

## **The Integrated Core at Santa Fe Junior College**

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Santa Fe opened its doors to students in 1966 with a general education program in place created by an engaged faculty and staff under the leadership of founding president, Joseph W. Fordyce. Six 3-credit hour courses constituted an integrated program required of every entering student. Descriptions of the program began with a small circle that represented the individual student. The course that focused on the individual student was Behavioral Science (BE) 100, “The Individual in a Changing Environment,” a personal development course designed to help students explore values and a philosophy of life, and confront prejudices and viewpoints. The course was taught mostly through the methods of the encounter group and the human potential seminar. It was the forerunner of the current student success course, except it was much less didactic and focused on personal elements not often addressed in college courses today. Many colleges in the 1950s and through the 1970s offered personal development courses or applied psychology courses, but few engaged students in the process of self-understanding as did BE100 at Santa Fe.

Around the core course in personal development, designers drew three additional circles to illustrate the three environments that impact individual development. HM100, “The Humanities,” represented the Aesthetic Environment; SC100, “The Physical Sciences,” represented the Physical Environment; and SS100, “The Social Sciences,” represented the Social Environment. Two lines crossed the circles, indicating that in all environments students needed to be competent in two languages: EH100, “The English Language,” and MS100, “The Mathematics.”

Figure 1 illustrates the integrative nature of the Santa Fe program. The program was more than a core of six courses. Santa Fe had developed a philosophy of values and a philosophy of teaching to give meaning to the core.

The Santa Fe Commitment included eight statements:

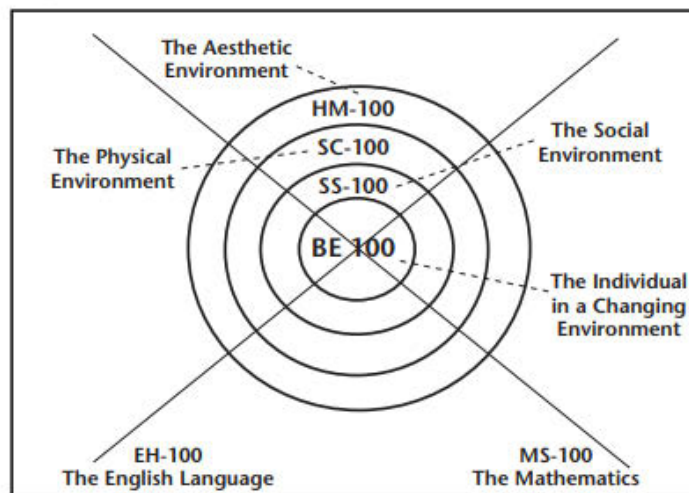
1. The student is the central focus for the process of learning.
2. Teaching occurs only when students learn.
3. Effective educational experiences will modify human behavior in a positive manner.

4. All human beings are motivated to achieve that which they believe is good.
5. Education should be an exciting, creative, and rewarding experience for the student and the teacher.
6. All human beings have worth, dignity, and potential.
7. Experimentation and innovation are reflections of attitudes; when they are translated into practice, the process of education can be significantly advanced.
8. Traditional concepts of education (the lecture, the thirty-student class, the fifty-minute period, the standard textbook, the rectangular classroom, the student desk, etc.) are suspect and in need of careful trial and evaluation at least equal to, and perhaps more than, new and innovative practices.

The Santa Fe Commitment provided an overarching framework for the values of the college, and was used to screen every new employee. All applicants for positions at Santa Fe had to write a response to the statements indicating the extent to which each reflected their own values, including evidence from their own experience of how they had implemented each statement as an instructor or administrator.

Robert Shepack (1969), former president of El Paso Community College in Texas, completed his doctorate at the University of Florida with a study on the impact of this faculty selection process and concluded that it played a significant role in helping Santa Fe become one of the most innovative colleges of its time. In 1968, Santa Fe was one of only twelve colleges in the United States selected for membership in the League for Innovation in the Community College (League), based in great part on its general education program and progressive philosophy. Santa Fe is still an active member of the League and was awarded the 2015 Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence, the nation's preeminent

**Figure 1. Core Curriculum at Santa Fe**



recognition of high achievement and performance in America's community colleges. In addition to this overarching philosophy for the entire college, the six core courses were required of every new student, first-time or transfer. Each course had both cognitive and affective behavioral objectives; the grading system for all college courses used A, B, and C, and students could not earn the failing grades of D and F; a critical minima of competencies was established for an A, B, or C for each course; learning contracts using the critical minima were required for every student in every course; and learning strategies included an emphasis on active learning, problem based learning, and collaborative learning.

A sound general education program involves more than agreeing on core courses or core objectives. To reflect the views of the founders of general education, there must also be a foundation of values and strategies to make the program a transformative experience for students. The leaders at Santa Fe, in addition to creating an integrated core of learning embedded that core in a culture of innovation and a philosophy of student-centered learning that made it transformative for students, faculty, and administration.