

# Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education

The “Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education” were created by Arthur W. Chickering and Zelda Gamson. These principles and the suggestions for implementation were distilled from decades of research on learning in higher education. The project received support from the American Association of Higher Education (AAHE), the Association of American Colleges (ACE), and the Johnson and Lilly Foundations. The investigators are leading scholars in faculty and student development who, amongst other things, solicited the ideas of hundreds of faculty members and administrators in North American colleges and universities.

Seven Principles was originally published in 1987; it is based on an underlying view of education as active, cooperative, and demanding (Chickering, p. 5). The goals of the authors are first, to identify practices, policies, and conditions that would result in a powerful and enduring undergraduate education, and second, to offer a set of research-based principles that would help sustain debate and action regarding undergraduate learning (Chickering, p. 13).

An enthusiastic response to the principles prompted the authors to develop a “checklist” for instructors (available from the BYU Center for Teaching and Learning), with examples and indicators for each of the principles. The version of the seven principles that you are now reading was edited by Lynn Sorenson and Emily Burns at the BYU Faculty Center. It is a collection of teaching (and other) behaviors which have been shown to enhance student learning. Items selected for inclusion are applicable to a range of disciplines, institutions, and class settings. They are short and jargon-free, and they focus on behavior or practices that can be adopted.

Of course, no one instructor can perform all of the items listed here but it is the hope of the BYU Center for Teaching and Learning that these principles will stimulate both discussion and action among faculty, students, and administrators. These principles will enhance student learning.

## Summary of Seven Principles

Below are summaries of each of the 7 principles. Click on the specific principle to access the complete list of suggestions for implementation. Accompanying the suggestions are links to relevant articles from *Focus on Faculty*, the quarterly Faculty Center newsletter for those who teach at BYU. In addition, links are provided to pertinent *Questions and Answers for Teaching Assistants*, developed by D. Lynn Sorenson, Trav D. Johnson, Jessica Taylor, and Shelley T. Graham for teaching assistants, student instructors, lab assistants, tutors, discussions leaders, graders, and other roles of students charged with helping students learn.

1. **Good practice encourages student-faculty contact.**

Frequent student-faculty contact in and out of class is the most important factor in student motivation and involvement. Faculty concern helps students get through rough times and keep on working. Knowing a few faculty members well enhances students’ intellectual commitment and encourages them to think about their own values and future plans.

2. **Good practice encourages cooperation among students.**

Learning is enhanced when it is more like a team effort than a solo race. Good learning, like good work, is collaborative and social, not competitive and isolated. Working with others often increases involvement in learning. Sharing one’s own ideas and responding to others’ reactions improves thinking and deepens understanding.

3. **Good practice encourages active learning.**

Learning is not a spectator sport. Students do not learn much just sitting in classes, listening to teachers,

memorizing pre-packaged assignments, and spitting out answers. They must talk about what they are learning, write about it, relate it to past experiences, and apply it to their daily lives. They must make what they learn a part of themselves.

4. **Good practice gives prompt feedback.**

Knowing what you know and don't know focuses learning. Students need appropriate feedback on performance to benefit from courses. In getting started, students need help in assessing existing knowledge and competence. In class, students need frequent opportunities to perform and receive suggestions for improvement. At various points during college, and at the end, students need chances to reflect on what they have learned, what they still need to know, and how to assess themselves.

5. **Good practice emphasizes time on task.**

Time + energy = learning. There is no substitute for time on task. Learning to use one's time well is critical for students and professionals alike. Students need help in learning effective time management. Allocating realistic amounts of time will help students to learn effectively and teachers to teach effectively. How an institution defines time expectations for students, faculty, administrators, and other professional staff can establish the basis for high performance for all.

6. **Good practice communicates high expectations.**

Expect more and you will get more. High expectations are important for everyone—the poorly prepared, those unwilling to exert themselves, and the bright and well motivated. Expecting students to perform well becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy when teachers and institutions hold high expectations for themselves and make extra efforts.

7. **Good practice respects diverse talents and ways of learning.**

There are many roads to learning. People bring different talents and styles of learning to college. Brilliant students in the seminar room may be all thumbs in the lab or art studio. Students rich in hands-on experience may not do so well with theory. Students need the opportunity to show their talents and learn in ways that work for them. Then they can be pushed to learning in new ways that do not come easily.

## **Conclusion**

### **Whose Responsibility Is It?**

Teachers and students hold the main responsibility for improving undergraduate education. But they need a lot of help. College and university leaders, state and federal officials, and accrediting associations have the power to shape an environment that is favorable to good practice in higher education.

### **What qualities must this environment have?**

- A strong sense of shared purposes
- Concrete support from administrators and faculty leaders for those purposes
- Adequate funding appropriate for the purposes
- Policies and procedures consistent with the purposes
- Continuing examination of how well the purposes are being achieved

There is good evidence that such an environment can be created. When this happens, faculty members and administrators must think of themselves as educators. Adequate resources are put into creating opportunities for faculty members, administrators, and students to celebrate and reflect on their shared purposes. Faculty members receive support and release time for appropriate professional development activities. Criteria for hiring and promoting faculty members, administrators, and staff [reflect] the institution's purposes. Advising is considered important. Departments, programs, and classes are small enough to allow faculty members and students to have a sense of community, to experience the value of their contributions, and to confront the consequences of their failures.

States, the federal government, [sponsoring institutions], and accrediting associations affect the kind of environment that can develop on campuses in a variety of ways. The most important is through the allocation of financial support. States [and boards] also influence good practice by encouraging sound planning, setting priorities, mandating standards, and reviewing and approving programs. Regional and professional accrediting associations require self-study and peer review in making their judgments about programs and institutions.

These sources of support and influence can encourage environments for good practice in undergraduate education by

- setting policies that are consistent with good practice in undergraduate education.
- holding high expectations for institutional performance.
- keeping bureaucratic regulations to a minimum that is compatible with public accountability.
- allocating adequate funds for new undergraduate programs and the professional development of faculty members, administrators, and staff.
- encouraging employment of under-represented groups among administrators, faculty members, and student service professionals.
- providing the support for programs [and] facilities, [including the] financial aid necessary for good practice in undergraduate education.

## References

To order copies of “Inventories of Good Practice in Undergraduate Education,” write to The Johnson Foundation, Inc., Processing Center, P.O. Box 17305, Milwaukee, WI 53217.

1. Chickering, Arthur W., and Zelda F. Gamson, “Applying the Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education,” *New Directions for Teaching and Learning* Vol. 47 (1991), San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc., Publishers.
2. Hatfield, Susan Rickey, ed. *The Seven Principles in Action*. Bolton, Mass.: Anker Publishing Company, Inc., 1995.
3. *Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education: Faculty Inventory*. Racine, Wisc.: The Johnson Foundation, Inc., 1987.