



2012

# Leading Practices in Curriculum

Principles and standards for  
leading educational  
practices in curriculum at  
Camosun College

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Educational Support &  
Development

## **Background**

Throughout the late summer and fall of 2010, the College community participated in several activities aimed at identifying existing strengths, goals and priorities for curricular enhancement at Camosun. A planning session, attended by participants representing a range of departments of the College and including leaders in decision making, policy, curriculum development and design, identified the current practices, priorities and future directions for curricular enhancement. Curriculum development, design, underlying philosophies, values, resources, structures and systems were explored and a framework for future directions in curricular leading practices began to emerge. Information gleaned from this event allowed the Educational Support and Development team to create and map a strategy for curricular enhancement; one that would be consultative and that would focus on the creation of a positive future for curricular quality and enhancement at Camosun.

## **Consultation and guidance**

Consultation with the College community has provided a focus and direction for the identification and description of the structures, processes, values and principles that guide curriculum at Camosun. The goals of the consultation process, as defined by the Educational Support and Development team, were to:

1. Identify the current resources, structures and processes that promote and support excellence in curricular activities across the college.
2. Develop a vision for where the college might go in respect to excellent curricular activities.
3. Identify priorities for changes/developments in curricular activities that could begin immediately and progress over the next few years.

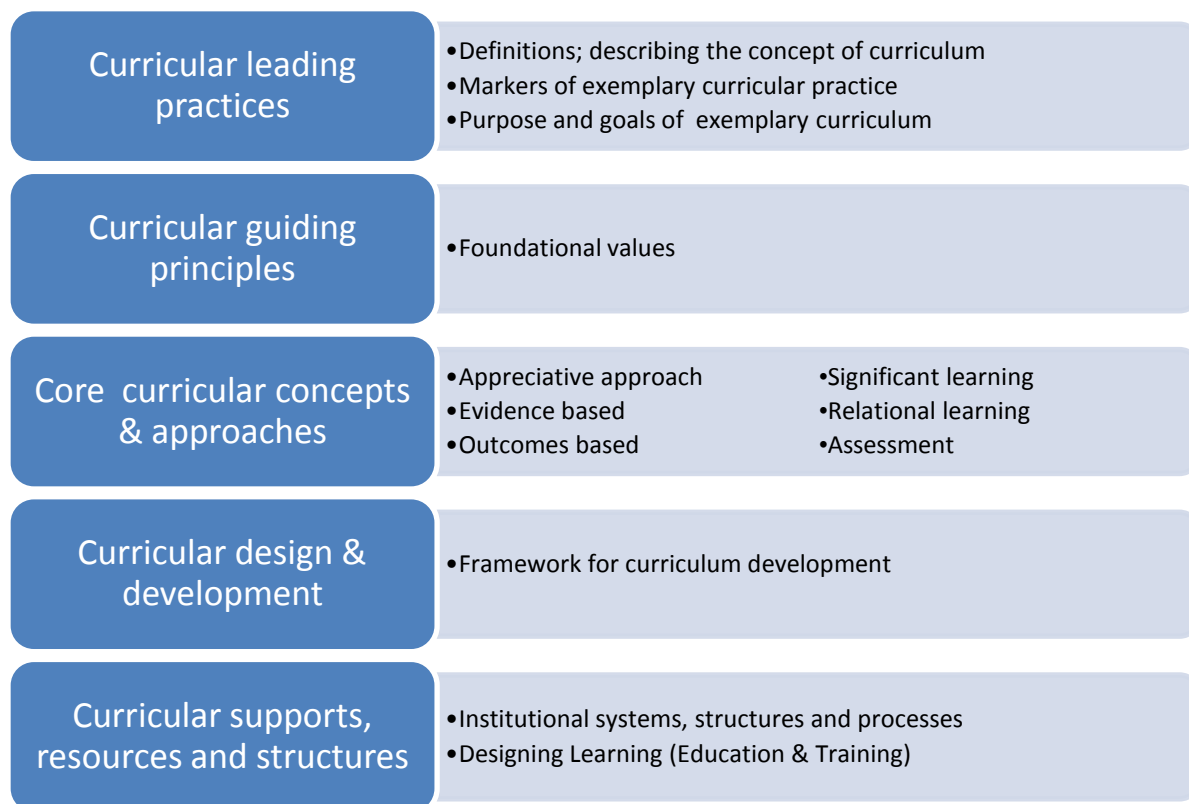
The consultation process and the resulting data and action plan, incorporate the recommendations and priorities identified by the newly created Curriculum Enhancement Advisory Committee, information generated by 13 distinct Camosun stakeholder focus groups, and a literature review of leading practices in post-secondary curriculum design and development. This process has yielded data that confirms and supports the value, currency and integrity of many of the existing curricular practices and approaches in place at Camosun. A review of contemporary leading practices and future directions in post secondary curriculum reinforces the notion that in order to maintain its relevancy and vision for curricular excellence, Camosun College must adopt guiding principles that articulate the underlying values and beliefs associated with leading practices in curriculum, endorse a learning outcomes to approach all curriculum development and design, incorporate the concepts of significant learning and elements of appreciative inquiry within its curriculum model, and finally, recognize that curriculum is a process and series of activities that require effective and cohesive resources, systems and structures.

