

# Commitments of a Culver Educator



*Culver educates its students for leadership and responsible citizenship in society by developing and nurturing the whole individual – mind, spirit, and body – through integrated programs that emphasize the cultivation of character.*

## The Culver Mission

Culver educators are committed to:

### **Modeling Culver's Mission**

Culver educators support the Culver Mission and model leadership and responsible citizenship in their interaction with students and colleagues. They respect, support, and participate in the programs—academic, athletic, extra-curricular, spiritual, and student life—that comprise the Culver experience. That commitment encourages Culver educators to develop mindful habits that reflect the core virtues, values, and character strengths enumerated in the Culver Academies Code of Conduct and by the Cardinal Virtues of wisdom, courage, moderation, and justice.

### **Teaching and Learning**

Culver educators exhibit professionalism, a positive mindset that reveals a commitment to the vocation of teaching and the cultivation of learning as embodied in the Culver Teaching & Learning Model with its emphasis on student-centered classrooms, critical and creative thinking, and goal-driven curriculum development. That commitment encourages respect for oneself both as teacher and role model for students and as a colleague within the department and the greater school community; respect for others and their work here at all levels of employment; and respect for the well-being of the institution and its ideals.

### **Collegiality**

Culver educators support each other by teaching each other about teaching, learning, and leading; talking about practice in frequent and precise conversations; engaging together in researching, designing, implementing, and evaluating curriculum; and observing each other in the practice of teaching and administration.

### **Professional Growth**

Culver educators are continuous adult learners, engaging in scholarship and professional development opportunities that keep them up-to-date in their disciplines and teaching methodologies. Ongoing professional growth supports the attainment of individual goals arising from the yearly reflection and growth process.

# Modeling Culver's Mission

## Instructor

*Develop an understanding of and respect for: whole student education, the modeling of effective leadership, responsible citizenship.*

*Demonstrate a commitment to learning, embracing, and applying the Culver Code of Conduct and Culver's virtues and values.*

*Develop an understanding of Culver's non-academic programs through participation in athletic, extra-curricular, spiritual, and/or residential activities.*

## Senior Instructor

*Understand, promote, and respect whole student education, the modeling of effective leadership, responsible citizenship.*

*Clearly articulate, incorporate, and model in classrooms, performance spaces, athletic venues and residential living spaces Culver's virtues and values.*

*Understand and promote Culver's non-academic programs through participation in athletic, extra-curricular, spiritual, and/or residential activities.*

## Master Instructor

*Enhance, influence and provide leadership for initiatives in: whole student education, the modeling of effective leadership, responsible citizenship.*

*Incorporate Culver's virtues and values into programming and instruction across one's sphere of influence.*

*Shape department culture in a significant way by guiding younger colleagues and leading character development initiatives within one's sphere of influence.*

*Provide leadership for Culver's non-academic programs through significant contributions to athletic, extra-curricular, spiritual and/or residential activities.*

## Mentor Instructor

*Guide, direct and nurture leadership for initiatives in: whole student education, the modeling of effective leadership, responsible citizenship.*

*Consistently exemplify Culver's virtues and values, and directly influence the implementation of character development across the School.*

*Shape school culture in a significant way as a servant leader.*

*Nurture leadership for Culver's non-academic programs through significant oversight of athletic, extra-curricular, spiritual and/or residential activities.*



## **THE CULVER MISSION and PRINCIPLES**

*Culver educates its students for leadership and responsible citizenship in society by developing and nurturing the whole individual – mind, spirit, and body – through an integrated curriculum that emphasizes the cultivation of character.*

Culver is committed to the intellectual growth of all members of its community through participation in a demanding curriculum that prepares students for success in higher education. Culver's curriculum emphasizes critical thinking, problem solving, writing, research, artistic expression, and foreign language proficiency through innovative teaching methods and technologically rich classrooms. Equally important is the cultivation of those virtues that develop both a lifelong love of learning and a commitment to the responsible stewardship of knowledge.

Character development is essential to the Culver mission. For over a century the foundation of the Culver model has been an education in the classical virtues of wisdom, courage, moderation, and justice. Given that habits of mind, spirit and body develop slowly, an education in the virtues requires understanding, self-discipline, and practice. All aspects of Culver's academic, residential, extracurricular, and athletic curricula are designed to provide students with opportunities for individual growth within a carefully structured environment and provide opportunities for them to begin the difficult task of developing lifelong habits.

