



**Infusing “Core Commitments”  
throughout Basic Subjects  
Curriculum:**

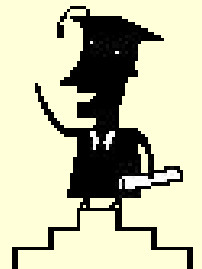
An interdisciplinary, cross-divisional approach to educating students for personal and social responsibility

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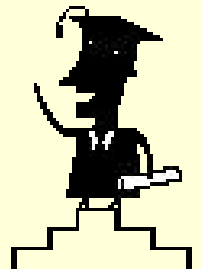
# What are Core Commitments?

- Striving for Excellence
- Cultivating Personal and Academic integrity
- Contributing to a Larger Community
- Taking Seriously the Perspectives of Others
- Refining Ethical and Moral Reasoning



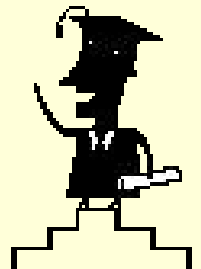
# CSUN's Winning Approach

- New freshmen receive curricular components in two basic subjects courses: Freshman Composition (taught in four different departments) and Critical Thinking
- Students have an opportunity to continue their core commitments through participation in courses or voluntary service that will earn them a Certificate upon completion of 15 units



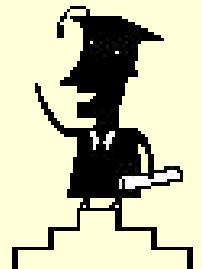
## Thinking Differently

- Interdisciplinary approach
- Developmental design, with opportunities for social and personal responsibility growing each year
- Integrating curricular and co-curricular components
- Cross-divisional partnerships maximize student involvement



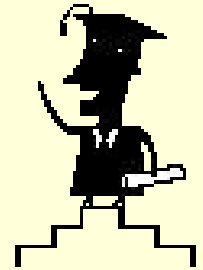
## Steepest challenges

- Getting faculty “buy-in” in throughout Basic Subject courses. That’s why we’re here!
- Dealing with the challenges posed by student body comprised of commuters, and students with various outside responsibilities
- Designing and implementing program that provides students with opportunities and incentives at each class level



## Special Contributions

- National model for:
  - Large suburban public university
  - Demographically diverse student body
  - Hispanic and Minority-Serving Institution
  - Serving a community that reflects the diversity of the student body
  - Award-winning programs in community service-learning, strong background of student involvement in local service programs



# Of the 5 Core Commitments – The Guiding Philosophy

- **Striving for Excellence:** developing a strong work ethic and consciously doing one's very best in all aspects of college;
- **Cultivating Personal and Academic Integrity:** recognizing and acting on a sense of honor, both by being honest in relationships and by upholding academic honor codes;

# The Philosophy That Informs the 5 Core Commitments

- **Contributing to a Larger Community:** recognizing and acting on one's responsibility to the educational community, the local community, and the wider national and global society;
- **Taking Seriously the Perspectives of Others:** recognizing and acting on the obligation to inform one's own judgment; relinquishing a sense of entitlement; and engaging diverse and competing perspectives as a resource for learning, citizenship, and work; and
- **Refining Ethical and Moral Reasoning:** developing moral reasoning in ways that incorporate the other four responsibilities and using such reasoning in learning and in life.

# A Call To Action

- “Students’ values and ethics should not be addressed in isolation from their basic responsibility as learners. Rather, values, ethics, and civic responsibility should be integrally woven into the educational goals that students embrace once they make the decision to become candidates for a college degree.” – from A Call To Action, Core Commitment, Educating Students for Personal and Social Responsibility, AACU

# A Critical Thinking, Writing-Based Approach

- **Developmental Reading** – approximately two-thirds of CSUN's entering first year class of 4,000 students tests directly into either Development Mathematics or Developmental English (i.e., Developmental Reading or Basic Writing Skills), or both for the Fall 2007/2008 semester. The remainder of the class entered Freshman Composition.

# The Writing Continuum

- All entering Freshman students (and all transfers) are expected to fulfill the Basic Subjects, General Education requirement in Freshman Composition.
- The 097/098 remedial courses offer students the opportunity to develop and/or enhance those critical reading, writing and vocabulary skills so as to enter and then meet the system wide Freshman Composition requirements. They have one academic year in which to do so.
- The Developmental courses are graded on a “CR/NC” basis. Any students failing to complete the Developmental courses is “stopped out” of the University by virtue of Executive Order #665 issued by the Chancellor’s Office.

