

Higher Education in the U.S. and Webster University's Values

This document provides an introduction to the values of the U.S. higher education system. It aims to help orient Webster instructors across our global network to the expectations of working within the U.S. system.

Learner-centered experience

- *Student engagement and active learning:* The teaching style at U.S. institutions often focuses more on student activities and in-class work than on traditional lectures. Many Webster instructors intersperse lecture, discussion, peer learning, group work, and individual work throughout the class period. Students are expected to actively participate and take ownership of their learning, while instructors are expected to guide and encourage.
- *Support and connection:* Webster instructors aim to be approachable and available for student questions, both in and out of class via individual appointments, email, and office hours. Instructors want their students to view them as helpful resources rather than remote experts, and they want their classrooms to feel like comfortable environments where students feel like valued members of the community.
- *Focus on student success:* Instructors in the U.S. tend to see their role as encouraging student success and persistence across the board. At Webster, competition is often considered less important than collaboration, and most instructors do not aim to weed out underperforming students but rather to direct them to appropriate supports.
- *Resources to support academic excellence:* Instructors play a vital role in connecting students with resources that will help all students achieve academically (University Libraries, the Academic Resource Center, Advising, mental health services).
- *Institutional commitment to inclusion and justice:* All U.S. institutions are bound by laws protecting individuals from discrimination and harassment (such as Title IX and ADA). Webster's particular values and identity as a worldwide institution mean that it places special emphasis on diversity and inclusion efforts.

Holistic approach to education

- *General/liberal education:* Many U.S. undergraduate programs focus on giving students a broad preparation for succeeding in a wide variety of career paths, rather than only focusing on the student's major area of academic specialty. Like most general education programs, Webster's Global Citizenship Program places an emphasis on skills that will be useful to students regardless of career path (such as written and oral communication, quantitative reasoning, and critical thinking). That said, students are sometimes unaware that this is the goal of their degree and report frustration with courses outside of their major. For instructors who teach GCP courses, it is important to help guide students toward understanding how the skills they are gaining in the course relate to their own personal and professional goals.
- *Flexibility in student trajectory:* Students in the U.S. system enjoy great flexibility in choosing their major and in changing their major. U.S. high schools do not tend to track students toward particular careers, and once in higher ed, students can decide to change their program of study (and often do). Students who receive degrees in particular areas may or may not go on to work in those domains.
- *Quality student life experience:* Students at U.S. institutions hold high expectations for extracurricular activities on campus, from sports to clubs to social events. These activities are viewed as central elements of the student experience.
- *Personal and social development:* The goal of U.S. higher ed is to support the growth of the student as a whole person. Therefore, curricular and cocurricular opportunities exist together within one student-focused ecosystem. The Webster experience is not only about intellectual growth and career readiness, but also about fostering students' social development, personal goals, health and wellness, commitment to global citizenship, and interest in lifelong learning.

- *Integration and application of knowledge:* U.S. universities tend to prize placing knowledge within meaningful contexts and integrating knowledge across student experiences. Students are expected to apply what they've learned across all their learning experiences: courses, internships, work, and co-curricular activities.

Individual excellence in pursuit of knowledge

- *Research and discovery:* Inquiry governs both classroom experiences and faculty endeavors. Students work with faculty on research projects, and faculty bring their experience in research or in various industries into the classroom. Intellectual freedom is prized so long as it does not conflict with university values.
- *Academic integrity:* While collaboration within and between disciplines is encouraged, the U.S. higher education system places a high value on protecting individuals' intellectual work. This means that instructors are expected to teach students how to avoid plagiarism by properly crediting all sources of ideas and information. Additionally, students are expected to work together during the learning process, but graded content should represent an individual student's own work, not the work of a peer.
- *Instructor expertise:* Instructors are considered subject-matter experts in their fields and are generally given wide latitude in their approach to teaching their courses, so long as they focus on meeting course outcomes.
- *Intellectual freedom:* American institutions consider academic freedom central to the health of higher education, and instructors should be accorded independence from institutional censorship and control. This includes freedom to publish their research in accordance with their disciplines, freedom in the classroom to teach their subjects, and freedom to share their opinions as individual citizens (AAUP, 1940 and AAC&U, 2006).

Webster as a private, teaching-focused, global institution

- *A private institution:* Webster is held accountable by our own mission, policies, and governance structures, rather than by state governance.
- *A teaching-focused institution:* Faculty engage in diverse forms of scholarship, teaching, and service, and evaluation for tenure or promotion is based on an adapted form of the Boyer model of scholarship (Boyer, 1990).
- *A global institution:* Webster operates globally through a series of contracts, partnerships, and investments connected by one curriculum.

Evaluation and continual improvement

- *Grades:* Instructors provide letter grades to each student by evaluating assignments, exams, presentations, activities, and attendance. Students expect to receive regular, timely feedback about their work and their progress in the course. Like many American institutions, Webster uses a 4-point letter grade system.
- *Academic assessment:* Instructors play a key role in the continual improvement of Webster's programs, and are expected to participate in departmental and program-level assessment activities, in order to ensure the quality of our programs.
- *Professional development:* Instructors are encouraged to take advantage of professional development opportunities to stay current in their disciplines, present their own research, and enhance their teaching skills.

References

AAC&U. (6 January 2006). AAC&U Board of Directors' statement, Academic freedom and educational responsibility. Retrieved from <https://www.aacu.org/about/statements/academic-freedom>

AAUP. (1940). 1940 Statement of principles on academic freedom and tenure. Retrieved from <https://www.aaup.org/report/1940-statement-principles-academic-freedom-and-tenure>

Boyer, E. L. (1990). Scholarship reconsidered: Priorities of the professoriate. Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.