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ISOTHERMAL
COMMUNITY COLLEGE

A Learning College Primer

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Greetings from the President

Welcome to Isothermal Community College...a community of individuals committed to “improving life through learning.” Learning is the central focus for Isothermal and charts our continuing journey to become a preeminent “Learning College.” Faculty, staff, and students are all challenged and encouraged to demonstrate a commitment to our Learning College philosophy, and we rise to the challenge. Our collaborative efforts demonstrate how we have and continue to create a climate that nurtures and supports each learner. We are delighted that you have decided to join us on our journey and look forward to an exciting and mutually beneficial learning experience.

Dr. Myra B. Johnson
President

Mission

Isothermal Community College exists to improve life through learning. It is a simple statement, but when one tries to get to the essence of what the College is all about, it says it all. This is our mission. This is the driving force behind our focus on becoming a learning college.

Vision

Our vision is *to transform Isothermal Community College into a preeminent center recognized nationally for excellence in learning and services.*

Values

In improving life through learning, we embrace the following values:

- A commitment to excellence
- Nurturing an organizational climate of integrity, care and respect for individuals
- Innovation, evaluation, and informed change
- Elimination of barriers to learning
- Self-directed learning and critical thinking
- The preservation and perpetuation of our diverse cultural heritage
- Serving as a catalyst for positive community growth

Learning College

Terry O’Banion, author of the book *A Learning College for the 21st Century* (1997), first used this phrase to describe a paradigm shift from a focus on teaching to a focus on learning in higher education.

O’Banion’s work makes the following statements about the role of a **Learning College**:

- Creates substantive change in individual learners
- Engages learners as full partners in the learning process
- Creates and offers as many options for learning as possible
- Assists learners to form and participate in collaborative learning activities
- Defines the roles of instructors by the needs of learners
- Identifies the roles of all college employees in supporting learning
- Succeeds only when improved and expanded learning can be documented for its learners

Lifelong Learning

Isothermal Community College provides a broad range of educational experiences to serve the unique learning styles, schedules, and academic aspirations of a diverse student population throughout their adult lives. The range includes literacy classes and high school completion programs; certificate, diploma, and associate degree programs; training in specialized skills; and courses that are just for fun.

The College responds to needs of our students through a variety of learning options. For the convenience of our learners, educational experiences are offered. . .

- Mornings, afternoons, and evenings
- On our Polk and Spindale campuses
- At community sites and high schools
- At business sites
- In traditional classroom settings
- Online, through distance learning, and in hybrid courses
- In partnerships with community organizations
- Through cultural events and arts programming
- Through Rutherford Early College High School (REaCH).

Team for the Advancement of a Learning College (TALC)

In the spring of 1996, Isothermal Community College made a commitment to become a learning-centered college. An early initiative was the empowerment of a committee on learning, which evolved into the Team for the Advancement of a Learning College (TALC) Leadership group. This Leadership Team seeks input from the college community to guide its efforts to keep learning at the forefront of our mission. All college employees (faculty and staff) who have the desire to be active in our quest to become a learning college are encouraged to do so. The TALC leadership group includes chairs and co-chairs from each of the learning taskforces, plus additional representation from the college at large.

All taskforces were developed to respond to institutional barriers identified by faculty and staff. Original taskforces included Professional Development – Faculty, Professional Development – Staff, Technology, and Cooperative Learning (an active learning technique for which all faculty receive training). Since the implementation of the TALC learning initiative, taskforces have been added, merged, or dissolved as needed to accomplish our mission. The Technology Taskforce was dissolved as a result of its becoming incorporated into a department. The Institutional Effectiveness Taskforce was created and then dissolved once it had served its purpose in the SACS renewal of accreditation process. The Cooperative Learning Taskforce merged with the Learning Communities Taskforce to form the Learning Strategies Taskforce. Five additional taskforces have been added to facilitate TALC efforts: Assessment, Enhancing Systems and Processes (ESP), Campus Life, Business and Industry, and Academic Advising. A brief description of each current taskforce's charge follows:

Academic Advising Taskforce

The function of the Academic Advising Taskforce is to review and support the academic advising system of the College. This includes:

- Determining areas where professional development is needed for advisors.
- Developing a training program and professional development opportunities for advisors that go beyond the mechanics of registration.
- Promoting “Developmental Advising” practices on campus
(see http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Clearinghouse/AdvisingIssues/dev_adv.htm for more information).
- Seeking ways to better educate students about their role in the advising
- Working to ensure that advisors are informed about the advising system on our campus.
- Looking for ways to improve our advising system so that the needs of all parties involved will be effectively met.

Assessment Taskforce

This taskforce researches methods of assessment and explores ways to effectively assess what we do. The College's comprehensive assessment plans include both academic and service area assessment. A major undertaking of this taskforce has been the development of a campus-wide assessment plan that focuses on the College's stated learning outcomes and general education competencies.

