

What Does It Mean to Be a Cornell Graduate?

Waning confidence in higher education has increased demands for institutional accountability to students, parents, institutional governing bodies, accrediting agencies, as well as government offices. Concerns about the future of higher education from both inside and outside the academic community abound as a “politically popular accountability ideology has swept statehouses across the country and is capturing the allegiance of many lawmakers of both major parties” (AAC&U, 2004). These external demands create an imperative that as an institution we define the value of a Cornell College education. We look to our own beliefs and values to answer the question “What does it mean to be a Cornell graduate?”

We first turn to our mission statement, *The Aims of Cornell College*. In accordance with this statement, we value liberal education as an end in itself and as a means of empowering students for leadership through productive careers and humane service in the global community.

We are committed to sustaining a community devoted to liberal learning and democratic values. To this end, we seek to provide a caring environment for living and learning, characterized by close relationships, physical and emotional well-being, appreciation of diversity, affirmation of equal opportunity and academic freedom, and respect for the dignity and worth of each individual.

We endeavor to provide opportunities for pursuing liberal education that allow Cornell students to:

- explore widely the range of human experience and investigate carefully the work of a chosen discipline;
- analyze problems and synthesize solutions;
- integrate theory and practice; and
- read critically, reason effectively, engage creatively, feel deeply, evaluate fairly, respond imaginatively, communicate clearly, and act responsibly.

The Vision Statement of the Cornell College Curriculum further articulates the goals of a Cornell education:

The overarching objective of a Cornell College education is to produce graduates who are able to engage meaningfully with both the world and their own lives. Inasmuch as knowledge fosters this engagement, its acquisition occurs in the service of meaning – to allow students to make sense of their lives and surroundings. (Ad Hoc Report, 2005, p. 1)

To this end, the Cornell vision seeks to focus the curriculum on four central and interrelated themes: (1) skills to acquire knowledge, (2) process of acquiring knowledge, (3) depth of knowledge, and (4) connectedness of knowledge.

Educational Outcomes

Upon completion of their educational experiences at Cornell College, we expect graduates to have achieved educational outcomes associated with a liberal education. Drawing from the language proposed by the AAC&U (2004), we expect students to:

1. Possess strong skills related to the acquisition, analysis, interpretation and communication of knowledge;
 - a. these skills include, but are not limited to, those pertaining to writing, reading comprehension, critical thinking, quantitative reasoning, information literacy, oral communication, and language acquisition;
2. Possess, through exposure and hands-on experience, deep understanding of the inquiry practices of disciplines that explore the natural, social and cultural realms;
 - a. as a result of their experiences with various inquiry modes, students will possess broad understandings of, and abilities related to, different disciplinary and interdisciplinary forms of thinking;
 - b. as a result of their experiences with a major, students will possess depth of understanding and strong research skills in at least one mode of inquiry;
3. Possess intercultural knowledge, global perspectives, and a proactive sense of responsibility for individual, civic, and social choices; and,
4. Possess habits of mind that foster integrative thinking and the ability to transfer skills and knowledge from one setting to another.

These outcomes are achieved and demonstrated in a variety of contexts. Students demonstrate proficiency in one or more areas of concentration as well as a general understanding of the concepts and modes of inquiry stemming from the natural and social sciences, the arts, and the humanities. Core competencies – the specific skills and abilities we expect students to acquire – and core content knowledge – the general areas of knowledge with which we expect students to have at least some passing acquaintance – flow from students' achievement of these educational outcomes. Student proficiency is demonstrated in a variety of independent and collaborative contexts blending their academic and co-curricular experiences and learning.

At Cornell College we seek to provide students with opportunities to acquire a liberal education, to achieve general educational outcomes, and to develop specific sets of core competencies and content knowledge. While faculty and staff provide a supportive environment, students ultimately bear the responsibility for the education they achieve.