The COLLABORATE Initiative

Contexts & Issues
In today’s socio-economic climate, many are becoming increasingly skeptical of the value of learning in higher education. A number of critics refer to reports, both academic and popular press, that indicate a disturbing disconnect between academic learning and real world significance. Other critics point to college exit surveys that show recent college graduates feeling lost and unprepared for life after college. As such, critics of higher education are demanding more accountability and justifiable returns on the time and money spent on college education.

Colleges and universities counter that shifting economic, political, social conditions should not determine the value of learning. They maintain that institutions of higher education are not merely vocational programs that produce employable workers, but are communities that foster knowledge and develop students to become critical thinkers, problem-solvers, and responsible citizens. Hence, they contend that the value of college learning experiences cannot be reduced to quantifiable outcomes.

These are compelling and sound arguments about learning in higher education – diverse perspectives that must be considered. At the very least, this critical moment provides opportunities to question and reframe the meanings of learning in higher education. The COLLABORATE Initiative embraces this moment.

Why COLLABORATE?
COLLABORATE provides much needed space to jointly engage in meaningful, purposeful, and practical inquiries on social issues and processes. In doing so, we aim to both re-conceptualize and enact updated meanings of learning in higher education.

The COLLABORATE Initiative aims to reconceptualize learning in higher education through reflexive inquiries into the processes of acquiring, producing, and utilizing knowledge.

COLLABORATE’s Reflexive Dual-Process Model of Learning

Our approach is twofold: First, we aim to conduct rigorous and relevant research, facilitate pragmatic and engaging practices, and foster productive and meaningful relationships that inform and improve the ways we learn and work. Second, we seek to improve the ways we engage in the collaborative learning, researching, and working processes.
In other words, through participation in collaborative projects, participants will make meaningful connections between academic approaches and real world issues. Through strategic collaborations among students, faculty, educational institutions, businesses, and community-based organizations, participants will become life-long learners and more engaged, reflective, collaborative, and proactive professionals and citizens.

Participants experience learning as a process, not just a product. In essence, we are reframing learning as a collaborative process.