

	Policy Number: 755	
	Policy Category: Academic	
	Academic Rigor	
	Policy Summary: <i>This policy established clear criteria for rigor across academic levels.</i>	
	Approval Date: 06/30/25	Effective Date: Upon approval
Policy Owner: Dean, Academic Affairs	Scheduled for Review: Spring 2030	

Policy Statement

Overview and Purpose

This policy articulates Prescott College's commitment to academic excellence through a progressive framework that establishes clear criteria for rigor across academic levels. Through this framework, we aim to:

- Ensure learning experiences challenge students appropriately at each stage of their educational journey, providing consistent quality while honoring diverse learning paths;
- Create a shared understanding that enables faculty and staff to identify when students need additional resources or support, fostering an environment where all students can thrive; and
- Support students' professional development and position graduates for success in an evolving world by maintaining academic standards that align with our core values of social justice, sustainability, and experiential education.

This framework serves as both a foundation and a compass, guiding our community toward educational practices that transform students into engaged lifelong learners, ethical leaders, and positive changemakers.

Definition

At Prescott College, academic rigor is defined as the balance of scholarly challenge with supportive guidance across all programs. Aligned with core values, we design learning experiences that appropriately scaffold expectations for each academic level, simultaneously developing critical thinking (cognitive domain) while nurturing motivation and emotional intelligence (affective domain). We achieve academic rigor through culturally responsive teaching in a way that honors diverse ways of knowing and being, building on students' varied backgrounds and strengths.

Current Academic Degree Levels

20000	Lower-division undergraduate
40000	Upper-division undergraduate
50000	Graduate or master's level
70000	Doctoral level

Summary of Core Criteria

The core criteria of academic rigor include:

1. Critical Thinking & Analysis: Examining assumptions, evaluating evidence, recognizing patterns, and forming reasoned judgments that integrate multiple perspectives.
2. Meaningful Inquiry & Problem-solving: Identifying significant questions, designing appropriate investigative approaches, and applying knowledge to address complex challenges.
3. Experiential learning: Connecting theoretical knowledge to direct application in relevant contexts, allowing students to test concepts, develop skills, and reflect on practice.
4. Communication, Research, & Writing: Applying interconnected skills of gathering, evaluating, and synthesizing information from appropriate sources, then effectively communicating syntheses in discipline-relevant ways.
5. Student Support & Agency: Transitioning from providing more structured student support and guidance to more independent student-directed learning, with students demonstrating increasing autonomy and self-regulation.

Additional criteria may be added by faculty for specific program needs and/or to align with professional standards and certification requirements.

Mapping Criteria across Academic Levels**Critical Thinking and Analysis**

Academic Level	Guidelines
20000	Students are introduced to theoretical frameworks and recognize connections between concepts through guided analysis; They identify basic assumptions, contextualize facts and opinions, and determine credibility of sources.
40000	Students draw from theoretical frameworks to evaluate competing arguments, analyze complex systems, and draw reasoned conclusions that acknowledge and interpret contextual factors.

50000	Students systematically evaluate theoretical frameworks, analyze complex interdisciplinary problems, and construct nuanced arguments supported by robust evidence.
70000	Students critique established paradigms, generate sophisticated analytical frameworks, and produce analyses that advance theoretical understanding in the field.

Meaningful Inquiry & Program Solving

Academic Level	Guidelines
20000	Students engage with structured problems, apply basic disciplinary methods, and collaborate effectively in guided group investigations.
40000	Students formulate focused questions, apply multiple methodological approaches, and develop solutions that integrate diverse perspectives.
50000	Students generate original inquiries and create evidence-based solutions applicable to professional contexts.
70000	Students formulate paradigm-challenging questions, design innovative research approaches, and develop solutions to complex problems with broad implications.

Experiential Learning

Academic Level	Guidelines
20000	Students participate in structured field experiences, connect observations to course concepts, and reflect on learning with guidance.
40000	Students practice (design, construct, craft) and apply theory-in-practice, demonstrating intentional reflection and the ability to adapt approaches based on feedback; Mentorship and leadership skills are evident.
50000	Students design and take steps toward implementing applied projects that integrate theory with practice, evaluate outcomes systematically, and reflect upon and refine professional approaches.
70000	Students create innovative applications that advance, refine, and deepen practice in their field, generate frameworks for evaluating methodologies, and mentor others in experiential contexts.

Communication, Research, & Writing

Academic Level	Guidelines
20000	Students utilize foundational research methods, evaluate source credibility, and communicate ideas clearly with appropriate quality, creativity, structure, citation, and formatting.
40000	Students implement multiple research approaches, synthesize diverse sources, and produce well-structured work adhering to disciplinary conventions (structure, coherence, quality, and/or creativity).
50000	Students apply advanced research methodologies, critically evaluate existing literature, and produce professional-quality communications tailored to specific audiences.
70000	Students finesse sophisticated research paradigms, contribute original scholarship to their field, and communicate with authority across specialized and general audiences.

Student Support & Agency

Academic Level	Guidelines
20000	Students navigate learning with clear structure and regular feedback while beginning to develop self-assessment skills, resource awareness, and collaboration skills.
40000	Students manage increasingly complex projects with periodic guidance and demonstrate initiative in seeking appropriate resources, either independently or as part of a team.
50000	Students demonstrate self-direction and accountability in their learning, while consulting with faculty and colleagues.
70000	Students function as self-guided scholars who establish their own parameters for excellence and contribute to the mentoring of others in their field.

Definitions

Reason for Policy

To establish clear criteria for rigor across academic levels.

Responsibilities

For following policy:	All faculty
For enforcement of policy:	Dean, Academic Affairs
For oversight of policy:	Dean, Academic Affairs
For procedures implementing the policy:	Dean, Academic Affairs
For notification:	Policy Librarian

Procedures**Cross Referenced Policies****Revision History**