Business and Industry Taskforce

This taskforce seeks to improve the lines of communication between college faculty/staff and employers in the service area. This partnership informs curriculum planning as faculty integrate real-world concepts into the curriculum.

Campus Life Taskforce

The Campus Life Taskforce explores activities and programs that cultivate a sense of community and promote morale among Isothermal employees.

The goals of the Campus Life Taskforce include:

- serving as a planning partner for social activities and celebrations
- encouraging and supporting employee wellness
- providing resources to promote personal safety, e.g. seminars, workshops
- exploring ways to work with student organizations to promote campus life.

Enhancing Systems and Processes (ESP) Taskforce

In support of the College's Learning Initiative, the ESP Taskforce strives to identify and remove barriers to student success as well as to foster the independence of students. This taskforce reviews institutional practices to identify barriers or impediments that reduce staff effectiveness or that have a direct negative impact on student learning. The taskforce not only initiates improvements in college policies, processes, systems, and services, but also makes recommendations to guide institutional priorities through informed change.

Learning Strategies Taskforce

In October 2001, the Learning Communities and Cooperative Learning Taskforces merged to form the Learning Strategies Taskforce in order to broaden the focus to a greater variety of learning strategies. This taskforce explores strategies for improving learning through the following:

- Steering efforts to train new faculty in learning strategies
- Sharing cooperative learning techniques
- Serving as planning partners for newly trained faculty and staff
- Serving as a resource by demonstrating the techniques
- Meeting regularly to discuss ways to support learning efforts
- Acknowledging contributions to the learning college (viz. the Golden Apple Award)
- Supporting the implementation of "Learning Communities"
- Contributing to the enhancement of global learning

Professional Development—Faculty Taskforce

This taskforce explores and researches areas for faculty development. Specifically this includes identifying perceived faculty needs, determining how best to address those needs, and then planning, implementing and evaluating the professional development activities.

Professional Development—Staff Taskforce

This taskforce explores, determines, plans, implements, and evaluates professional development activities for staff. The two Professional Development Taskforces work together to plan professional development activities for all College employees.

Outcomes Assessment

In October, 1998, Isothermal embarked on a comprehensive assessment initiative. Under the umbrella of the Assessment Taskforce, the college has selected six general education competencies for curriculum assessment institution wide. Assessment teams, made up of representatives from across campus, have developed rubrics for measuring these outcomes. These outcomes are as follows:

- Communicate effectively through writing, reading, speaking, and listening, and through demonstration of information literacy
- Analyze problems and make logical conclusions
- Demonstrate positive interpersonal skills through cooperative learning and group interaction
- Demonstrate quantitative competencies
- Demonstrate basic computer skills
- Understand diverse historical and cultural perspectives

Other components of the college's assessment plan include program assessment, classroom assessment, individual student assessment, faculty and staff assessment, and service area assessment. All of these are ongoing aspects of the Learning College at work.

Active Learning

The most basic philosophy that human beings learn best by doing is the underlying concept of active learning (O'Banion, 1997).

In the paradigm shift to a learning college, student roles change from passive to active, and students become fully responsible for their own choices and activities. In other words, they become more responsible for their own learning. Teachers become learning facilitators who establish environments conducive to learning and who guide students toward expected outcomes, but it is the active involvement of the student that makes the difference.

At Isothermal Community College, this paradigm shift has:

- Encouraged new ways of teaching and learning
- Stimulated creativity
- Helped remove barriers to learning
- Promoted teamwork
- Created new methods for assessing outcomes.

Cooperative Learning

“Cooperative learning is a teaching/learning strategy that creates a learning climate where understanding, caring and stimulation allow students to respond with an avid interest in learning while growing in self-confidence, independence, and creative energy” (Rogers, 1969, cited in O'Banion, 1997).

Since the fall of 1998, Isothermal Community College has engaged in an active partnership with The Center for Cooperative Learning at the University of Minnesota under the direction of David and Roger Johnson. The Johnsons have conducted specialized training on our campus for faculty and selected support personnel. All full-time faculty and several adjunct faculty members have completed the foundations course in Cooperative Learning; many have also completed courses in Advanced Cooperative Learning, Structured Controversy, and Leading the Cooperative School. A number of Isothermal personnel are now certified as Cooperative Learning trainers for the foundations course.

This commitment to cooperative learning continues to impact the way students, faculty, and staff engage in the learning process.

Learning Styles

Research on multiple intelligences, as well as gender and culture related learning styles, clearly indicates that traditional education and standard lecture formats may not work for a majority of students. At Isothermal, all learning styles are valued. Isothermal faculty are informed about different learning styles, which is significant in two ways. First, it allows faculty to recognize, value, and provide opportunities for all students. Second, as faculty develop an awareness of their own learning styles, which has a significant influence on preferred teaching styles, they can expand their repertoire of teaching strategies.

