

# Educational Framework

## I. Introduction

Calvin’s educational framework names college-wide goals that ground the college’s curricular and co-curricular activities. It attempts to answer the question, “What are the enduring characteristics or qualities of thinking, doing, and being that mark a Calvin graduate?” The educational framework, derived from the [college mission](#), articulates a frame that ensures coherent, holistic programs and practices in which students learn and develop.

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*The mission of Calvin College is to equip students to think deeply, to act justly, and to live wholeheartedly as Christ’s agents of renewal in the world.*

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The Educational Framework is a “no-frills,” functional document. It does not duplicate or expand on the primary documents of the college (*Expanded Statement of Mission, An Engagement with God’s World, From Every Nation, Statement on Sustainability*), which beautifully articulate the college’s foundational commitments to liberal arts education, a Reformed tradition, and matters of racial justice, reconciliation, and cross-cultural engagement. Rather, the educational framework emerges from the college’s foundational documents and commitments. These provide coherence and meaning to the educational framework.

The all-college goals identified for a Calvin graduate will direct conversations about how these goals will be developed, implemented, and assessed—through the core, at department and program levels, and in the co-curriculum. The specific work of outcome development and alignment, however, is best left to the community, over time.

## II. All-College Goals

### Learning

Deep, Broad, Engaged

*Calvin students learn that*

- rigorous, open-minded, and disciplined learning leads to understanding, wisdom, and wonder, which glorifies God.
- a broad study of the liberal arts in a [core curriculum](#) develops essential knowledge, skills, and virtues.
- effective methods of in-depth study and research in [majors](#) and minors enable discovery of knowledge and enhancement of skills and virtues.
- the curriculum and co-curriculum together nurture knowledge of ourselves and our gifts.
- imagination, knowledge, and courage in learning equip us for transformative action; we analyze, inquire, experiment, interpret, express, perform, and create.
- developing [life-long habits](#) of effective and enthusiastic learning prepares us for lives of faithful service in the kingdom.

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*“General education, anchored in the core curriculum, serves to equip all students to live the Christian life in contemporary society” (ESM, 34).*

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*“The major...equips students to assume specific positions in society and to show expertise in shaping contemporary culture and social institutions. The major is a study in depth...” (ESM, 34).*

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*“Our educational goals include the development of abilities and competencies that enable people to be effective in the tasks of knowing and caring” (ESM, 27).*

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## Faith

Informed, Courageous, Lived

*Calvin students learn that*

- Christian faith increases in richness, resilience, and passion when grounded in biblical, theological, and historical knowledge.
- Calvin College’s understanding of scripture is articulated in the [Reformed tradition of Christianity](#).
- a richer and more complex understanding of Christian faith emerges when studied in reference to multiple Christian traditions and other world faiths.
- Christian faith in the Reformed tradition welcomes questions and seeks understanding; to achieve that disposition, our faith must be at once humble and bold.
- Christian faith is strengthened by historic spiritual practices, particularly devotional practices and communal worship.
- Christian faith finds purpose in acts of justice, mercy, and love in the world—acts by which we show gratitude and through which God [builds the kingdom](#).

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*“At the heart of our programs lies the pursuit of knowledge of our triune God as revealed in scripture and creation, and as expressed through religious traditions in general and the Reformed Christian tradition in particular” (ESM, 27).*

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*“The tasks of our daily life together are guided by faithfulness to the Word. We aim to be conformed more and more to the likeness of God incarnate, willing to receive the mind and heart of Jesus. We also aim to be agents of renewal. We believe that we are, as individuals, as groups, and as a whole gifted by God to be such agents of a common aim” (ESM, 48).*

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## Citizenship

Local, Global, Christlike

*Calvin students learn that*

- Christian vocation impels us to use our hearts and minds, talents and resources to be attentive, insightful, and creative [participants in the world](#).
- Christian humility directs us to recognize our own formation in a particular culture, time, and place.
- Christian love enjoins us to develop cultural intelligence, to value human cultures, and to become wise and responsible students of global human diversity.
- Christian stewardship commits us to become faithful caretakers of the physical creation, and to study and sustain our universe.
- Christian service moves us to work alongside others with compassion, confronting our own and others’ injustice and sharing hope in Christ’s [justice](#) and mercy.

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*“...the college’s programs encourage insightful and creative participation in society. We aim to foster sensitivity to the working of God and creation and respect for the variety of gifts that are offered by people of different genders, races, ages, and abilities. We strive to learn the demands of justice, an appreciation for diverse cultures, an attentiveness to the religious meanings of life events, and an awareness of ways to renew the world for God’s glory” (ESM, 27).*

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*“The outreach to an external community, moreover, will be marked by an insistence upon justice, identifying clearly the injustice in this world, refusing to tolerate it, and working to eradicate it” (ESM, 27).*

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## Vocation

Responsive, Discerning, Dynamic

*Calvin students learn that*

- God’s people respond when **called**—whether with the reluctance of Moses or the readiness of Mary.
- the lifelong practice of discerning and developing our talents and passions prepares us to respond with our gifts of knowledge, skills, virtues, and faith.
- the process of divine calling and human response is ongoing, complex, and unpredictable—but ultimately is shaped to God’s providence.
- God uses **our learning experiences**, our successes, and our failures to ready us for the expected and unexpected tasks to which God will call us.
- though fallen, we praise God through our faithful actions, hopeful and confident that God uses us for his purposes.

