especially case studies. They may also be experienced in labs, computer simulations, field trips, practicums, service learning, community activities, tutoring, and student exchange programs.
- We believe at Columbia College that knowledge and skills are more effectively understood, acquired and retained when the learner is more motivated to learn. This motivation tends to increase when the learner moves from more passive learning environments such as listening and note taking to more interactive learning environments such as case study discussions, role plays, and debates which allow the learner to be in more control of what they are learning. This will allow them to gain more personal and, therefore, more relevant experience. Still greater depth and appreciation of new knowledge and skills is realized when it is used to assess and analyze a situation (preferably a real problem) and an effective solution is identified.
- The more personally authentic the situation or problem is to each learner the more motivated they will be to learn and the more meaningful the experience will be. Faculty at Columbia College is therefore encouraged to have learners draw on real life situations when trying to understand a concept or when learning to apply new knowledge and/or skills. It is through the process of problem based and experiential learning that learners are able to take theory and put it into practice that provides the most deep seated meaning to an individual, and may be retained by them the longest.
- Learning and growth are recognized as being achieved at Columbia College when the individual is able to demonstrate he/she is able to consistently apply new knowledge and/or skills in a meaningful manner to solve a variety of new and preferably real world problems or challenges. This is referred to, by some, as outcome-based or competency-based learning.
- Student learning is often influenced at Columbia College by such matters as the students' cultural or civil beliefs, experiences, or practices. It may also be affected by their familial, emotional, physical, psychological, social, financial, or maturational matters. Some of these influences may affect learning for all or a considerable portion of ones' life. Our faculty does their best to understand how these factors influence each student separately.
- Learning can be inhibited or severely impaired when a learner is placed in an environment where he/she is not able to adequately function at the level he/she desires or the level expected of him/her by the authority such as a facilitator. This inhibition or impairment may be further exacerbated by the negative reaction of his/her peers.

Therefore, great care is taken by Columbia's admission advisors to assess a learner's readiness to be admitted to the College. It must be ascertained if he/she has the necessary entry level language, communication skills, cultural skills, applicable computer skills, academic knowledge and abilities, and motivation to be successful in this learning environment at this time.

- A fundamental principle of Columbia College is that when a student fails, the College also fails, and when the student succeeds then so do we. One of the purposes of this College's faculty and staff is to ensure that it is structured to respond to the different learning needs of each individual that will enable him/her to succeed.
- In summary, the most preferred learning situation will occur at Columbia College when each learner is placed in a learning environment that is structured to accommodate his/her learning style, interests, abilities, and skills. It will be more effective when he/she is able to progress at a speed that is challenging yet manageable to him/her, and the College will be most successful when each learner receives continuous feedback, encouragement, and stimuli that allow him/her to successfully acquire learning outcomes that can be applied in his/her personal life and/or workplace.