Students are given the means, usually in ACA classes, to assess their learning styles so they can be aware of the methods of learning that work the best for them. While they may begin activities with the style most comfortable to them, they are also encouraged to broaden their skills by exploring and using styles not so familiar and comfortable.

Learning Communities

O'Banion cites research indicating that learning is significantly improved in learning communities that have been shown to increase critical thinking skills, student motivation, writing skills, and retention.

Isothermal's Learning Strategies Taskforce directs the implementation of learning communities. An initial community was piloted fall 2000 with developmental students. An Arts and Sciences curriculum learning community was developed for fall 2001. In a learning community students take a block of courses which, for example, may include biology, composition, basic computer skills, and study skills. Content in each of the courses is reinforced by the other instructors. For example, biology may provide content which is used in essays. The study skills course provides information on effective reading and research, and the computer skills course teaches students effective technical methods of presenting researched information. Students are also given ample opportunity in all of the learning community classes to develop teamwork and leadership skills.

The college plans to increase the number of learning communities in the future.

Learning Technology

Technology permeates every facet of our society. To be competitive in the marketplace and to function effectively in our knowledge-based society, our students should be equipped to utilize information and technology. In addition, they should be able to exploit technologies to enhance communications and expand their learning experience. Technology is a tool that can enhance awareness, enrich learning resources and extend the learning experience beyond traditional boundaries. Learners, not technologies, should be the focus of our efforts, and the following is what Isothermal believes should be considered before applying technologies in the learning environment:

- Technologies should serve a clearly identifiable need.
- Faculty, staff and students should have adequate access, training, facilities and support.
- Technology should supplement but not supplant effective pedagogy.
- Innovative learners should be allowed to experiment in a secure environment.
- Effective innovations should be acknowledged and rewarded.

Learning Support Services

At Isothermal Community College all students are offered a variety of opportunities to grow as learners and to have access to services that support that growth. Our learning centered support services include the following:

- Academic advising
- Financial aid
- Success and Study Skills class (ACA 115)
- Supplemental Instruction
- Career services
- Disability services
- Computer labs
- Online writing tutorial service (Smarthinking)
- Library services (including online services)
- Student activities
- Student Government, clubs and organizations
- Counseling services
- Placement Testing
- Veterans Benefits

Developmental Education

The mission of the Developmental Education Program is to increase the likelihood that students will improve their academic performance and will persist in college.

Developmental students have diverse learning styles, abilities, and expectations that require different levels of instructional support. A variety of teaching strategies such as cooperative learning, computer-assisted learning, one-on-one interactions, and lecture improves student learning. Developmental personnel encourage students to become independent learners and then give them the tools to do so.

Developmental Education offers courses in composition, reading, and mathematics. All Developmental Education classes place instructional emphasis on building student self-confidence and developing effective study skills, along with developing content skills necessary for success in curriculum courses. Critical thinking and problem solving skills are of primary importance in all Developmental Education courses.

Economic Development

Isothermal Community College plays a proactive role in shaping the readiness of both employers and the workforce for current demands and future opportunities. The college works directly with groups such as Rutherford County Economic Development Commission, Isothermal Planning and Development, and the Employment Security Commission to identify needs and solutions. Anyone seeking to upgrade skills may participate in open enrollment classes while other sessions are developed by the Office of Customized Training to meet the needs of individual employers.

Diversity

Isothermal Community College is committed to diversity enhancement and to the development of a climate that is conducive to the inclusion and participation of both students and professional associates without regard to veteran status, race, color, religion, age, gender, national origin, or disability. The college is further committed to providing opportunities and activities that promote the advancement of minorities and women to positions of leadership at our institution.

We believe that

all members of the Isothermal Community College staff, faculty and student body must be dedicated to personal and academic excellence and must practice personal and academic integrity.

We believe that

we should respect the dignity of all persons, their rights and property and that we should demonstrate concern for others, their feelings, and their need for conditions that support their work and development.

We believe that

prejudice and bigotry are unacceptable, that we should always strive to learn from differences in people, cultures, ideas, and opinions and that we must refrain from and discourage any behavior, actions or deeds which threaten the freedom and respect every individual deserves.

We believe that

learning is central to the college's mission, that diversity in learning styles requires diversity in teaching styles, and that an environment which fosters and celebrates learning is the responsibility of the entire college.

We believe that

allegiance to these beliefs will promote the concept of diversity, that the Isothermal Community College concept of diversity encompasses a spirit of inclusion that is reflected in its curriculum programs and in its recognition of the many variations in teaching, learning, and management styles represented by its faculty, staff, and students.

We believe that

diversity is based on one principle: that there should be respect for the dignity and for the rights of every individual.

*In times of change, learners inherit the earth, while the learned find themselves
equipped to deal with a world that no longer exists.*

Eric Hoffer

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