

Core Commitments of a Learning-Centered University

A learning-centered university:

- envisions all its constituencies (students, faculty, administrators, staff) as intentional learners
- provides diagnostic and support services to those constituencies to enable them to formulate and revise their learning objectives
- fosters the attitudes that define intentional learning, including curiosity, initiative, autonomy, risk taking, self-direction, self-knowledge, and the exercise of responsibility
- takes learning not as an incidental byproduct of its main activities, but as their overarching objective
- uses the promotion of learning as a touchstone for institutional decision-making and deliberation
- links its individual incentives and benchmarks (degrees, RTP, advancement, etc.) to meeting learning-based objectives
- questions, and when necessary, transgresses organizational barriers that serve as obstacles to identifying and meeting learning objectives
- rewards collaboration that refines learning objectives and better enables their satisfaction
- implements effective measures to gauge its progress toward meeting its learning objectives, while continually working to align those objectives with its practices

Core Values

- collaboration
- a community of intentional learners
- continual improvement
- learning-focused policy making
- continual reflection and improvement

Continuum of Learning Orientations

(M. Martinez, "Executive Summary of the Learning Orientation Research" (1998), Expert learning Communities Research Program, Instructional Psychology and Technology Department, College of Education, Brigham Young University)

Intentional Learners

At the top of the continuum are intentional learners. Deeply influenced by an awareness of the social, cognitive, conative, and affective aspects influencing them, intentional learners place great importance on personal strengths, ability, persistent effort, strategies, high-standards, and positive expectations to self-direct intentional learning successfully. Intentional learning is a skilled, adaptive approach that has great value and usefulness to the learner. Intentional learners enjoy acquiring expertise. As they acquire expertise they like to share knowledge with other and often serve as a guide, coach, or mentor to others.

"Intentional learners take responsibility and control of their learning and become actively involved in managing the learning process" (Martinez, 1997, p. 175). They use stimulating influences, such as intentions, motivation, passions, personal principles and high standards, to direct achievement of challenging personal goals.

Intentional learners learn best in loosely structured learning environments that encourage and support positive anticipations, expertise building, risk-taking experiences, mentoring relationships, self-directed learning, problem-solving situations, support for high learner control opportunities, transformative processes, high learning standards, and achievement of challenging personal goals for long-term accomplishments and change.

Performing Learners

In comparison, a performing learner is a non-risk, skilled learner that consciously, systematically, and capably uses conative and cognitive processes, strategies, preferences as they focus on grades and attaining normative achievement standards.

In contrast to intentional learners, performing learners are short-term and task-oriented, take fewer risks with challenging or difficult goals, and rely on coaching relationships and available external resources and influences to accomplish a task. Performing learners clearly acknowledge meeting only the stated objectives, limiting effort, getting the grade, and avoiding exploratory steps beyond the learning task. These learners prefer semi-structured learning environments and seldom solely rely on compliance, others for motivation, or explicit direction and feedback.

Conforming Learners

Compared to intentional or performing learners, conforming learners are compliant and more passively accept knowledge, store it, and reproduce it to conform, complete assigned tasks if they can, and please others. The conforming learner does not typically think critically, synthesize feedback, solve complex problems, make independent decisions, or give knowledge new meaning to initiate change in themselves or the environment.

These learners are typically less skilled learners who have little desire to control or manage their learning or change their environment. They prefer to have simple standards set for them, expend less effort, and receive explicit guidance and feedback as they accomplish required tasks. These learners learn best in environments that are safe, structured, focus on step-by-step procedures, and offer easily attained short-term goals.

Resistant Learners

In contrast to the other three learning orientations, resistant learners lack a fundamental belief that academic learning and achievement can help them achieve personal goals or initiate positive change. Too often they have suffered repeated, long-term frustration from inappropriate learning situations at the hands of unskilled, imperceptive instructors who unfortunately deter individuals from enjoying successful learning experiences and opportunities. These learners do not believe that formal education or academic institutions can be positive or enjoyable influences in their life.