## **A Framework for Leading Practices in Curriculum**

Leading practices in curriculum require that we view 'curriculum' as a process and a series of activities that when complete, achieve the goal of a fluid, coherent and well constructed plan that encompasses all aspects of the learning experience at Camosun.

It is not a linear process where tasks and activities occur in isolation rather, it calls upon us to integrate knowledge, values, systems and structures into each element of the curricular process. Leading practices are principle rather than rule-driven. Guiding principles provide the foundation for all aspects of curriculum design, development and implementation and it is when those principles are embedded in College practices and policies that an enhanced and quality curricular process can occur. A principle driven curricular process allows and enables the current and future needs, priorities, and goals of the College community to be met in a thoughtful, responsible and deliberate manner.

# FRAMEWORK FOR LEADING PRACTICES IN CURRICULUM



Leading Practices reflect and are consistent with educational principles, philosophy, goals and action plans described in *2011-2014 Strategic Plan: Inspiring Lives* (Camosun College, 2011), *Education Plan 2010 -2011* (Camosun College, 2010), and *Guiding Principles for a Learning-Centered College* (Camosun College, 2000).

- Defining and describing curriculum
- Markers of exemplary practice
- Purposes and goals of exemplary curriculum

## **Defining and describing curriculum**

Curriculum refers to principle driven actions and processes that guide and foster significant learning experiences. It is a planned, thoughtful and deliberate course of actions that ultimately enhance the quality and impact of the learning experience for students.

It encompasses the creation, development, and organization of learning opportunities aimed at meeting intended learning outcomes. It also involves the thoughtful assessment of learning outcomes. The ultimate goal of curriculum is to enhance the quality and impact of the learning and teaching experience.