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*“Intrinsic to the Reformed tradition has been the sense of the significance of each calling—Christians called to serve God in their vocations. The college shapes that calling by finding areas of integration between faith and vocation, an effort that remains a primary educational objective of the college” (ESM, 18).*

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*“Since the body of Christ needs many different members to accomplish its work, the major should enable people to respond to Christ’s calling by finding suitable vocations through which they can make contributions to the church and society” (ESM, 34).*

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## III. Outcomes

What will others see that tells them a Calvin College graduate has achieved these four goals? What specific knowledge, skills, and habits of mind or heart will graduates demonstrate to show attainment of a goal?

Answering these questions is the work of faculty and staff in academic departments and co-curricular programs around the college. A chemistry student will demonstrate mastery in a different way than a philosophy major. An athlete will demonstrate mastery in a different way than a musician.

A few *examples* follow. These are only illustrative and not intended to be comprehensive, recognizing that departments and programs will identify their own outcomes.

**Learning:** Graduates will, for example, be able to

- read and listen carefully, critically, reflectively, and charitably.
- present ideas, findings, or information clearly and accurately, in written, oral, quantitative, and visual form.
- engage with and evaluate disciplinary foundations of knowledge and culture.
- demonstrate virtues such as love of learning, curiosity, intellectual humility, and generosity.

**Faith:** Graduates will, for example, be able to

- describe how biblical themes of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration take shape in and inform particular disciplines and professions.
- bring Reformed Christian perspectives to bear on contemporary issues.
- demonstrate hospitality toward and respect for other faith traditions and other world religions.
- display virtues such as faith, hope, and honesty in academic, personal, and communal formation.

**Citizenship:** Graduates will, for example, be able to

- demonstrate intercultural knowledge and competence in interactions with others.
- discern and counter racism and other injustices in all their forms.
- put into action the principles of stewardship ethics.
- participate responsibly and knowledgeably in public life.
- demonstrate virtues such as empathy, courage, justice, and stewardship.

**Vocation:** Graduates will, for example, be able to

- demonstrate self-knowledge related to their gifts and callings.
- collaborate successfully with others, knowing when and how to lead, and when and how to support the leadership of others.
- display a commitment to practices of life-long learning and service.
- understand and demonstrate the role of virtues and ethical reasoning and action in their own areas of focus.

#### IV. Means to Ends

How does Calvin College help students achieve these outcomes? Just as the outcomes to reach all-college goals are operationalized in different ways, the means by which these outcomes can be achieved are different. Again, the task for departments and programs is to think about the ways in which particular program and major outcomes can be realized. A few *examples* follow. These are illustrative and not comprehensive, recognizing that departments and programs will identify and constantly develop effective means to achieve outcomes.

**Learning:** Calvin students can

- finish a major—or two (or develop their own strategic interdisciplinary major).
- participate in musical ensembles, theater productions, student organizations, or athletics.
- work with a faculty member on a summer research project.
- complete an internship using skills developed in a major or practiced in a student organization.
- attend January Series lectures.
- serve as a Resident Assistant in one of Calvin's living communities.
- become an Academic Help Ambassador (AHA) in a residence hall.

**Faith:** Calvin students can

- complete a minor in Ministry Leadership.
- live in a Project Neighborhood house.
- volunteer in an organization that serves people from a variety of faith traditions.
- write reflective papers for courses, explaining how faith shapes understanding and practice in disciplines and professions.
- participate in the worship apprentice program or the Barnabas Team.
- faithfully attend chapel, LOFT, a residence hall Bible study or all-college Bible study.
- work with a Broene Center counsellor to understand God's faithfulness in troubled times.

**Citizenship:** Calvin students can

- complete an urban studies minor.
- participate in an international off-campus semester or interim.
- provide leadership in events such as Calvin's *Unlearn Week* or the *Faith and International Development Conference*.
- write for *Chimes* or *Dialogue*, or volunteer to help at Calvin's downtown studio during Art Prize.
- work with a faculty member on sustainability research through Calvin's new Clean Water Institute or the Plaster Creek Stewards program.
- serve and learn through a residence hall's "Community Partnership" program.
- participate in, and be accountable to, residence hall "floor charter" conversations.

**Vocation:** Calvin students can

- serve as a leader or captain in co-curricular programs.
- participate in a capstone course that includes an assessment of one's strengths.
- take a course for no other reason than that it sounds interesting and challenging.
- rethink career options after discovering talents and passions in a core course.
- become a member of the student team for the Festival of Faith and Writing.
- participate in Calvin's mentoring program.
- volunteer for a leadership position in a student organization.

## V. Assessment

Gathering systematic evidence of students' knowledge, skills, and learning experiences is intended to support what is working well, bolster what needs to be improved, and end what is no longer effective or relevant. We intend that assessment:

- be utility focused, asking "Who will use the evidence and for what purpose?"
- use a variety of approaches to gather evidence, because multiple methods increase the likelihood of offering meaningful results.
- be guided by a data collection schedule that helps organize the assessment process and provides a sustainable timeline for various kinds of reviews.
- result in action plans that address how findings will be used to change educational practices.

Each year, one of the four all-college goals will be assessed. A college-wide plan will be developed that annually engages a cross-divisional group of students, staff, and faculty in assessing one of the four goals. In addition to gathering cross-divisional data, outcome data on a particular goal will be collected for the core, major, and co-curriculum from the respective departments and programs.

This college-wide assessment of goals is not intended to replace department or program assessment plans that aim at more precise evidence of learning.