

A Leap Forward: The Engaged Citizenship Curriculum of Simpson College
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Simpson College, a comprehensive regional college strong rooted in the liberal arts tradition, is moving forward on a bold new plan for its general education curriculum. Beginning in the fall of 2010, the College will transition to a new ‘hands on’ approach to the foundational liberal arts component of the Simpson Experience. This new approach builds on the strengths of the traditional liberal arts approach to undergraduate education, but adapts it to the needs of current students and future employers. This ‘Engaged Citizenship’ curriculum has been created by the faculty of the college in response to recent studies of student learning theory, the needs of employers, suggestions from alumni, and the recommendation of higher education organizations in the United States. Of particular importance were studies and recommendations of the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU) of best practices in the liberal arts. Simpson’s unique approach links the historic mission of the institution to education students to become engaged citizens, and the very best in learning theory. The Engaged Citizenship curriculum promotes an integrative approach to learning that enables students of all ages to develop intellectual and practical skills.

The new Engaged Citizenship curriculum has four parts:

1. Simpson Colloquium

An entry course designed to help all students acclimate to college work.

2. Engaged Citizenship Courses

Seven courses that address the issues of citizenship from a variety of perspectives

3. Seven Embedded Skills

Seven skills which will help students develop expertise that will help them as they grow as free, responsible and fulfilled individuals in the world of family, work, service and scholarship

4. The Senior Capstone

A culminating project in the student’s major that allows students to demonstrate their abilities as apprentice practitioners in their chosen field of study.

The Engaged Citizenship curriculum will comprise about a third of the courses students will take during their Simpson Experience. The remaining two-thirds will be split between their academic major and elective courses. The total number of credits required for the Bachelor of Arts (BA) will be 128, plus two May Terms. The total number of credits required for the Bachelor of Music (BM) will be 132, plus two May Terms.

Simpson Colloquium (SC)

Requirement

All entering, degree-seeking students will take a Simpson Colloquium in their first semester. Instructors organize seminars to meet the particular needs of different cohorts (i.e., separate sections for first-year students, EWG undergraduates, and fulltime transfers).

Requirement Purpose

Simpson Colloquium is an introductory college course that seeks to integrate new students into academic culture focused on engaged citizenship during their first semester on campus. The course serves several purposes. First, it familiarizes students with the tradition of liberal arts education through the focused study of important issues– “big questions.” Second, the course provides students with a solid foundation for future academic work, both by focusing on essential skills (Written Communications and Critical Thinking) and by introducing them to campus resources. Finally, Simpson Colloquium provides students with opportunities to grow personally and intellectually, thereby enhancing their satisfaction with college life.

Area of Engagement: The Arts (AR)

Requirement Purpose

The arts are a vital component of human existence. They provide an opportunity to experience and express the world in ways distinct from other disciplines. The Arts component of the General Education curriculum focuses on learning through participation in artistic creation. By taking a course that engages students in the act of creation, students will develop an understanding of art as a constructed means for communication, designed to reveal certain meanings and ideas or to elicit specific responses. Students are given the opportunity to develop their imaginations and to develop their ability to express themselves.

The general education program prepares students to become engaged citizens by exploring enduring questions about ourselves, civilization, and the world and by developing the skills necessary to shape and create a diverse and just community. As an organizing principle, citizenship encourages an emphasis on issues of personal integrity, moral responsibility and social justice. The arts have long been instrumental in the exploration and pursuit of engaged citizenship.

Area of Engagement: Civic Engagement (CE)

Requirement Purpose

Civic engagement encompasses citizenship and the rights one gains as a community member. These include at a minimum civil liberties, civil rights and the opportunity and right to participate in the construction of that community through voting, civic conversation, and other forms of participation. Civic engagement involves the values, duties, skills, and responsibilities

that are part of positively shaping our communities. It is important to recognize that we are all both shaped by and shapers of the communities of which we are part.

Civic engagement is a concern because there is considerable evidence of disengagement, from politics, community action and public life, particularly among young people. Since civic engagement and participation are grounded in patterns of belief and behavior formed early in life, it is important that students understand the significance of civic engagement. Students should both learn to act on their values and accept responsibility for them as they affect self, others and society.