## **Markers of leading curricular practice**

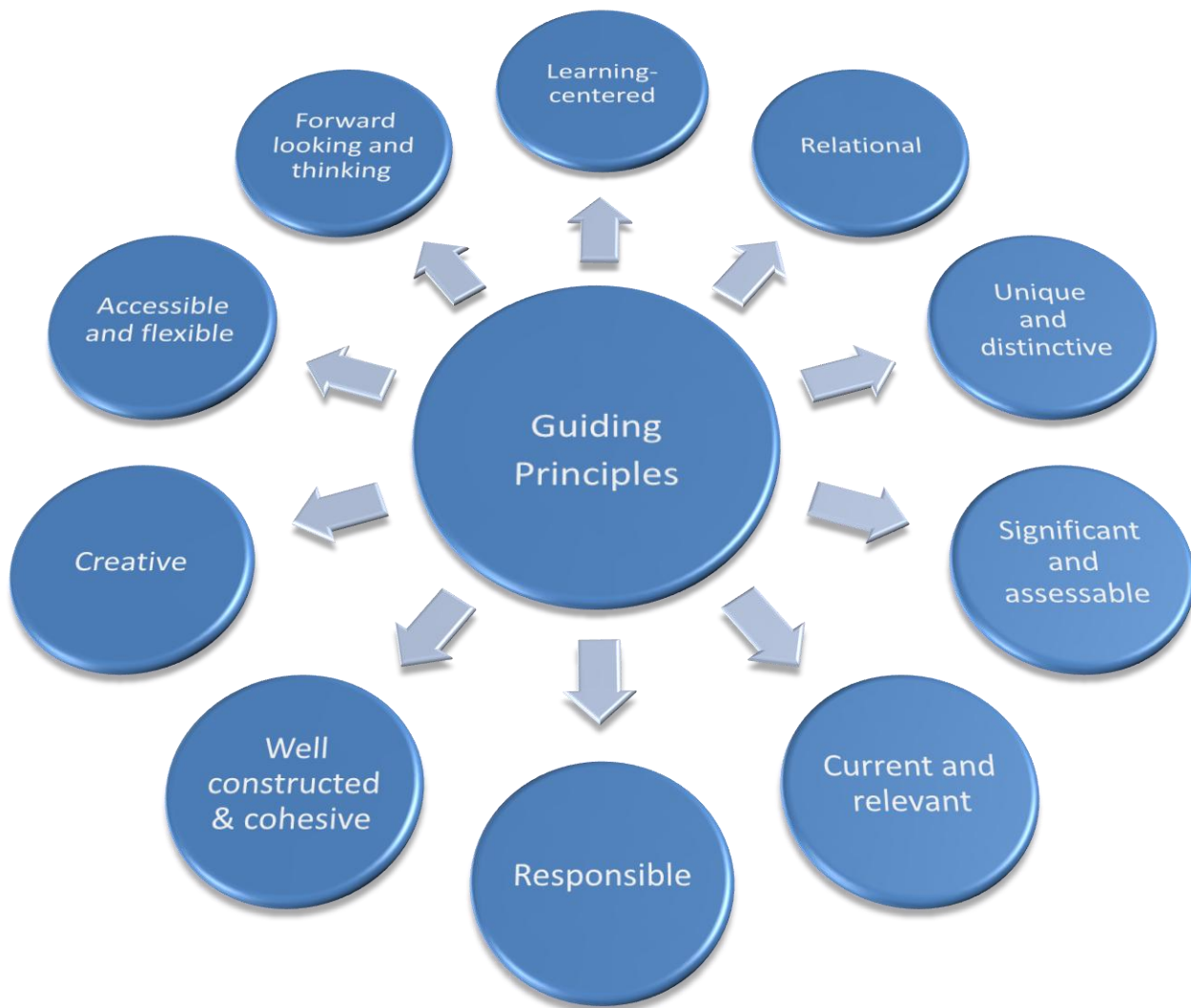
- Driven by and founded on principles that reflect the values and beliefs of a learning-centered organization
- Supports the achievement of learning outcomes and a significant learning experience
- Is inclusive and recognizes the diversity of communities of learners
- Challenges stakeholders to meaningfully and continuously question, assess and examine practices, and to focus on positive futures and directions
- Stresses the value and significance of conversation and relationships in creating and sustaining strength based practices
- Incorporates at various levels and varying degrees, input from all stakeholders involved in the learner's educational experience.
- Applies new knowledge and innovation through applied research
- Is understood, accepted and supported by resources, systems and infrastructure.
- Is congruent with institutional goals, values and strategies

## **Purposes and goals of exemplary curriculum**

- Incorporates and integrates significant learning experiences with resources, supports and structures to optimize learner success
- Achieves educational outcomes that are relevant to learner, community and industry priorities
- Includes an educational plan based on
  - defined values
  - purposes and outcomes
  - a design that clusters relevant coherent educational content

- strategies, activities and processes for achieving significant learning experiences and moving learners toward meeting course/program outcomes
- ongoing assessment of learner progress and program effectiveness
- Prepares learners for citizenry and for community, professional and industry needs and practices and/or further study
- Relates learning, assessment and teaching to coherent, rigorous, and flexible curriculum activities and processes
- Aligns learning activities, teaching strategies and assessment practices with learning outcomes.
- Is augmented and supported by current and relevant technology

(Adapted from Beliefs and Values about Learning Centred Practice, Martin, 2010)



## **Guiding principles for leading practice in curriculum**

### **LEARNING-CENTERED**

- We believe, as a learning-centered organization, that student learning is the purpose and focus of everything we do, and that learning is an active process that occurs across contexts. Fundamental to a successful learning experience is a responsiveness to, and respect for, the diversity that is present amongst all learners.

