

Social Sciences

Students need to have a curiosity about the questions we raise in the class, and a desire to want to explore the complexity of the social and moral issues we address. Then you can give them the tools. If they are disengaged from education, then it is a lot harder.

Faculty Viewpoint

Knowledge & Skills Foundations

In the social sciences, incoming students succeed when they are armed with specific knowledge and skills—but above all, when they are ready to embrace the learning process.

Basic Knowledge & Skills

Students who are ready for entry-level courses are familiar with the fundamental concepts of social sciences such as history, economics, geography, political science, sociology.

In geography, well-prepared students know how to read, interpret and locate places on a global map. They are familiar with worldwide immigration and migration patterns.

In economics courses, successful students come prepared with foundational mathematical skills and an understanding of basic concepts such as demand, supply, scarcity, opportunity and tradeoffs.

In political science, a basic civic knowledge is necessary for success. Such basic knowledge includes a sense of how the U.S. government works; an awareness of the system of legislative, executive and judiciary checks and balances; and how an amendment is ratified. In addition, successful students have a basic knowledge of, and can distinguish between, economic and political systems. They can describe the differences between capitalism and socialism and between democracy and oligarchy.

In history, students who are ready for college-level study know important events

and documents that have shaped the course of U.S. history; the U.S. Constitution, Federal Indian Policy and the Civil Rights movement, to name a few. A clear knowledge of significant periods in western and non-western world history is crucial, including, for example, the origins of Judaism, the rise and fall of Ancient Greece, the influence of Christianity and the Crusades on European culture and society, the Aztec civilization, the French and Russian Revolution, and the rise to independence in the post-colonial period of countries in South America, Africa and Asia, in particular.

In sociology, successful students understand and are able to discuss the implications of changes in U.S. demographics leading to increasing diversity. They understand the major issues in gender equity and are aware of contemporary social, political and cultural movements in U.S. society and around the world, and the major theories that underlie such movements.

Beyond the basic facts, students entering social science courses need certain skills. Just as in the natural sciences, second languages, mathematics and English, successful students know the mechanics of writing and basic grammar and communicate their ideas with clarity and coherence. Familiarity with the terminologies and definitions that pertain to each discipline is also important. Basic mathematical and statistical knowledge (arithmetic and algebra, means and correlations) helps students read and understand graphs in economics and analyze and interpret statistical data in sociological, historical and geographical reports.



General Sense of History & Geography

Beyond the memorization of dates and events that have marked and shaped the world in general (and the U.S. in particular) successful students have a sense of history. An understanding of chronological sequence and causation across time is vital. Students should possess factual knowledge, be accurate when discussing historical dates and understand how historical sequencing and events influence one another. Students should be able to describe how their current place in time is influenced by the past and informs their future.

Students need to have a sense of the fundamentals of capitalism, how and why it is different from other forms of economic systems and the types of governments and societies associated with it.

Faculty Viewpoint

Successful students are aware of the diversity and relativity of historical perspectives and interpretations. As they learn about world events, memorize dates and understand various historical periods, they realize how people in various regions of the world have experienced similar events in different ways. Local experience adds to comprehension of a historical phenomenon. Students who have the ability to make interdisciplinary connections have a broader and deeper sense of history. When students see the relevance of economics, culture, geography and politics in the shaping and unfolding of historical events, they gain more from college-level social science courses.

In addition to a sense of history, social science students benefit greatly from a sense of place. Successful students know how to read maps. They approach geography from cultural, economic and political perspectives. Armed with these skills, students better realize how geographical contexts often contribute to the development of a society. They also recognize how contexts influence the ways in which people see the world; it is more useful, for example, to know how water use affects society than to memorize the exact borders of all the countries in Africa.

