

The Undergraduate Learners' Experience in a Research University

What Does It Mean To Attend a Research University?

All colleges and universities share a teaching function – the passing on of knowledge to our students. But the unique feature of a research university is the additional element of discovery – to produce new knowledge in the full range of disciplines we offer through our teaching and research programs. A research university exposes students to the latest developments in their fields of study and to scholars who work at the leading edge of their disciplines. Research universities sharpen a set of fundamental skills, which mark the foundation for scholarship:

- Inquiry
- Clear and critical thinking
- Problem solving
- Effective communication.

The Conference Board of Canada has identified a set of critical employability skills deemed necessary to participate and progress successfully in the modern world of work. These are the abilities to manage information, think and solve problems, use numbers and communicate effectively – all attributes associated with the skills and competencies cultivated at a research university such as the University of Calgary.

The University of Calgary has made the decision to emphasize the educational experience for students in a research university as part of its Academic Plan, "Raising our Sights".

Start With a Quality Curriculum

There's more than one way to solve a complex problem, so it's valuable to develop an understanding of different perspectives and methodologies as well as the ability to effectively communicate them. Each degree program at U of C offers students a core set of enhanced features and competencies which instill exceptional abilities in problem solving, posing critical questions, relating theory and practice, developing abstract reasoning and engaging meaningfully with those from other cultural and linguistic communities. We do this by creating opportunity for our students in these key areas of learning:

- **Inquiry** – Learning through inquiry is an interactive and rigorous experience. Your professors aren't simply disseminating information in a content-driven format, they're guiding you through a process where you ask the questions and search for the answers. Taught in small classes, these problem-based courses encourage discussion, curiosity and development of academic skills such as critical thinking and research. The U of C is broadening opportunities for students to take inquiry-based courses at the first year level, which will prepare you for the challenges of higher level learning later on in your degree.
- **Research** – Inquiry courses provide you with the foundations for higher-level research in your chosen discipline of study. First year

students are also exposed to leading edge researchers and professors who are recognized in their fields both nationally and internationally, and will learn about research and problem-solving methods and processes. Senior level students have increasing opportunities to participate on a research team or in their own faculty-supervised research projects.

- **Interdisciplinary Study** – As a part of your degree, you'll learn about disciplinary perspectives beyond your major field of study, an experience that enriches appreciation for diverse questions and methodologies.
- **Internationalization** – Enhanced understanding of other cultures and international issues is central to studying, working and living in today's global community. U of C has more than 150 exchange programs that will take students virtually anywhere in the world, but you can also pursue studies of other countries and cultures without leaving the campus through cross-cultural and language studies.
- **Experiential Learning** – U of C recognizes and provides opportunity for applying your knowledge through hands-on experience in field-work, labs, research projects or practicum and co-op job placements which augments your learning potential and your prospects beyond university.
- **Faculty-Student Interaction** – Six U of C faculty members have received the prestigious independent 3M Award for teaching excellence and dozens of others have been formally recognized for the high quality of their teaching. Developing relationships between students and quality instructors is strongly encouraged at U of C and the classroom environment is fostered by the practice of facilitating interactive communication with professors and classmates.

As a prospective or newly admitted student, you may still be in the process of deciding which degree program and major to pursue. Each faculty maintains an explicit syllabus for each program and degree; the explicit syllabus is a document outlining the knowledge and skills students will acquire throughout an individual degree program, it defines the field of study, and demonstrates how the above curricular features are incorporated into the discipline. A synopsis of each program is on the web to assist you in identifying the right degree program. To view the synopsis for each U of C degree program, go to www.ucalgary.ca/programinfo

Navigating the System:

Student Advising – Advisors are an intrinsic tool for students navigating their way through their degree program. Advisors are on hand within each faculty to assist students with the following:

- Assist with course planning and degree requirements
- Admission to programs offered within the faculty

- Monitor student progress through their program
- Determine students' academic standings by conducting an annual review
- Approve the deferral of final examinations and term work
- Process requests to change from one faculty or program to another
- Approve requests to take course work at other institutions
- Approve students who are ready to graduate
- Provide assistance in applying transfer credit to program requirements

For course planning assistance, check out the degree navigator online at <http://www.ucalgary.ca/infonet/> or contact the appropriate faculty advising office directly. See faculty sections in the Calendar for contact information.

Transfer Students – Transfer students have access to all the above curriculum features and inquiry learning opportunities within their degree programs. Transfer students have generally less time at U of C to complete these academic features, so it is important to speak with a student advisor to determine how these can be incorporated prior to graduation.

The U of C has support systems in place to assist transfer students with their unique needs:

- The Transfer Equivalence Navigator, www.ucalgary.ca/Transfer2UofC will show the transfer credit students will receive upon transferring from any Alberta post-secondary institution.
- U of C 101: The Introduction for transfer students is designed to ease a student's transition to the U of C by providing the information and resources needed to reach full academic potential.
- Student advising is available in each faculty, or through the Prospective Student Office, www.starthere.ucalgary.ca/

Student Perspectives on Quality:

The University of Calgary takes seriously what our students think of the quality of their learner experience. Results from two evaluation systems are frequently used to upgrade the quality of our University to meet the needs of our learners. These are:

The Universal Student Ratings of Instruction (USRI)

– The USRI is a tool by which students evaluate their courses and instructors. The information collected is intended for use by students to aid them in selecting courses, by Deans and Department Heads to review the teaching activities of instructors, by instructors to assist them in improving instruction, and by the University for administrative research purposes. The USRI can be accessed at www.ucalgary.ca/infonet/

Graduating Student Survey – The purpose of this survey is to gather information from a broad spectrum of University of Calgary graduating students. The information collected provides input regarding ways to enhance the university experience of students. These surveys are done in partnership with other Alberta institutions and also Alberta Learning.