

College of Micronesia – FSM Dimensions of Learning¹

Overview

The College is moving toward being a learning-student centered Institution of Higher Education. To assist with understanding what is meant by learning and student centered, the college is using the following dimensions of learning to help guide design, implementation, assessment and improvement of programs in academics and student and administrative support services.

1. Workplace readiness and general skills

To succeed in the workforce or to proceed to higher levels of academic or professional performance, learners must acquire a set of basic minimum skills and abilities. Academic and business leaders have identified a set of abilities for which there is a wide agreement about importance. These include: (a) verbal reasoning; (b) quantitative reasoning, including basic mathematics concepts such as arithmetic, statistics and algebra; (c) critical thinking and problem solving; and (d) communications skills including writing. These basic academic skills are taught in a variety of sources across the curriculum.

A fuller description of workplace readiness and general skills is provided through the SCANS Skills (U.S.) and the Employability Skills 2000+ (Canada).

2. Content Knowledge/Discipline-Specific Knowledge and Skills

To become a member of most professions, there is a set of knowledge and skills that one must acquire in order to be considered competent within that domain. Many disciplines (e.g., health professions, law, business and technical programs) also require professional certification examinations that define the qualifications needed to enter the professions.

In many academic disciplines there are no certification standards. In these areas, in lieu of such standards, the awarding of the degree or certification is taken as evidence of mastery of the core set of competences. At the college, the program outcomes function as standards. The awarding of the degree or certificate is assurance that the person has the knowledge and abilities as described in the program outcomes. The college also sees the importance of giving students the opportunity for a sufficiently broad general knowledge with the opportunity to work in depth on a small number of subjects.

3. “Soft Skills” (Noncognitive Skills)

In today’s knowledge economy, it is not sufficient for a worker to possess adequate basic cognitive skills and discipline specific competencies. The nature of work requires that the person be able to work in teams, be a creative problem solver and communicate with a diverse set of colleagues and clients. Employers, colleges and universities have become more cognizant of the role that such so-called soft or noncognitive skills play in successful performance in both academic and nonacademic arenas.

A fuller description of noncognitive skills may be found in the work on emotional intelligences and in Howard Gardner’s Interpersonal and Intrapersonal intelligences.

4. Student engagement with learning

In addition to the three dimensions of student learning, it is also appropriate to look at the extent to which students are actively engaged in their own learning. The Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) provides a set of benchmarks that help describe student engagement in the following areas:

- Active and collaborative learning
- Student effort
- Academic challenge
- Student-faculty interaction
- Support for learners

¹ Adapted from ETS “Culture of Evidence”