At Culver, leadership training is both an end in itself and the means by which students develop a sense of social responsibility. Culver Military Academy is organized around its own distinctive military system of student leadership, while Culver Girls Academy is modeled on a prefect system. With these distinctive systems of leadership, Culver's students enjoy the benefits of equal leadership opportunities in their separate residential programs, while sharing in the advantages of a coeducational program in most other areas of school life. Through the enactment of leadership ideals made possible in and through these systems, they develop confidence in their abilities to complete difficult and challenging tasks, as well as habits of inquiry and self-discipline central to an education in the virtues.

Culver is committed to the spiritual development of its students. To encourage students to take the pursuit of spiritual truth seriously, Culver provides a variety of opportunities for the exploration and expression of religious faith. To this end every student participates in a school chapel service or similar faith activity. While Culver's religious heritage is rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition, we recognize and celebrate the rich diversity of faith and practice found among our students. The fruits of the cultivation of the spirit - a regard for the beauty of the world, a reverence for the gift of life, and a recognition of the limits of our understanding - are important components of a virtuous life.

Culver's programs in the visual and performing arts promote both aesthetic literacy and artistic practice. The arts are the common language of humanity and their study can lead to a deeper understanding of life and respect for cultural diversity. Emphasizing both theory and practice, Culver's arts programs contribute to the intellectual and personal development characteristic of an integrated approach to education and to an education in the virtues.

Culver's athletic, health, and physical education programs are an integral part of our curriculum. Participation affords a significant opportunity for the development of the virtues associated with personal integrity. While we encourage individual and team excellence, Culver's rich and varied programs are designed to present students of all skill and experience levels with opportunities to develop both a lifelong interest in sport and a lifelong regard for good sportsmanship. Culver's health and residential life curricula emphasize sound decision-making through programs that include fitness, nutrition, and respect for the body.

# Teaching and Learning

## Instructor

*Focus on developing a strong classroom presence and a deep understanding of content.*

*Foster clear and consistent communication with students, parents, colleagues, and administrators.*

*Understand and support the Culver Teaching & Learning model and routinely engage in reflection on practice.*



## Senior Instructor

*Demonstrate a strong classroom presence and deep understanding of content.*

*Understand the vision of one's department, engage in the development of curriculum and student experiences.*

*Demonstrate clear and consistent communication with students, parents, colleagues and administrators.*

*Understand and implement the Culver Teaching & Learning model and routinely engage in reflection on practice.*

## Master Instructor

*Demonstrate excellence in the classroom beyond classroom fundamentals and content mastery.*

*Understand the individual learning profiles of students and differentiate instruction accordingly.*

*Demonstrate a mastery of communication with students, parents, colleagues and administrators.*

*Understand and exhibit mastery of the Culver Teaching & Learning model and routinely engage in reflection on practice.*

## Mentor Instructor

*Serve as a "teacher of teachers" and mentor to colleagues at all ranks.*

*Demonstrate a mastery of communication with all school constituencies.*

*Serve in an advisory capacity concerning all aspects of the Culver Teaching & Learning model and routinely engage in reflection on practice.*

*Act as a role model by respecting the well-being of the institution and its ideals.*



## Philosophy

Constructivism is the view that young people are actively involved in constructing the worlds of meaning they inhabit. Based upon extensive research in cognitive and developmental psychology, constructivism has significant implications for all aspects of curriculum. The central question of any curriculum should be this: What do we want our students to understand? No reform – no change in schedule, technology, assessment or methodology should be considered which can't be shown to improve student understanding. Because understanding is built by the student, not the teacher, new learning depends heavily on what is already understood. New knowledge is built into and onto current knowledge.

