

Intersections: A First-Year Experience

Rationale for the First-Year Experience:

Given the challenge we face in introducing our students to the liberal arts mission of Central College, we believe that a more intentional, integrated, and common first-year experience will provide a framework for developing the life of the mind and the habits of an intellectually engaged citizen. Furthermore, such a program will improve retention (persistence) and promote more effective recruitment.

Some assumptions:

- There should be a common liberal arts experience for all first-year students.
- The experience will be concentrated in the first semester, with possible follow-up experiences in the second semester.
- The individual sections of the course will be conducted as seminars.
- Regular Central faculty members from many divisions and disciplines should teach the seminars.
- The experience should give students skills that will help their performance in other core courses.
- This will be a for-credit, graded course.
- There will be culminating, shared activities at the end of the first semester.

The requirement:

All first-year students are required to enroll in Intersections in the fall semester. Passing the course is a requirement for graduation. Students who do not pass Intersections will have two options: 1) retake the course or 2) take a total of three (3) Central Foundations courses in three different core distribution areas instead of the two Central Foundations courses normally required. Permission from the VPAA is required for withdrawal from Intersections. Transfer students are exempt from the Intersections requirement.

(modified by the Faculty, January 22, 2004)

Basic content:

The individual sections of this course will contain some common programming while still allowing faculty to individualize some of the schedule and content. All of the course sections will include

- A common theme
- A selection of some works (books, experiments, art, etc.) in common
- Common guidelines for grading and assignments
- Common speakers
- Common fine arts events

A common theme: “Intersections”

The common, general theme of the program will be “Intersections.” Each year the Intersections Council (see below), in consultation with faculty teaching the course, will decide on a specific topic or topics consistent with the Intersections theme. These specific topics as well as common works selected for the course will change from time to time, but the Intersections theme will remain constant.

The content of Intersections should be intellectually challenging, an introduction to the Liberal Arts. It should be interdisciplinary and should deal with the intersections where disciplines, ideas, and events connect, collide, and converge. Great works of the past connect to current issues. Science collides with religion. Art supports cultural diversity. The course will contain

- A set of significant works, a matrix, drawn from both the past and the present, that will be common to the seminar sections. These common works will be cultural artifacts in a broad sense such as readings, plastic arts, architecture, fashion, speeches, music, entertainment, experiments, theories, and events. The common works will include germinal ideas of perennial significance.
- A second set of works that respond to those common works in some way. Individual instructors will contribute this second set of artifacts and will work out individual approaches and connections in their own sections of the course. In addition, small groups of faculty whose sections meet at the same time could cooperate on scheduling readings and programs.
- A program of speakers, panel discussions, and fine arts events. Some of these will be tied to the matrix of significant works and will be required of all students in all sections of the course. Faculty members teaching individual sections may also require their own students to attend other relevant events.

Skills development in Intersections:

Course content and skills development support one another. The course content in Intersections not only should introduce the students to significant ideas, but also should be a means of teaching critical thinking skills such as drawing conclusions, making connections, seeing similarities and differences, judging arguments, evaluating sources of information, and identifying patterns. Conversely, these critical thinking skills should help students understand the content and significance of the chosen works. We believe this reciprocal process lies at the heart of a Liberal Arts education.

Because developing critical thinking skills is one of the main purposes of Intersections, the teachers of individual sections will

- Select course materials with an eye to making those connections, judgments, and patterns.
- Focus assignments and exercises on those skills. For example, the teacher might assign and teach a comparison and contrast paper, or guide students in preparing a panel discussion that looks for connections, or ask students to judge an argument, a source of information, or a work of art.

- Collaborate with library faculty to create information literacy components designed to enable students to access and use information effectively, evaluate information and sources critically, incorporate new information into their knowledge base, and use sources of information ethically and legally.
- Model critical thinking skills in various ways, such as science demonstrations, student papers, and discussions of how criteria for judging works of art have changed over time.

The teaching of competencies (e.g., how to organize a paragraph, how to do a laboratory experiment) is also appropriate for this course, depending on the type of assignments, but not the main goal.

Supervision of Intersections:

The Intersections Council will supervise the ongoing work of the FYE program. Membership of the Council will consist of three students (at least one first-year and at least one upper class), one administrator, four faculty members who teach in the program (no more than two from the same division), and the Director of Intersections. At the present time, the Intersections Council will not be a standing committee of the faculty; therefore, members will also be eligible to serve on standing committees. The Council may become a standing committee of the faculty after a review of the complete committee structure by the Faculty Policy Committee and after action by the faculty.

The Student Senate will elect the student representatives to the Council.

The faculty will elect the four faculty members on the Intersections Council in the normal spring election process. The Faculty Policy Committee will solicit nominations for the Intersections Council and will ascertain that the nominees intend to teach in the program. Faculty will serve staggered three-year terms.

The administrative representative will be the Vice-President for Academic Affairs or her/his designee.

The role of the Intersections Council will be:

- To choose the specific topic and matrix works each year.
- To organize common speakers and arts programs each year.
- To produce supporting materials such as model assignments and a calendar of common events.
- To recruit faculty to teach in the program.
- To supervise the training and development of faculty who teach the course: summer workshops, roundtable discussions of methods, etc.
- To monitor and evaluate the success of the course.
- To write grants in support of the development of faculty who teach the course.

The Director of Intersections will be a faculty member who will receive released time from teaching and other faculty duties sufficient to coordinate the program. The Director will report to the Vice-President for Academic Affairs, who will appoint her/him in consultation with the Faculty Policy Committee. The duties of the Director will be to

- Chair the meetings of the Council.

- Act as chief administrator of the Council activities listed above—for example, negotiate and sign contracts, organize summer workshops, and participate in faculty recruitment.
- Supervise the budget of the Council.

The Intersections Council, not the Director, has the major policy-making authority over the program.

Class size:

Sections of Intersections will be capped at 18 students, with the goal of achieving 15 as resources allow. Small, interactive classes are necessary for achieving the goals of the program--especially for teaching critical thinking skills and building a community of scholars. Small sections also permit experimentation with using the teacher in the class as the students' advisor.

Course credit:

Intersections will count for 3 semester hours of credit in student and faculty loads. Faculty should expect students in Intersections to devote about 6 hours a week outside of class to attendance at programs, reading, writing and other class related activities. Classes can meet on either a MWF or TR schedule.

Limiting the course to 3 credits rather than 4 allows it to fit more easily into student and faculty loads and into daily course schedules. It also makes room to experiment in some sections with add-on credits for other programs such as ACCESS, Exploring Experience, College Success, etc.

Central Core:

Intersections will count as a Central Foundations (CF) class in the Central Core. The emphasis on the development of critical thinking skills justifies CF credit. In effect, all first-year students in the fall will take one section of Intersections and then will be required to take only one more CF class.

Counting Intersections as one of the two required CF classes frees up faculty to teach in the program by shifting some of them from other CF classes to Intersections.

Approved by the Faculty 3/02

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