Area of Engagement: Diversity and Power in the U.S. (DP)

Requirement Purpose

The Diversity and Power in the U.S. requirement prepares students to be engaged citizens by exploring enduring questions about ourselves, civilization, and the world via developing the knowledge, dispositions, and skills necessary to shape and create diverse and just communities in the U.S.

The diversity that exists in societies is often characterized by a power differential. By taking up the perspective of groups that have been systematically denied power to shape social institutions, students investigate both the conflicts arising from these power differentials and the cultural contributions of those who are isolated by social inequities.

This requirement is designed to engage students in recognizing and analyzing the perspective of a less powerful (often minority) group and understanding the differences of experience this power differential engenders. In addition these courses encourage students to understand and empathize with the perspectives and experiences of another group.

Area of Engagement: Ethics and Value Inquiry (EV)

Requirement Purpose

Engaged citizens think critically about the sources and meanings of their commitments to personal integrity, moral responsibility, and social justice. Engagement is typically seen as an activity; one is engaged when one is doing something within her or his community, society, nation, or world. What constitutes the right kinds of actions and engagement? If being engaged requires participation, must one's participation be to further causes of personal integrity and social justice, or can one participate in the system by supporting causes and actions that only support his or her personal views or objectives? All of these questions are fundamentally questions about moral values and actions and how they relate to our responsibilities to ourselves and others. This means that being an engaged citizen, in part, requires an understanding of ethics and value systems. The purpose of the courses that fulfill the ethics and value inquiry requirement is to provide students with this understanding.

Area of Engagement: Global Perspectives (GP)

Requirement Purpose

Global Perspectives courses engage students in an exploration of societies outside of the United States. While some courses may deal with a specific problem (e.g., global warming, genocide, human rights), others focus on larger trends over the course of time (e.g., art, religion, politics, history, economics, literature). By acquainting students with the diversity of thoughts, beliefs and values of a society (or societies) external to their own, these courses encourage a greater appreciation of and sensitivity to global diversity. Students will gain the knowledge and ability to operate within that diverse world in a manner that promotes engaged citizenship.

Area of Engagement: Historical Perspectives in Western Culture (HP)

Requirement Purpose

Culture determines our assumptions, defines our options, and governs how we judge and perceive the modern world. Western culture emerged over time through a range of intellectual, philosophical, religious, and historical currents. A study of the development of Western culture and its past is critical to understand, appreciate or critique it. Such awareness provides context for the current structures of Western society and assists students in making informed decisions as engaged citizens.

Area of Engagement: Scientific Reasoning (SR)

Requirement Purpose

Scientific reasoning—in the natural, behavioral, and social sciences—includes the ability to solve problems through the analysis of quantitative empirical data. These methods help students understand how technology and science may affect their lives in areas such as the environment, medicine, human behavior, and scientific ethics. Scientific reasoning courses will provide experiences working with the methods of science including hypothesis formation and testing, systematic observation, and analysis of quantitative data. Students will be able to use the skills they learn about scientific problem solving and data analysis in making personal decisions about technology and science that will help them to be well-engaged global citizens.

Embedded Skill: Collaborative Leadership (CL)

Requirement – A student will be required to have two CL courses.

Requirement Purpose

Collaborative leadership is a process in which individuals work effectively in groups to bring positive change to classrooms, institutions, or communities. Traditionally, leadership has been defined as positional and related to individual action, but collaborative leadership is a relational process and a shared responsibility. Collaborative leadership experiences will increase students' confidence in working in groups for a shared goal and help students develop skills and dispositions like team building, delegation, conflict resolution, and effective communication.

Developing each student's collaborative leadership skills will enable our graduates to make positive contributions in both the workplace and their communities. In a world where problems are complex and interdependent, and where teamwork is often required to unite diverse groups behind a shared goal, collaborative leadership is a key to engaged citizenship.

Embedded Skill: Critical Thinking (CT)

Requirement – A student will be required to have two CT courses.

Requirement Purpose

Critical thinking is the lifelong intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information that is used to guide beliefs and actions. By becoming a critical thinker, one is able to make sound arguments based on adequate evidence and so is able to rationally examine and assess one's own arguments and those of others. A critical thinker applies these skills throughout his or her life in personal, professional, academic, and civic endeavors.