Reading, Research & Analysis

Reading—and reading well—is a very important part of the learning process. Successful college-level students comprehend assigned reading material and read closely, with attention to nuance. Close reading leads students to infer and extend meaning by identifying main points and distinguishing supportive statements from illustrative details. Successful students can gauge their own comprehension of the material and know what to do when they encounter reading that is difficult. Social sciences are related and are not simply a gathering of facts. To understand these

relationships, successful students are familiar with the scientific method. They ask questions such as, “What do we know?” and “How do we know it?” The scientific method in the context of the social sciences encompasses a number of skills and abilities:

1. The capacity to recognize hypotheses within texts and understand when evidence is being presented. This is a critical reading skill that helps a student evaluate the quality and relevance of materials used to build and support an argument.
2. A familiarity with theory building, with what a theory is, how a theory is developed and how a theory can be tested, debated and applied. Successful students can differentiate theory from opinion in a text.
3. The ability to find information—information literacy—from a variety of sources, including the library and Internet. Part of this skill is the ability to assess the quality and reliability of information, especially if the source is found online. Successful students ask themselves questions such as, “Where does this information come from?”, “Is it well supported?” and “Is this information relevant or irrelevant to the support of my thesis?”
4. The ability to generalize while at the same time recognizing their own biases and identifying fallacies in materials they read. Faculty members expect students to voice opinions, to speculate and to relate personal experiences within assignments, but only if they also generalize to principles discussed in class or connect personal knowledge to the material covered.

5. An awareness of various research methodologies, including quantitative and qualitative traditions of data analysis.

Students need to understand that a theory is a way of organizing information to help enhance our understanding of behavior.

Faculty Viewpoint

In addition to reading and research, note-taking is an important part of college-level study. Entry-level courses are typically lectures where students are expected to take notes diligently, to identify key components of the lecture and to appreciate how notes are essential to understanding the content of a course. To make all of this work, students need to know that taking notes is a learning process in itself. Successful students decide whether a piece of information is important or relevant before they write it down. They think about how they will use the notes after the lecture is over. They know how to prepare an outline with coherent sections and subsections and understand how this exercise relates to organizing the information they collect, either from lectures or other sources.



Orientation Towards Learning

In many ways, learning is about the communication of facts, concepts and ideas. Successful students use a variety of communication skills to show that they understand class material. Writing is one such medium of communication, but clear oral and visual communication is important, as well. Good communication includes engagement with an audience, whether it is one reader or hundreds. When presenting information, good communicators are attentive listeners to the questions and concerns of others. Good academic communication also includes accepting criticisms by others and answering questions with an attentive, positive attitude.