### **ACCESSIBLE AND FLEXIBLE**

- We believe that accessibility and flexibility in all aspects of curricular processes and activities is instrumental to learner success. A positive, strength based perspective requires that teachers, staff and administrators be knowledgeable of, and responsive to, the diversity of learners' needs, preferences and priorities, and that this knowledge and awareness be demonstrated through the creation of accessible and flexible curricular activities and processes.

### **RELATIONAL**

- We believe that respectful and equitable communication, relationships and conversation are fundamental to a cohesive, well constructed and responsible curriculum that meets the needs and aspirations of learners, teachers, staff, administrators and other stakeholders.

### **RESPONSIBLE**

- We believe that all curricular practices must demonstrate responsibility and accountability to both internal and external partners in the learning relationship: learners, teachers, administrators, community and industry members.

### **SIGNIFICANT AND ASSESSABLE**

- We believe that a commitment to an appreciative approach and the integration of the concepts of significant learning and assessment in curricular activities and processes provide the foundation for solid, authentic and sound educational practices that are meaningful, positive and future directed.

### **CURRENT AND RELEVANT**

- We believe that curricular processes and activities should be the product of current, relevant and evidence based practices, so as to be credible, sustainable and to meet the needs and priorities of learners, teachers, administrators, community, and industry stakeholders.

### **WELL CONSTRUCTED AND COHESIVE**

- We believe that all stakeholders in the curriculum process share the goal of developing and communicating curriculum that is thorough, thoughtful, and organized.



### **UNIQUE AND DISTINCTIVE**

- We believe that curriculum activities and processes communicate and reflect our unique and distinctive identity as a post-secondary institution; an identity that is respectful and inclusive of diversity, indigenization, internationalization, sustainability and global citizenship.

### **CREATIVE**

- We believe that there is a creative element in curriculum; one which allows for teacher and learner engagement in creative expression, and that recognizes the art of a craft or discipline.

### **FORWARD LOOKING AND THINKING**

- We believe that curricular leading practices should enable learners, teachers, staff and administrators to look to the future, prepare for, and deliberate upon emerging practices and innovations for the purpose of preparing learners for work, study and life.

## Core curricular concepts & approaches

- Appreciative approach
- Evidence based
- Outcomes based
- Significant learning
- Relational learning
- Assessment

### **Appreciative approach**

An appreciative approach to curriculum design and development has been an integral component of the Program Review and Renewal process at Camosun for several years. Founded on appreciative inquiry theory, this collaborative approach has proven to be a powerful and positive means to facilitating change and shaping future directions of curriculum. It is a strength based approach that shifts our thinking from viewing problems to exploring possibilities; one that harnesses the energy, creativity and capacities of the institution and its people.

Applied to curriculum, an appreciative approach offers a conceptual framework for identifying a vision for future directions, values and beliefs, priorities, strengths, goals and resources throughout the curriculum development process. The collaborative nature of an appreciative approach builds upon and strengthens partnerships, team work, communication and relationships between and amongst stakeholders involved in curricular processes and activities.

### **Evidence based**

An evidence based approach refers to curricular activities and processes grounded in current literature, leading practices, and contemporary research. Applied to curricular design, development and assessment, an evidence based approach provides a base for determining leading practices. It is a foundation for concrete, objective, current and forward thinking curriculum that is assessable, credible, responsible, and accountable to learners, teachers, the educational environment, industry, and community stakeholders.

This approach incorporates qualitative, quantitative and experiential research and practices so that the unique priorities, strengths and goals of a particular area of study, field or discipline are recognized and addressed.