# The Writing Programs: Devising a Rubric and Strategy for Success

- There are four Writing Programs at CSUN: Asian American Studies, Chicano/a Studies, English and Pan African Studies.
- Each Writing Program offers a continuum of courses that start with 097 Developmental Reading and 098 Basic Writing Skills. These are the developmental courses for those students failing to test directly into Freshman Composition by virtue of SAT and EPT scores. If such is the case, dependent upon the scoring, a student may be placed in 097 or 098.
- Students enrolled in these courses, no matter the department, come from every major offered by CSUN. While each of the writing programs concentrates on literacy skills, they are student-centered and culturally-based. Most important of all, they are values-oriented.
- Developmental Reading is based upon improving reading comprehension, reading speed, vocabulary, time and study area management, and competency in the crafting of sentences and paragraphs.

# The Writing Programs: Devising a Rubric and Strategy for Success

- The 098 Basic Writing Skills courses center on competency in the writing of paragraphs, essays and further development of critical comprehension. It, too, is value-oriented as the University presents an entirely different environment in regards to personal and social expectations for the majority of students.
- There is continued emphasis on vocabulary, as well as grammar and mechanics. Students will receive training in how to properly document sources including MLA, APA and ASA guidelines. These students are not familiar with paraphrasing, summarizing and documentation – which is an open invitation to plagiarizing.
- It must be stressed that students enrolled in the 097/098 courses are, at the same time, taking 100-level courses which put them in direct contact and competition with the regular student population. As well, they are in classrooms with professors completely unaware of their academic challenges, i.e., being in developmental classes.
- Rather, these professors have their own standards and values, expectations of what a collegian is supposed to bring with them into the classroom – not the least of which is a sound work ethic, intellectual rigor, and academic honor: significant challenges in the multiversity.

# “Content of One’s Character” is Fall 2007 Theme in Writing Program(s)

- The AACU Core Commitment team from CSUN met and decided upon writing prompts built around the theme of “Academic Honor.” It was decided this would be the glue bonding the Programs, and also involving those first year students. The Writing Prompts were formulated by the Directors for the Writing Programs at CSUN while at the University of Vermont in August 2007.
- In the Pan African Studies Writing Program, students participate in holistically graded Pre-Semester, Midterm and Common Essay exams. The students at each level are given an essay topic to write upon that is subsequently read and graded by two or more members of the Writing faculty in assessing the progress being made by the students. PAS served as a Core Commitments “Control Group.”
- For the PAS Writing Program students, these holistically graded essays were revised and rewritten in becoming part of that student’s Portfolio, or body of work developed that semester. This meant that, where the student first wrote upon the topic with no idea of what was being asked or revealed, the subsequent thinking through and revising process brought that subject to the forefront so that it was not only a writing topic, but one demanding critical reasoning, i.e., a recognition of logical relationships in writing, of what might be regarded as fallacious thinking (and the reasons why), while also making it clear to the instructor the attitudes held by her or his students in regards to Academic Honesty, and beyond that, the very Honor Code itself.

# “Striving for Excellence” as A Core Theme for Developmental Students

- **The 097 Pre-Semester Writing Prompt:**
- You have approximately forty-five minutes in which to complete this essay examination. Take a few moments at the start to outline your thoughts before writing. Make certain that your essay has a clear thesis, is well organized and developed. Save a few moments near the end in order to proofread your essay for any errors in spelling and mechanics. *Remember that no one is going to write an error-free essay in forty-five minutes! That’s why it is important to always proofread.*
- **Writing Prompt:**
- **When You Consider the Consequences**
- If students cheat in college, could this behavior have any consequences in the professional world they will enter when they graduate? What kind(s) of job(s) do you want to have when you finish college? What might the consequences of cheating be in these jobs? Be certain to answer each of the items listed below and provide specific details for the readers of your essay in explaining your reasoning.
  - For you?
  - For your co-workers?
  - For the company that employs you?
  - For society as a whole?
- **The 3 Key Tasks for 097 Writing Instructors**
- 1. With either topic, highlight areas that demand one to strive for excellence;
- 2. To show importance of personal character, of being “honorable” and also in respecting a code of honor; and
- 3. To emphasize how this contributes to the larger world, making it a better place.
- **The 098 Pre-Semester Writing Prompt:**
- You have approximately forty-five minutes in which to complete this essay examination. Take a few moments at the start to outline your thoughts before writing. Make certain that your essay has a clear thesis, is well organized and developed. Save a few moments near the end in order to proofread your essay for any errors in spelling and mechanics. *Remember that no one is going to write an error-free essay in forty-five minutes! That’s why it is important to always proofread.*
- **Writing Prompt:**
- **The College Community I Want to Be Part of**
- In “a 2004 survey of almost 25,000 high school students... 62% admitted cheating on a test.” IN addition, recent surveys suggest that the problem has grown on college campuses (“Building Character” 148).
- *Why do you think this is so, and is this the college community you want to belong to? Explain.*
- **The 4 Key Tasks for 098 Writing Instructors**
- 1. With either topic, highlight areas that demand one to strive for excellence;
- 2. To show importance of personal character, of being “honorable” and also in respecting a code of honor;
- 3. To emphasize how this contributes to the larger world, making it a better place; and
- 4. Opening up to the thoughts and opinions of others and, thereby, engaging diverse and sometimes competing perspectives as a resource for learning, citizenship and work.