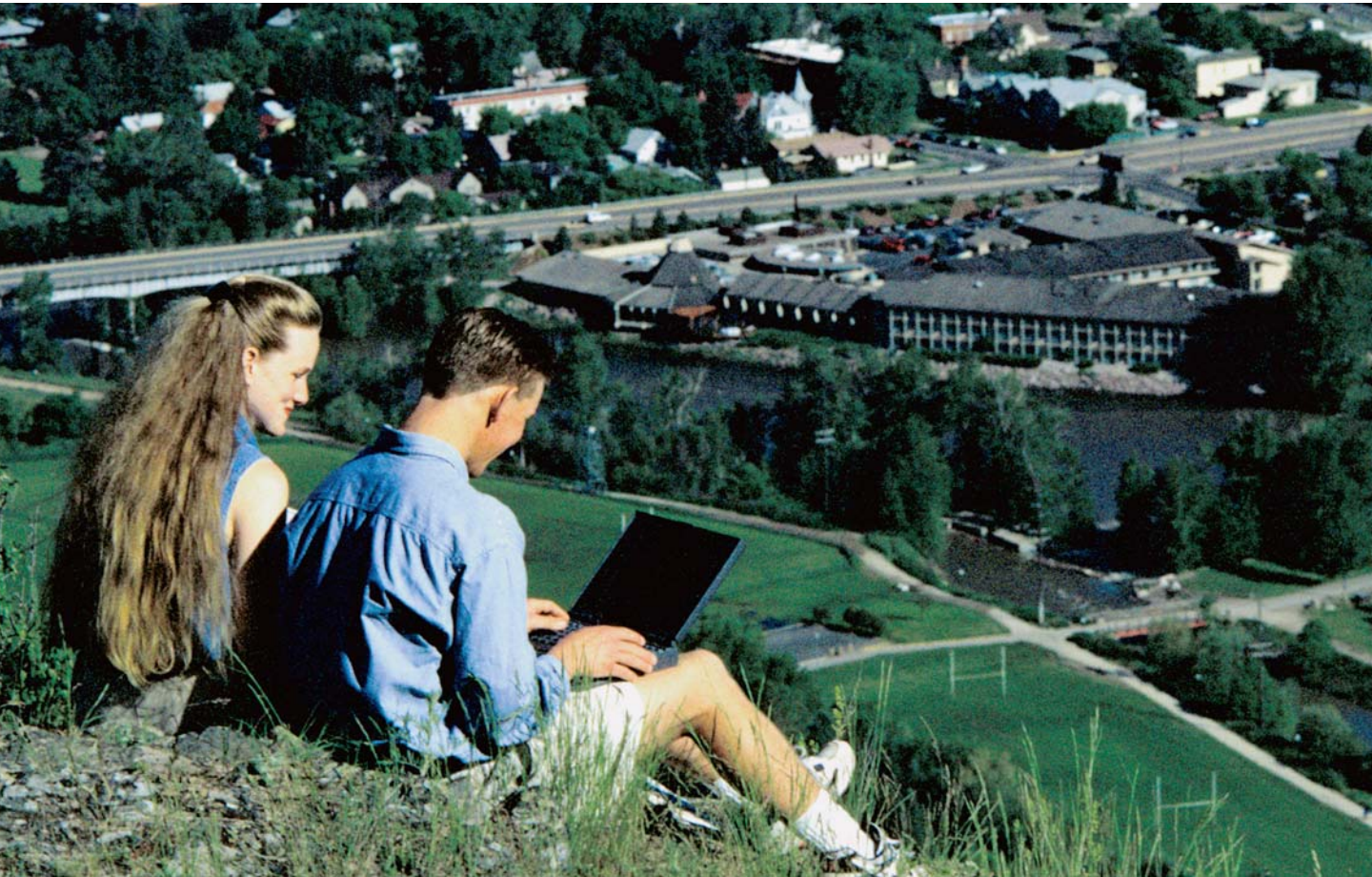
Connections between ideas and facts are vital to the learning process. Successful students make connections regularly between public knowledge and personal observations and experiences. They make connections across disciplines. How do the ideas in economics classes relate to everyday life? How do the concepts learned in sociology apply to the study of geography? Connective intelligence enables students to integrate and use knowledge from across different disciplines both within social sciences and in other areas.

Students need to understand that things happen in sequence and that something that happened later can't cause something that happened earlier.

Faculty Viewpoint

Just as students are encouraged to make connections between disciplines, they are encouraged to anchor historical, geographical or sociological materials to a sense of self. Successful students are engaged intellectually with the material they encounter in their studies. Rather than focusing entirely on outcomes and grades, they engage in the learning process and accept a challenge to do something new. They are comfortable with ambiguity. Students often come into classes in a quest for answers alone. Some questions and problems have no obvious solutions, while others have more than one solution. Social science faculty members, much like their peers in other disciplines, expect students to demonstrate a variety of study skills that will help them succeed in college. These include taking personal responsibility for their work, showing up to class, doing homework and reading assignments, completing written assignments on time and managing their time well.





Social Sciences Standards

*= Items with an asterisk are those expected of students who plan to major in a social science.

I. General Knowledge & Skills

A. Successful students have a basic understanding of the social sciences (history, economics, geography, political science, sociology). They:

- A.1. know the defining characteristics of disciplines within the social sciences.
- A.2. understand the diversity of human beings and human cultures (e.g., cultural, biological, emotional and intellectual diversity).
- A.3. know that each social science discipline is subject to certain criticisms and limitations, and are aware of the primary criticisms and limitations of at least one discipline in the social sciences.
- A.4. are aware of major current world events, issues and problems and know how concepts and theories in the social sciences can be applied to understand them.
- A.5. perceive events and circumstances from the vantage point of others, including those in racial and cultural groups different than their own; from the other gender; from other ages; and from those who live under other political and economic systems.