### **Outcomes-based**

Education that is outcome-based is a learner-centered, results-oriented system founded on the belief that all individuals can learn. First, what the student is to learn must be clearly identified. Second, the student's progress is based on demonstrated achievement. Third, multiple instructional and assessment strategies need to be available to meet the needs of

each student. And finally, adequate time and assistance need to be provided so that each student can reach the maximum potential. (Towers as cited in Lorenzen, (n.d.) ¶3)

Outcome-based education is an approach to teaching and learning that focuses on the learning experience and process. It allows learning to be verified, reflects learner skills, knowledge and attitudes, and fosters transformative learning or learning for change. The underlying principles of outcomes-based education support and uphold the values and principles of a learning-centered organization and culture. Curriculum moves from a teacher-centered to a learner-centered focus and learning experiences are shaped and designed so that learning can be verified through the demonstration of skills, knowledge and attitudes. The learning process is married with program, discipline and course content.

An outcomes-based approach allows for the valid assessment and measurement of progress and achievement in all facets of curriculum development, implementation and evaluation. Curricular and teaching decisions are linked to the intended learning outcomes, leading to an educational planning process where all curriculum is designed, developed, resourced and structured to support stated outcomes.

Outcomes-based educational practice is future oriented and learner-centered, focused on life skills and contexts; characterized by high expectations of and for all learners, and sources from which all other educational decisions flow (Boschee and Baronas cited in Lorenzen (n.d.) ¶ 8)

### **Significant learning**

Changes and advances in educational practice suggest that in order to enhance and create a meaningful and authentic learning experience, learning must be significant and reflective of new kinds of learning that go beyond cognitive learning (Fink, 2003).

Outcomes based education offers a means of locating what it is the learner should be able to do in terms of skills, knowledge and attitudes upon the completion of a course of study, providing a solid framework for the teaching and learning experience and for the assessment of learning. Significant learning pushes us further to explore and articulate a more complete learning experience; one which acknowledges the human dimensions of learning, caring, and ultimately citizenship.

Fink (2003) describes significant learning as 6 dimensions of learning; foundational knowledge, application, integration, the human dimension, caring, and learning how to learn. Foundational knowledge, and the integration and application of that knowledge (as represented in an outcomes based approach) is merged and blended with new kinds of learning that support and foster lasting change in the learner's life.

These dimensions of significant learning help us to move us past and through the kinds of learning that emphasize content and knowledge, to aspects of learning that recognize and reflect the human dimension of learning for 'change' and which can prepare learners for life.

Significant learning is interactive in nature, and all dimensions are integrated with a resulting learning experience that encompasses active, applied, authentic, reflective, and knowledge based learning.

## **Relational learning**

Meaningful and significant learning occurs within the context of human relationships. Relational learning refers to the thoughtful and deliberate communication and demonstration of interpersonal abilities and skills required to build and sustain a positive, dynamic and authentic educational experience.

Leading curricular practices recognize and acknowledge the critical role of the varied and complex relationships that exist within all curricular activities and processes. Pivotal to relational learning is the acknowledgement and recognition of the many layers and levels of relationships that are present within a post secondary environment and which when intentionally cultivated, can enhance the quality of the educational experience learners and teachers.

Learners, teachers, administrators, industry and community members have multiple, and complex roles and relationships that contribute to and affect the quality of the learning experience. It is necessary that these relationships be valued, examined and articulated so that all are aware of and prepared to engage in relational learning. Relational learning is respectful, recognizes the unique and distinct qualities of all stakeholders and enables all involved in curricular processes and activities to understand, identify and work towards achieving shared goals.

Relational learning is not a discrete skill rather it is the learning that comes from the multitude of interactions that take place daily between people involved in the educational experience. All stakeholders in the curricular process are involved in relational learning whether the learning is intentional or not. Applied to curricular development, relational learning is purposeful and significant, and is thoughtfully, responsibly and deliberately incorporated into curricular activities and process.

## **Assessment**

Assessment is the process of gathering and discussing information from multiple and diverse sources in order to develop a deep understanding of what students know, understand and can do with their knowledge as a result of their educational experiences; the process culminates when assessment results are used to improve subsequent learning. (Huba and Freed, 2000, p. 9)

Assessment that is, tracking progress, change and accomplishments by exploring and reiterating priorities, strengths and milestones, and engaging all stakeholders in that process can ensure that quality curriculum and leading practices are sustained and

maintained over time. Achievements can be noted, gaps and needs prioritized, and possibilities for curricular enhancement identified and described.