# Culver Teaching and Learning Model

## Pedagogy

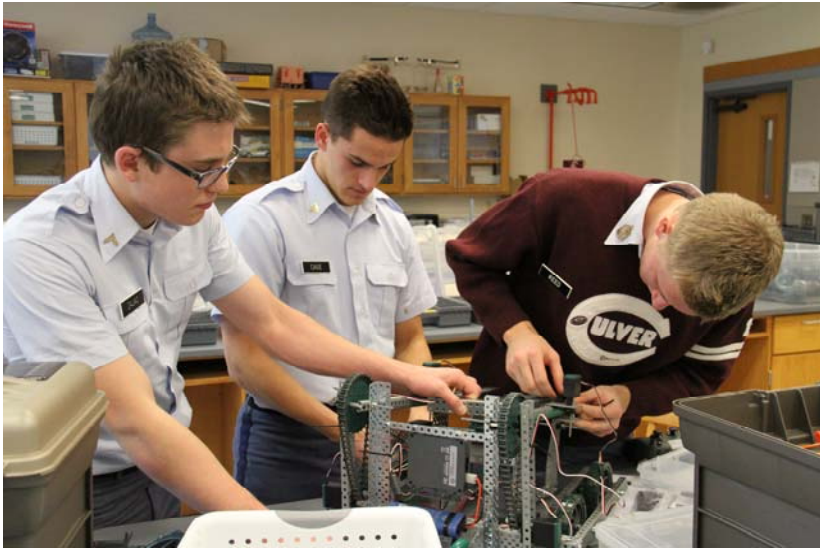
The implications of constructivism for teaching methodology and assessment practice are profound and ramified. Recognizing that students are active meaning makers and that they sometimes create misconceptions which are remarkably resistant to change, teachers must focus on creating classroom environments where understanding grows and on developing assessment instruments that help them to diagnose misunderstandings and foster new understandings. In addition to traditional pedagogies such as lecture-discussion, teachers ought to embrace a variety of classroom methods that call upon students to actively engage in the construction of meaning, both individually and collaboratively, e.g. Harkness discussions, laboratory investigations, ensemble performances, group presentations, and so on.

## Assessment

A comprehensive system of assessment should provide students with both formative (to support performance) and summative (to measure performance) feedback that is focused on explicit course goals. All assessments, whether formative or summative, should provide students with clear and detailed feedback from which they can deepen understanding and sharpen self-evaluation. Critical thinking – the capacity to reflect critically on what we know and how we have come to know it – is necessary for deep understanding in any discipline. Critical thinking depends upon dispositions to clear and deliberate thinking that must be carefully cultivated. To this end, assessments should be modeled on the kinds of meaningful tasks that professionals engage in everyday. Foundational skills and basic content knowledge are vital to success on authentic tasks and should be assessed accordingly.

## Grading

To cultivate higher-order cross-disciplinary thinking skills such as interpretation and analysis, and to foster critical thinking dispositions such as inquisitiveness and open-mindedness, persistence and flexibility, honesty and fair-mindedness, students should be given feedback on both their authentic performances – i.e. assessments that provide evidence that central learning goals have been met – and their learning processes. Performance grades capture achievement (on tests, lab reports, projects, papers – in speeches, plays, concerts, recitals) relative to universal standards, while Process grades record the development of attitude, disposition, effort, and mindset relative to individuated standards. Performance grades measure the fruits of learning, while Process grades register the habits-of-mind of the learner.



# Class Visit Indicators

Culver Teaching & Learning Model  
in Action in the Classroom

## Planning and Preparation

- Student interests and needs learned and used by teacher in planning
- Clarity of the purpose of each lesson and clear and accurate classroom explanations
- Variety of performance opportunities for students
- Formative assessments and other types of feedback designed to inform minute-to-minute decision making
- Thoughtfully planned learning groups

## The Classroom Environment

- Comfortable and welcoming classroom environment
- Expectation for all students to actively participate
- Effective use of physical space, including furniture placement, board and wall space, and desk materials
- Questions of high cognitive challenge, formulated by both students and teachers

## Instruction

- Appropriate balance of instructional methods
- Effective use of traditional and technological resources
- Active listening, including visible adjustment in the face of student lack of understanding





# Goals and Grading

## Culver Teaching & Learning Model

Performance goals relate to what students know, understand, and are able to do in the discipline. Some departments anchor goals to the department mission, assessing core performance goals during the student's tenure in the department. Performance goals are evaluated using evidence from summative assessments given in a course such as authentic tasks, performances, and tests. These assessments are designed to measure learning as it relates to a performance goal or goals in the course. Criteria that define and evidence used to assess a performance goal should be clear to students, with regular opportunities for self-assessment and formative feedback prior to reporting on the goal.

Process goals relate to how the student is learning. Process goals reflect the habits of mind, communication skills, and types of engagement in the learning process that are essential to success in the course. Process goals are evaluated using a variety of evidence such as a record of participation, a student's self-reflection, homework completion, teacher observations, or an overall evaluation of engagement in formative assessments. Just as with performance goals, criteria that define and evidence used to assess a process goal should be clear to students, with regular opportunities for self-assessment and feedback.