A.6.* integrate concepts learned from at least two different social science disciplines.

A.7.* understand the significant generalizations, principles and theories of each discipline.

II. History

A. Successful students know significant periods and events in United States history. They:

A.1. understand important events, social movements and political processes that have shaped U.S. history, and are aware of the major historical figures that influenced history. These include but are not limited to:

- European exploration and colonization, 15th and 16th centuries
- interaction of Native Americans and European settlers
- development of American colonial government
- causes and consequences of slavery
- The Revolutionary War
- creation of the U.S. Constitution
- The Bill of Rights
- development of political parties
- westward expansion
- The Mexican-American War
- antebellum sectionalism and polarization
- The Civil War
- reconstruction
- industrialization and the rise of big business
- Federal Indian Policy of the late 19th century
- Spanish-American War
- The Progressive Movement
- social and cultural movements of the 1920s
- The Great Depression
- The New Deal
- U.S. in World War II
- The Cold War
- The Civil Rights Movement
- Vietnam
- immigration and migration patterns in the contemporary U.S.
- the influence of religion on U.S. history

B. Successful students know significant periods and events in world history and social, religious and political movements, as well as major historical figures who influenced such movements. They:

- B.1. understand important events and social, religious and political movements that have shaped world history, as well as the major historical characters who influenced history. Examples of important topics and areas include but are not limited to:
- early civilizations in India and the Middle East
 - development of Judaism
 - Ancient Greece
 - rise and fall of Ancient Rome
 - emergence of Christianity
 - development of Buddhism
 - The Byzantine Empire
 - emergence of Islam
 - Mayan civilization
 - feudalism/manorialism in Medieval Europe
 - the influence of Christianity in Europe and the Crusades
 - The Aztecs
 - the exchange of flora/fauna/pathogens known as the “Columbian Exchange”
 - The Renaissance
 - The Scientific Revolution
 - The Reformation and Counter (or Catholic) Reformation
 - The French Revolution
 - The Industrial Revolution
 - European nationalist movements of the 19th century
 - World War I

- The Russian Revolution
- World War II
- The Cold War
- African and Asian history

C. Successful students understand historical perspective and historical analysis. They:

- C.1. understand their own position in history and how history has influenced their kinship group and family ancestors.
- C.2. know the effects that specific human decisions have had on history.
- C.3. understand the contingency of history; that is, events depend on human ideas and actions and that things may have been different in the absence of those ideas and actions.





- C.4. demonstrate the ability to perceive past events with historical empathy.
- C.5. know the influences that specific ideas and beliefs had on a period of history and how events may have been different in the absence of those ideas and beliefs.
- C.6.* know how to evaluate the credibility and authenticity of historical sources.
- C.7.* know how to evaluate different historical interpretations.
- C.8.* understand the social, economic and political climate of significant periods in history and how a particular climate shaped those who lived at that time.

III. Economics

A. Successful students understand basic concepts of economics. They:

- A.1. understand the basic economic concepts of scarcity, opportunity cost, trade offs, markets and supply and demand.
- A.2. understand the difference between a market economy (capitalism) and a central planned or command economy.
- A.3. understand the role government plays in the U.S. economy.
- A.4. understand the concepts of exchange and trade and the impacts of a global economy, including implications for individuals, the U.S. and other nations.

- A.5. understand the conflict among the social goals of an economic system (e.g., security, freedom, equity, efficiency, stability and growth).
- A.6.* understand and know how to use economic analysis tools, including functions and basic statistics.

IV. Geography

A. Successful students have a basic understanding of the tools and concepts of geography. They:

- A.1. use maps and atlases to find locations and other geographical information.
- A.2. understand the nature, distribution and migration patterns of human populations on Earth's surface.
- A.3. understand the role of geography in explaining processes of environmental and human change.
- A.4.* realize the advantages and disadvantages of maps, globes and other geographic tools used to illustrate data sets.