# “Strive for Excellence”: Outcome for Freshman Comp Students

For the 155-level Freshman Composition students, the pedagogy they are exposed to is informed by all five Core Commitments where Personal and Social Responsibility is concerned. The Freshman Composition students, as a whole, do not bring much of the “baggage” into the classroom as do students requiring remediation.:

- **Key Tasks for the 155 Writing Instructors**

1. With either topic, highlight areas that demand one to strive for excellence;
2. To show importance of personal character, of being “honorable” and also in respecting a code of honor;
3. To emphasize how this contributes to the larger world, making it a better place;
4. Opening up to the thoughts and opinions of others and, thereby, engaging diverse and sometimes competing perspectives as a resource for learning, citizenship and work; and,
5. Developing moral reasoning in ways that incorporate the other four responsibilities, using such reasoning in learning and in life.

Reminder:

The Fall 2007 semester was used as a launch point for the Core Commitments Initiative – and note this is a national effort, not a local or regional one. At CSUN, there were other areas as well that reflect the methodology, e.g., the Freshman Seminar Common Readings being the most notable to date.

- **The 155 Pre-Semester Writing Prompt**

- You have approximately forty-five minutes in which to complete this essay examination. Take a few moments at the start to outline your thoughts before writing. Make certain that your essay has a clear thesis, is well organized and developed. Save a few moments near the end in order to proofread your essay for any errors in spelling and mechanics. *Remember that no one is going to write an error-free essay in forty-five minutes! That’s why it is important to always proofread.*

- **Writing Prompt:**

- **“It’s All Good”: A Disturbing Trend in Academic Culture**
- “According to a recent survey by the Josephson Institute, 43 percent of high school students agreed that a person has to ‘lie and cheat sometimes in order to succeed’” (“Building Character,” 148). What we are witnessing is an apparent paradigm shift in which a culture of academic dishonesty has seemingly taken root and is now being encouraged while people turn their heads, looking the other way, in excusing what previous generations simply would not have tolerated or condoned.
- *What in today’s society leads people to think and act this way? Discuss at length.*

# How To: Incorporate *Cultivating Personal & Social Responsibility* Into Your Syllabus

- The key is to use the metamessage, to embed the concept of academic integrity into that contract with the student, i.e., the syllabus through clearly articulated policy statements on plagiarism. To wit,
- **Syllabus Statement No. 1:** This is a class that has a core commitment to personal integrity: there is zero tolerance for academic dishonesty. Do your own work. You'll be happy with yourself that you did and you will participate in an honest and trustworthy community that we create together in this classroom.
- **Syllabus Statement No. 2:** Some of the topics we will cover in this class reflect the university's commitment to standing for and teaching values of personal and social responsibility. You will be asked to reflect on such values as respecting the views and well being of others, recognizing your obligations as a member of the academic community, and fulfilling your role as a participant in the larger communities – local, national, and global – to which you belong.

# Points That Bear Repeating

## Thinking Differently

- Interdisciplinary approach
- Developmental design, with opportunities for social and personal responsibility growing each year
- Integrating curricular and co-curricular components
- Cross-divisional partnerships maximize student involvement

# Watch for Grant Opportunities

- Civic Engagement Grants
- Links to Grants for Improving Writing
  - Qualify to be part of Certificate Program

# The Core Commitments Team

- Adam Swenson - Philosophy
- Roberta Orona-Cordova – Chicano/a Studies
- Johnie Scott – Pan African Studies
- Anne Kellenberger - English
- Sharon Kohlmeyer - English
- Maria Turnmeyer – Asian-American Studies
- Shelly Thompson – Humanities
- William Watkins – Student Affairs
- Maureen Rubin – Undergraduate Studies
- Cheryl Spector – Freshman Programs
- Merri Whitelock – Community Engagement