Teaching should always be guided by course goals, as they embody what is assessed when we assess our students, namely, essential skills and understandings. Summative assessments, focused on key goals, form the essence of academic performance, and are therefore what gets graded.

If it's graded, it's summative. If it's summative, it's performance. If it's performance, it's graded. Everything else, including *all* formative assessment, is a matter of process. So it is impossible for a formative assessment to be *graded*. But that's not to say that it can't be *scored* to provide the learner formative feedback.

*All* course work – class activities, small and large group discussions, homework, practice assessments, performance assessments – provides opportunities for students to demonstrate dispositions and behaviors. And cultivating positive dispositions will influence curricular and pedagogical decisions, as well. In the end, process grades each grading period should be measurements against course process goals that require students to display healthy academic behaviors and growth mindsets.



# Collegiality

## Instructor

*Develop an understanding of teaching and learning at Culver with colleagues through frequent conversations and observations.*

*Engage in curricular design work with department colleagues.*

## Senior Instructor

*Foster an understanding of teaching, learning, and leading within and outside your department through frequent conversations, observations, and opportunities to share practice.*

*Lead curricular design work with departmental colleagues.*

## Master Instructor

*Teach faculty and staff about teaching, learning, and leading at Culver through frequent conversations, observations, and opportunities to share practice.*

*Lead and evaluate curricular design work across campus.*



## Mentor Instructor

*Teach faculty, staff, and the broader independent school community about teaching, learning, and leading at Culver through frequent conversations, observations, and opportunities to share practice.*

*Mentor those leading curricular design work in department and across campus.*



Collegiality is actively engaging with colleagues to learn and grow in one's practice. As educators collaborate in the art of teaching, they build respect for one another and a sense of cooperation in working toward a common goal – improving student learning.

Culver expects its professionals to exhibit collegiality in all aspects of their work. As stated in the Rank and Promotion documents, Culver professionals should “demonstrate a commitment to collegiality.” According to the “Expectations of all Culver Instructors” document, an educator’s commitment to teaching and learning “encourages respect for one-self both as teacher and role model for students and as a colleague within the department and the greater school community [and] respect for others and their work here at all levels of employment . . .” Inherent in collegiality is mutual respect. Trust and the assumption of good intentions make it possible to resolve conflicts as they arise.

Using Judith Warren Little’s operational definition of collegiality in schools<sup>1</sup> as a basis, Culver expects its instructors to exhibit four specific collegial behaviors.

- Adults in schools *talk about practice*. These conversations about teaching and learning are frequent, continuous, concrete, and precise.
- Adults in schools *observe each other* engaged in the practice of teaching and administration. These observations become the practice to reflect on and talk about.
- Adults engage together in *work on curriculum* by planning, designing, researching, and evaluating curriculum.
- Finally, adults in schools *teach each other* what they know about teaching, learning and leading. Craft knowledge is revealed, articulated, and shared.

### **Talk about practice**

Culver teachers discuss their teaching pedagogies in numerous venues. Formal dialogue takes place during monthly Professional Learning Community (PLC) gatherings, as well as in regularly scheduled departmental meetings. Informal conversations happen frequently and spontaneously. Teachers find opportunities to get to know each other and support one another in developing their practice.

### **Observe each other**

Culver teachers embrace the opportunity to reflect, learn, and grow through regular observation of their colleagues. Through systematic observation, teachers foster mutual respect and a sense of cooperation with their peers. Informal observation stimulates discussion about curriculum, pedagogy and practice.

### **Work on curriculum**

Culver teachers plan, design, research, and evaluate curriculum informally and formally. Department Chairs and Curriculum Team Leaders (CTLs) foster dialogues in an intentional manner through level meetings, curriculum team meetings, and department meetings. Informal discussions occur organically within and across campus departments, often during unscheduled blocks and outside of regular meeting times.

### **Teach each other**

Culver teachers seek opportunities to share their best practices with each other. They carefully select professional development opportunities on and off campus, and they discuss what they have learned in formal and informal venues. On campus opportunities to lead and learn from this teaching are prevalent in the Hungry Teacher Seminar Series, Techie Teacher Talks, Hungry Tuesday of June Week, and other internal professional development opportunities.