Critical thinkers in the liberal arts tradition are engaged citizens. An engaged citizen takes intellectual responsibility to be an informed and active participant in the life of the community.

Embedded Skill: Information Literacy (IL)

Requirement – A student will be required to have two IL courses.

Requirement Purpose

An information literate person is able to ask appropriate questions related to an information need and discover explanations and specific answers to those questions based on evidence. The goal of information literacy is knowledge, the basis for good decision making.

Through the ability to make informed decisions, information literacy becomes a means by which individuals can develop into engaged citizens and contributing members of a community. Information literacy, as a methodology and a set of skills, allows and inspires individuals to be life-long learners. Information literacy is common to all academic disciplines; therefore, individual skills and concepts change when applied to specific fields of study and inquiry.

Embedded Skill: Intercultural Communication (IC)

Requirement – A student will be required to have one IC course.

Requirement Purpose

Engaged citizenship on a global level includes communicating with others across cultural and linguistic lines. Courses in this category are designed to put students in direct contact with speakers of languages other than their own. Cultural information and experiences will be shared through the medium of a nonnative language.

Intercultural Communication courses are not focused on achieving language competency, but rather on learning through experience. Since intercultural communication is a daily reality for much of the earth's population, this requirement allows students to understand the world through the eyes and words of others. Students will analyze and reflect on the value of using multiple linguistic resources to access other cultural views. As a result, students will gain new perspectives on their own culture.

Embedded Skill: Oral Communications (OC)

Requirement – A student will be required to have two OC courses.

Requirement Purpose

In order to be a well-engaged global citizen, individuals must be able to express ideas effectively to others. Oral communication skills help the communicator redefine and shape his or her values and facilitate change in others. Specifically, oral communication skills are a set of abilities enabling individuals to become confident and competent speakers by the time of their graduation. These skills develop over time through a carefully planned process. OC courses will engage students in both formal and informal uses of communication. OC courses will equip students to comprehend, critique, and analyze information in order to be able to effectively and efficiently communicate their ideas to others.

Embedded Skill: Quantitative Reasoning (QR)

Requirement – A student will be required to have two QR courses.

Requirement Purpose

Quantitative reasoning is the application of quantitative concepts and skills to solve real-world problems for the purpose of making decisions. To effectively use quantitative reasoning requires understanding how to interpret, evaluate, and use various types of quantitative information in order to support a position or argument. It includes the ability to express quantitative information visually, symbolically, numerically and verbally (including written or oral communication).

In order to perform effectively as professionals and citizens, students must become competent in reading and using quantitative data, in understanding quantitative evidence and in applying quantitative skills to the solution of real-life problems such as choosing the financing for a new home, how to live a sustainable lifestyle, and whether to vote for or against a specific tax. The goal is to instill long-term patterns of interaction and engagement with quantitative problem solving.

Embedded Skill: Written Communication (WC)

Requirement – A student will be required to have four WC courses.

- At least one WC course will be in the student's major area of study.
- Two of the WC courses must be above the 100-level.

Requirement Purpose

Written communication is the ability to communicate successfully via handwritten, printed, or electronic text.

Writing is an essential skill that students need in order to comprehend, analyze, and synthesize a variety of texts in a variety of disciplines. At Simpson, students will learn to write in multiple contexts: in the Simpson Colloquiums, in general education courses, in courses for their majors, and in elective courses.

Engaged citizens rely on strong writing skills, whether they are exploring and developing their own ideas, responding fairly and responsibly to the ideas and perspectives of others, or crafting the polished, compelling and persuasive expression so often necessary to shaping and creating a diverse and just community.

Capstone in the Major (CM)

Requirement Purpose

To prepare students to be engaged citizens who are able to apply their learning in a specific disciplines to the larger community through work and/or service, each major will require a capstone experience (or in the case of interdisciplinary capstones, in conjunction with other departments) that allows students to demonstrate their abilities as apprentice practitioners in their chosen fields of study.

Since the capstone experience may vary widely by major, the specific learning objectives for the experience will be determined by faculty in the discipline in which the student is majoring. As engaged citizens, students will share their work with an audience appropriate to the project as determined by the faculty of that department. Senior research projects, senior seminars and senior exhibitions or performances are examples of possible capstone experiences.