

Ability-Based Learning

"Learning is not a spectator sport. Students do not learn much by just sitting in class listening to teachers, memorizing pre-packaged assignments, and spitting out answers. They must talk about what they are learning, write about it, relate it to past experiences, apply it to their daily lives. They must make what they learn part of themselves" (Chickering and Gamson, 1987, p. 3).

Ability-Based Learning is a form of curriculum design, teaching strategies, and evaluation methods that differs from traditional didactic teaching methods. This model focuses on creating learning opportunities and experiences for students to assist them with identifying their own learning styles and then implementing strategies to help them learn in the most productive and positive way possible.

An ability-based learning model differs from traditional curriculum development in several key ways:

- Learning is designed around student interests and is contextual in nature, meaning that students are exposed to a variety of experiences grounded in “real life” learning (interviews, volunteer experience, guest speakers, field trips, etc.).
- Students learn in teams and use essential learning.
- Instructors structure learning around real problems, encouraging students to also learn in settings outside the classroom.
- Student assessments allow students to understand their own learning styles and preferences. This way, students monitor and enhance their own learning process through the development of self-assessment and reflection skills.
- Assessments are implemented through a variety of mechanisms, including self-assessment, instructor assessment, peer evaluation, etc.
- The integration of assignments into a core E-Portfolio process provides a mechanism for students to develop self-assessment skills, critical thinking skills, and analytical skills.
- This curriculum model supports the issues identified in the needs assessment which indicates employers want entry-level professionals who have “real world” experience and a higher sense of confidence and competency in skill development and implementation.