V. Political Science (Civics)

A. Successful students have a basic understanding of types of governments. They:

- A.1. understand the nature and source of various types of political authority (e.g., the differences between democracy and oligarchy).
- A.2.* know the various types of governments throughout the world (e.g., the differences between limited and unlimited governments).

B. Successful students have a basic understanding of the U.S. political system and its history. They:

- B.1. know basic facts about the U.S. political system and constitutional government (e.g., federalism; checks and balances; and legislative, executive and judiciary branches of power).
- B.2. understand the content and context of documents that established the U.S., especially the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution.
- B.3. understand the content and context of documents important for the protection of individual rights in the U.S., especially the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights.
- B.4. know the methods citizens can use to participate in the political process at local, state and national levels, and how political participation can influence public policy.

VI. Sociology

A. Successful students have an understanding of social problems, social structure, institutions, class, groups and interaction. They:

- A.1. understand that social problems are larger than the individual.
- A.2. understand that social inequalities based on a variety of factors—including gender, race and age—exist and have a range of effects on society.
- A.3. understand the global diversity of various family forms, as well as kinship in different societies.
- A.4. understand that group and cultural influences contribute to human development.
- A.5. understand that group and cultural influences contribute to human identity.

- A.6. understand that group and cultural influences contribute to human behavior.
- A.7.* understand various meanings of the social group, the general implications of group membership and the different ways that groups function.
- A.8.* understand the theory and methods of mediation, cooperation and conflict resolution.

VII. Inquiry, Research & Analysis

A. Successful students understand the scientific method of inquiry and investigation. They:

- A.1. understand how hypotheses are formulated to examine social behavior.
- A.2. understand that hypotheses are contingent—that they can be disproved by additional evidence.
- A.3. understand that well-tested hypotheses may be integrated into a theory predicting social behavior.
- A.4. know how to apply a theory to new evidence.
- A.5. understand how to write and test a hypothesis using additional evidence.
- A.6. know the ethics associated with data collection and human subjects.
- A.7. understand the limits of scientific investigation.

B. Successful students are able to read and interpret data. They:

- B.1. know how to interpret data presented in tables and graphs.
- B.2.* know the basics of probability theory and the concept of a sample.
- B.3.* know the difference between statistical and substantive significance.

C. Successful students know how to find a variety of sources of information, and how to analyze, evaluate and use them properly. They:

- C.1. locate information from a variety of sources appropriate to the task at hand.
- C.2. draw inferences then determine main and supporting ideas.
- C.3. critically evaluate information by discerning the quality of the materials.
- C.4. critically evaluate information by qualifying the strength of the evidence and arguments.
- C.5. critically evaluate information by determining its credibility.
- C.6. critically evaluate information by identifying any bias and/or perspective of the author(s).
- C.7. critically evaluate information by using prior knowledge.
- C.8.* demonstrate familiarity with a data analysis software program.

D. Successful students are able to identify and analyze problems appropriate to the social science discipline being studied. They:

- D.1. identify and define a problem.
- D.2. use deductive and inductive problem-solving skills as appropriate to the problem being studied.
- D.3. use multiple perspectives and resources to analyze a problem.

VIII. Communication

A. Successful students are able to communicate clearly and coherently. They:

- A.1. present a coherent thesis when making an argument.
- A.2. support the thesis with appropriate evidence when making an argument.

- A.3. anticipate and answer possible objections when making an argument.
- A.4. present a concise, clear closing when making an argument.
- A.5. organize ideas to achieve coherence in communication.
- A.6. write research papers that incorporate processes appropriate to the topic being researched. These include:
- integrating information from a range of appropriate sources
 - logically introducing and incorporating quotations
 - synthesizing information into a logical sequence
 - identifying different perspectives
 - identifying complexities and discrepancies in information
 - offering support for conclusions
- A.7. understand the concept of plagiarism and how to avoid it through the use of paraphrasing, summarizing, quoting and citing.
- A.8. identify and use parts of speech correctly and consistently (e.g., verbs, conjunctions, interjections).
- A.9. use a variety of sentence structures in writing (e.g., compound-complex, analogous).

