Integrating Essential Skills Instruction into General Education

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Topics
- General Education and Student Success
- Instructional goals: integration, transparency, transferability
- Critical thinking assessments/assignments

At your seat and table...

- 2-page handout with links to resources, general information on the new GE requirements, a summary of the five essential skills, and the state Critical Thinking skills rubric.
- Participant Worksheet

Let's start with question 1!

Introductions

- Introduce yourselves at your tables
- Discuss: What is Student Success?
- Share ideas

LEADS 2025 measures of student success and social mobility

- Retention and degree completion
- Career attainment
- (Small) Achievement gaps
- Social Mobility Index
- Etc.

Characteristics of a successful student/graduate?

- Transferable competencies
  - Cognitive
  - Intrapersonal
  - Interpersonal


What is the primary purpose of general education?

- Disciplinary introduction or foundation for degrees
- Development of transferable skills

Skills-Centered

Five Essential Skills

- Communication
- Critical Thinking
- Information & Digital Literacy
- Personal & Social Responsibility
- Quantitative Reasoning

Six content areas

- Communications
- Mathematics
- Science
- Social & Behav. Sci.
- Humanities
- Creative & Fine Arts

Priority of the new state model
Benefits of learning in multiple/varied contexts

- Groups A and B practiced as shown
- When tested later on a bucket 3 ft away, group B did best by far.

“... varied practice ... improves your ability to transfer learning from one situation and apply it successfully to another.”


Instructional goals

- Integration not decoration. Disciplinary context is vital
- Transparency. Students must know our learning objectives
- Transferability. Teach for “deep” (transferable) learning...

Teaching for transferability

- Using multiple and varied representations of concepts and tasks
- Encouraging elaboration, questioning, and self-explanation
- Providing challenging tasks with guidance and feedback
- Use formative assessment (including student self and peer assessment)
- Fostering learning mindsets (“priming motivation”)


Learning Mindsets

Mindsets: “Beliefs” found to significantly influence student behavior, outcomes, and motivation

Belonging Mindset
“I belong in this learning community”

Growth Mindset
“I can change my ability and competence through effort”

Relevance Mindset
“This work has value and purpose for me”

Self-Efficacy Mindset
“I can succeed at this”

Farrington, C.A. et al. (2012). Teaching adolescents to become learners: The role of noncognitive factors in shaping school performance.
Critical Thinking

Look over the critical thinking rubric contained in your packet. Focus on the component skill column:
1. Problem setting
2. Evidence acquisition
3. Evidence evaluation
4. Reasoning/conclusions

Integrating essential skills instruction into GE courses

1. Review GE Certification documents (available by request, see handout).
   a. Narratives
   b. Sample Assignments/Assessments

Worksheet Q. 2: Example Narratives and Assignments

- Choose one example to review at your table.
- Individually, identify whether/how the assignment requires students to demonstrate each component of the critical thinking skill.
- Collectively, identify two or three essential strengths of the assignment with respect to critical thinking.
- Report out—briefly describe the assignment, its strengths, and other observations.

Example narrative excerpts: Critical Thinking in BIOL 111G

- Problem sets are ... based on real-life situations (e.g. an authentic and scientifically-relevant problem) that can be grounded in a course-specific scientific topic.
- Information is routinely provided to students in the form of data (raw or presented in charts and graphs). This provides students opportunities to practice their data graphing, interpretation and evaluation skills.
- Students identify the key problems or questions. Students then draw a conclusion based on what they have evaluated and make evidence-based recommendations.

Your own course now

Individually, describe one example of
- An existing activity and how you want to modify or
- A new activity you want to create

How will it give students an opportunity to demonstrate one or more aspects of critical thinking?

Share your ideas in pairs or groups of three.
Summary: Integrating essential skills instruction into GE courses

1. Review request documents (available by request, see handout)
2. Think about existing activities in your class. (Not lecture!) Are the skill components already represented? Can you make those more transparent to students?
3. Modify existing activities or design new activities as needed. These should be connected to disciplinary content.
4. Frame essential skills for your students throughout the course!

Thank you!