

COLUMBIA COLLEGE CALGARY

FIVE DISTINCT EDUCATIONAL FEATURES OF COLUMBIA COLLEGE CALGARY

Every post-secondary institution in North America should regularly question who they are and what makes them valuable to students, employers, and society. What are their distinct features that drive academic decisions and program delivery? It's also important for institutions to clearly communicate these features with students. This will allow students to determine if these features align with their own personal learning and educational needs.

Columbia College has identified five distinct educational features that as a whole set Columbia College apart from most universities and colleges in North America. These features have been incorporated into most professional programs at Columbia College. They are each based on extensive research into leading-edge educational practices around the world. These features are listed below:

- (1) **Student Centered Approach.** The long-term interests of our students should govern every decision we make. In this regard we have developed an inverted organizational decision-making pyramid. The success of our students and the needs of the potential employers of our future graduates are placed at the top of this pyramid. Our faculty and staff are placed in the middle; and our management and Board of Directors are placed at the bottom. While everyone is valued, respected, listened to, and whenever possible represented in each decision that affects them, Columbia's success is ultimately measured by the satisfaction and outcome of each student. Essentially, when our students succeed, then we succeed. To learn more about Columbia's student-centered approach go to [Student Centered Approach to Education](#).
- (2) **Professional Behavior.** At Columbia College, we believe that every individual, regardless of education or position, should be treated as a professional. Based on extensive research, Columbia identified 157 behaviours that most employers consider essential workplace behaviours that are desirable regardless of the industry or the individual's position (from the most junior position to the most senior). These behaviours include teamwork, communication, problem solving, decision making, workplace ethics, and performance.

These behaviours are often not found in post-secondary institutions within formal specialized courses or if found do not have formal clearly defined learning outcomes. This lack of emphasis on the development and strengthening of these professional behaviors can affect the ability of graduates to find and hold on to meaningful employment. Often it is these essential generic workplace behaviors that are the primary reason why employees lose their job in North America. Students attending Columbia College will find themselves engaged in direct discussions and learning activities relating to these behaviors throughout their programs. These 'professional behaviors' are central to our college culture and we challenge each student, staff, curriculum designer, and faculty member to incorporate them into their daily activities. A full list of these behaviours can be found at [Professional Behaviours](#).

(3) **Four Stage Learner Centered Model of Education.** Columbia's faculty do not deliver daily lectures. Instead, they facilitate student learning, by normally adopting the following four stages of learning in daily classroom lesson plans. The Four Stage Learner Centered Model of Education is based on the highly renowned Bloom's Taxonomy. The stages include:

- Students come to class after completing their assigned homework. Their assignment may include reading, reviewing, observing, and recording what they learned or do not understand.
- Classes begin with students handing in written questions they have based on their homework assignment. Some of these questions are shared by the faculty member. They are then actively discussed among learners and concluded by the faculty member.
- Faculty members engage students in one or more hands-on learning activities where they have an opportunity to apply and experience the subject of discussion. This moves learning from a point of intellectual stimulation to learning by engaging as many of the students' senses as possible. This is commonly referred to as learning by doing or experiential learning.
- Finally, learners are asked to demonstrate their understanding of the subject. This normally includes a formal written daily test or may include one or more related demonstrations of the knowledge and/or skills (competencies) they have acquired.

While different learning outcomes may lend themselves to a variety of different models, the Four Stage Learner Centered Model is the starting point of lesson planning for each program at Columbia College.

(4) **Mastery Learning Model.** Dr. Benjamin Bloom coined the term Mastery Learning in 1968. In this model of education each student will normally be tested or assessed near the end of each individually scheduled class. Students will normally be required to demonstrate they have mastered at least 75% of the knowledge and/or skills being taught. Students scoring lower than the identified mastery level will be required to attend a mastery learning tutorial session (often on the same day as the assessment) to improve on the areas needed until they can demonstrate mastery. This model adds to and complements Columbia's Four Stage Learner Centered Model.

Columbia College chose to adopt Mastery Learning into its Practical Nurse Diploma program in 2013 to address the goal of increasing student graduation rates and overall success on National Exams. The results were amazing! Our Practical Nurse diploma program's graduation rates and scores on national exams are now among the highest in North America. As a result of these outcomes, each current and all future professional programs at Columbia College will be adopting the principles of the Mastery Learning Model into their program design and delivery.

(5) **Columbia Performance Labs.** One of the challenges most students face in higher education is the ability to retain what they have learned. To assist our students to retain knowledge, skills, attitudes, and professional behaviour we established the Columbia Performance Labs. Our Performance Labs are developed and adapted by various programs and in some cases faculty members to help ensure that the knowledge and/or skills that have been acquired by students are retained by students as they complete a course, move from one set of courses to another, or as they proceed through their

program of study. What we have learned is that not only have our students shown a higher level of retention of the knowledge and skills they initially acquired but they have actually refined and strengthened their understanding as well. This has strengthened student confidence, leading them to perform better on comprehensive exams or other types of evaluations. In addition, students have performed better on their field-based work experience, have received stronger employer performance evaluations, and have seen an increase in the number of job offers following their final work experience placement. As a result, over 80% of Columbia's graduates have historically become employed in their field of education.

Performance Labs may begin within the first few weeks of a program and continue to the completion of a program. Some programs have also established additional performance labs after a program has concluded to help students prepare for their regional or national exam.

Performance Labs may be included in program fees or be charged separately. Performance Labs may be a required course within a program or an elective. Each of these decisions are made by the program leaders prior to the start of a program. They are described in the program section of Columbia's website.

Performance Labs may consist of regular drill and practice exercises, speed tests, games, or friendly, fun, hands-on competitions where students participate individually or in teams. As the student continues through their program, the mix of events, activities, exercises, and games may change but the underlying intent is to help students retain and strengthen the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and professional behaviour acquired throughout their program.