<sup>1</sup>“Norms of Collegiality and Experimentation” (*Education Research Journal*, 1982)

# Professional Growth

## Instructor

*Exhibit a growth mindset through on-going professional development, focusing on one's central commitments as teacher, coach, mentor, co-curricular activities director.*

*Establish and realize professional goals related to improving the classroom experience and enhancing understanding of disciplinary content.*

## Senior Instructor

*Exhibit a growth mindset through on-going professional development, focusing on school leadership and engagement with the broader Culver community.*

*Establish and realize professional goals related to campus leadership and broad engagement in the community.*

*Hold or be making reasonable progress towards an advanced degree related to teaching and learning in your discipline.*



## Master Instructor

*Exhibit a growth mindset through processing and the sharing of best practices and engagement with the educational community beyond Culver.*

*Establish and realize professional goals related to campus leadership and engagement in the educational community beyond Culver.*

## Mentor Instructor

*Exhibit a growth mindset by engaging with the broader independent school community through involvement in regional and national events, organizations, and conversations.*

*Establish and realize professional goals related to mentoring colleagues and campus leaders and engagement in the educational community beyond Culver.*



### Biennial Growth and Reflection Cycle: Year One

The first year of a cycle involves conversations between a faculty member and department chair. Goals are drafted and discussed in June or early fall. Department chairs, colleagues, and administrators will observe classes throughout the year. The department chair will have a conversation surrounding observations by January. In the spring of Year One, department chairs will have a conversation to check-in on goals and discuss the highlights of the year. To guide reflection on teaching and learning, conversation notes, class visit feedback, student feedback, spotlights, and goals will all be shared through Folio.

### Biennial Growth and Reflection Cycle: Year Two

The second year of a cycle continues to center on conversations between a faculty member and department chair. Conversations in Year Two incorporate feedback from athletics, student life, and academic administrators through commendations and recommendations. This formative feedback is written by the department chair with input from senior administrators. In addition, this year asks faculty members to reflect upon the past two years in writing. In the spring of year two, department chairs will have a conversation to discuss Commendations, Recommendations, and reflections from the faculty member's written narrative. As in Year One, Folio will capture goals, feedback, conversation notes, along with Year Two's written narrative, Commendations, and Recommendations.



## Professional Development Funds

Professional development funds are devoted to the cultural and educational advancement of the faculty and staff. Primary consideration will be given to activities that improve the quality and tone of instruction given to students by broadening the cultural outlook, that help realize faculty-established goal, and that improve general knowledge of the discipline. Stimulation and encouragement of faculty and staff self-improvement should be the governing idea rather than a reward for long service or for some particular achievement. The Dean of Faculty, Academic Dean, and Department Chair evaluate all requests.

# Opportunities

## Financial Support for Professional Growth Opportunities at Culver

### Sabbatical Leaves

The major purpose of the sabbatical leave is to allow faculty members an opportunity to carry out a program of study or research that will contribute to the professional growth of the faculty and enable them to make a more effective contribution in future service to the Academies. An additional purpose of sabbatical leave is to give the faculty members an opportunity to have a change from the regular pattern of existence at the Academies and thus to be refreshed through such a leave of absence. Sabbatical leaves may be summer leaves at 20% salary, semester leaves at full salary, or year leaves at 50% salary.

## Academic Chairs

Being selected as an Academic Chair is a rare honor and provides a tremendous opportunity for faculty to make an impact at Culver. Chair holders are faculty who have a growth mindset and a student-centered learning approach in your classroom. A Chair holder can “dream big” and pursue a significant project with priority financial support over a seven-year period. An Academic Chair is both an honor and a bestowed trust given to an individual upon whom the Culver Academies has deemed worthy of pursuing an academic endeavor to the benefit of the individual, her department and the Academies overall.

## Summer Curriculum Grants

Summer curriculum grants are intended to reinforce the school faculty goal of “supporting faculty who are committed to providing leadership within the independent and broader school communities through responsible innovation in areas such as curriculum design and learning technologies.” Toward this end, grants may be used to develop curriculum for new courses and existing courses or to explore teaching and learning technologies that will enhance classroom instruction. The Dean of Faculty and Academic Dean review and approve proposals and meet with faculty to discuss the experience in the fall.

## Gignilliat Debt Relief Fund

Through the generosity of a Culver donor who wants to help retain excellent faculty who have invested in their own learning, Culver is able to offer a debt relief program to offset up to \$15,000 of student loans that faculty are carrying. The primary requirements are that the faculty member must have served for one school year as full time and be in good standing, and that they be in the first five years of employment. At the beginning of each year, the Dean of Faculty asks faculty for feedback on student loan debt for review by the Head of Schools. Recipients are free from repayment after three years of subsequent service.