To ensure quality educational and curricular activities and practices, it is necessary to continuously review and reflect on curricular design, development, principles, approaches, and the systems and resources which support curriculum. Sound assessment practices yield evidence that ultimately improves the learning experience. In order to be meaningful and useful, assessment should be evidence based, focused on intended learning outcomes, and tailored to address the unique and distinctive qualities and priorities of a particular area of study.

Assessment is shaped and informed by the intended learning outcomes of a program, course or area of study and can encompass a range of evidence based tools and strategies. Clarity about what it is that learners need to know and do with their knowledge, allows us to know what needs to be assessed.

Key elements of leading practices in curricular assessment:

- Assessment is done for the purposes of increasing learning and to demonstrate evidence of intended learning outcomes.
- Assessment is flexible, can take a variety of forms, and occurs throughout all phases of curricular design, development and implementation.
- Meaningful assessment involves all stakeholders at different times during various phases of curricular development.
- Criteria for assessment are clearly described, identified and communicated.
- Learners, teachers and stakeholders know what will be expected in regards to assessment, and each may contribute to both setting the standards and participating in the actual assessment.
- Assessment takes place in a variety of contexts.
- Assessment tasks integrate skills and understanding, and parallel what learners will do in life with what they have learned.
- Opportunities to recognize and grant credit for learning that students have previously acquired are considered (Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition)

(Adapted from Camosun College: A Curriculum Development Framework, 2007)

### **Framework for curricular design and development**

Camosun's Curriculum Development Framework articulates a process that is designed to meet the specific development needs of diverse programs and areas of study. It allows for considerable diversity amongst programs and incorporates concepts and approaches that drive leading practices including an appreciative approach, an evidence and learning outcomes based approach to significant learning, relational learning and assessment. A recent review of the literature of exemplary curriculum design and development practices supports and offers evidence that this process and the approaches and concepts that underpin the Camosun Curriculum Development Framework are current, relevant, evidence based, and progressive.

The framework relies upon a collaborative approach to curricular processes and activities and incorporates and ultimately articulates the strengths and priorities of learners, teachers, administrators, resources, industry, and community members. Stakeholders are supported to work in collaboration to identify institutional, learner, teacher, industry and community strengths and capacities, to seek solutions and explore possibilities, and to clarify and name beliefs and values about a discipline, learners, graduates, industry, community and the teaching and learning process. This forms a base from which clear and relevant program purpose statements, program and course design, intended learning outcomes, assessment, learning activities and approaches can be explored, developed, implemented and assessed.

The application of the Curriculum Development Framework to existing and new curriculum creates an opportunity for both internal and external stakeholders to participate meaningfully in curriculum development process and activities that are principle driven, evidence based and which meet current and future needs and priorities. As a result, many of the partners in this process experience significant and relational learning about learners, teachers, institutional resources and structures, industry and community. The desired outcome of this process is a curriculum that reflects and supports leading practices in all aspects of the educational experience.

### **Institutional systems, structures and processes**

In order to apply and incorporate leading practices into curricular activities and processes, the expertise and involvement of a range of institutional resources, systems and processes are required.

Camosun has an array of internal structures, systems and processes that are involved at various stages and phases of the curricular process. These resources and systems include educational leadership, curriculum developers, the curriculum approvals process, and Student Services. All of these resources and services strive to ensure that the needs and priorities of learners, teachers, staff, administrators and external bodies are met.

Well-constructed and cohesive institutional systems, structures and processes are essential to the institution's capacity to create and deliver learning experiences that are positive, current and future oriented. To support these goals, the internal systems, structures and processes must:

- Have the learning experience as the priority
- Foster collaboration amongst learners, teachers, staff and administrators
- Facilitate communication and sharing of information between and amongst stakeholders
- Share knowledge and expertise with others involved in curricular activities and processes
- Provide service and supports that are accessible, cohesive and flexible

A commitment by all institutional stakeholders to leading practices– that is, the incorporation of a shared and agreed upon set of guiding principles, core concepts, approaches and frameworks in all aspects of curricular development –supports curricular activities and processes and ultimately enhances the learning experience.



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