

UNL College of Architecture

Learning & Teaching Culture Policy

Adopted May 2026

Introduction

The Learning & Teaching Culture Policy has been developed collaboratively by faculty, staff, and students to support an environment that prioritizes educational excellence and the well-being of everyone in the college. In keeping with the expectations of our accrediting bodies, NAAB, CIDA, LAAB, and PAB, this document outlines the shared values and responsibilities that shape learning and teaching across our allied disciplines.

Design and planning are inherently demanding, and for that reason such a document is essential. Yet a strong learning culture does not arise automatically. It must be shaped through shared expectations and everyday practices. This policy affirms that learning is shaped not only by curriculum and instruction, but also by the broader conditions in which education takes place. These include how time is organized, how spaces are used, how critique is conducted, how expectations are communicated, and how people treat one another across the college. At its core, this policy concerns the kind of community we want to build together. It is intended to support a culture in which students and faculty can do serious and creative work in an environment defined by clarity, respect, responsibility, and care.

This policy is a shared commitment. Faculty, staff, and students do not hold identical roles, but they do share responsibility for sustaining the culture of the college. Faculty shape courses, expectations, feedback, and the broader learning environment. Students shape that environment through participation, preparation, conduct, and care for others. A strong culture depends on both. The framework is grounded in five interrelated pillars: **Stewardship, Accord, Discourse, Character, and Inquiry**. Together, these pillars guide how members of the college contribute to classrooms, advising, and community life.



STEWARDSHIP establishes the shared responsibility to create and maintain environments that support learning, including how we organize courses, communicate expectations, care for spaces or resources, and uphold conditions that are safe, functional, and healthy.



ACCORD sustains commitment to a culture of empathy, respect, balance, and well-being in which all people feel supported, treated with dignity, and able to engage demanding work without unnecessary fear, harm, or burnout.



DISCOURSE creates thoughtful and constructive exchange through listening, communication, collaboration, and critique so that ideas can be tested, refined, and developed through meaningful dialogue.



CHARACTER expresses personal and professional responsibility through integrity, professionalism, intellectual rigor, and the habits of judgment that sustain trust and excellence within the learning environment.



INQUIRY encourages deeper understanding through questioning, exploration, experimentation, and reflection within a culture of learning shaped by curiosity, initiative, creativity, and informed judgment.



Stewardship begins with care for the spaces, resources, and systems that support learning. This includes clean and usable studios, respect for shared resources, attention to equipment, storage, acoustics, and digital platforms, and emotional conditions in which people can work without unnecessary stress,

disruption, or risk. Stewardship is not simply about efficiency; it is about making the college a place where academic effort is sustained through collective care. It takes shape through **organization**, **responsible prioritization**, **attention to safety**, and **care for the health** of the community and its learning environments.

- **For faculty and staff**, stewardship calls for **organization** in clearly structured courses, current syllabi and learning platforms, and communication that reduces confusion. It also involves responsible **prioritization** through coordinated deadlines where possible, awareness of cumulative workloads, and recognition of what is essential and what may remain flexible. Faculty and staff support stewardship through attention to **safety** and care for the **health** of learning environments by maintaining classrooms, studios, shared resources, digital platforms, and conditions that support student well-being.
- **For students**, stewardship takes shape through **organization** in preparing for class, managing materials, and participating responsibly in shared routines. It also includes responsible **prioritization** in managing time and commitments so that both individual progress and collective expectations can be sustained. Students contribute through attention to **safety** and care for the **health** of shared environments by maintaining work areas, respecting common spaces and equipment, and sustaining physical and digital conditions in which others can work productively.



Accord reflects the ways members of a collegiate community make room for challenge without losing sight of dignity, support, and long-term well-being. This includes recognizing the pressures of design education, creating environments in which people feel heard and respected, and sustaining a culture in which rigor does not depend on chronic exhaustion, indifference, or unnecessary harm. Accord is not about avoiding difficulty; it is about ensuring that difficulty is held within a culture of mutual care and responsibility. It takes shape through **empathy**, **respect**, **balance**, and **wellness**.

- **For faculty and staff**, accord includes **empathy** for various life perspectives and the many pressures students may be carrying across courses and beyond school. It also requires **respect** through fairness, attentiveness, and humane judgment, while supporting **balance** by recognizing that strong expectations need not rely on habitual overload. Faculty and staff contribute to **wellness** when they help create environments in which students feel supported, heard, and able to speak candidly about challenge and uncertainty.
- **For students**, accord suggests **empathy** toward faculty and peers, extending **respect** in daily interactions, and helping build a culture in which difference is met with dignity rather than dismissal. It also involves supporting **balance** and collective **wellness** through encouragement, and healthy challenge, while helping address isolation, exhaustion, and destructive competition.



Discourse takes shape through the habits and structures that make meaningful exchange possible across classrooms, studios, reviews, and informal interactions. It includes listening carefully, speaking clearly, offering feedback constructively, and creating conditions in which people feel heard and respected and in which disagreement and critique can advance understanding rather than diminish it. Discourse is not merely conversation; it is the disciplined and relational work of learning with and through others. It takes shape through **mindfulness**, **communication**, **collaboration**, and **criticism**.

- **For faculty and staff**, discourse looks like **communication** that makes expectations clear, frames discussion in legible and respectful ways, and offers **criticism** that is rigorous, specific, and genuinely useful to student growth. It also requires **mindfulness** in how feedback is delivered, recognizing that tone, timing, and format shape how critique is received and used. Faculty and staff support **collaboration** by encouraging dialogue and exchange rather than treating learning as a one-way transmission of judgment.
- **For students**, discourse means **mindfulness** in listening with an open mind, active participation in discussion and review, and clear **communication** in presenting ideas, asking questions, and responding to others. It also includes **collaboration** across differences and learning to give and receive **criticism** in ways that strengthen both academic work and the broader learning environment.



Character involves qualities that make trust, seriousness, and responsibility possible within academic life. It includes how one follows through on commitments, engages work honestly, responds to others with maturity, and grows into the responsibilities of a discipline and profession. Character is not simply a matter of attitude; it is the lived expression of values through conduct, judgment, and sustained responsibility. It takes shape through **integrity**, **professionalism**, **intellectual rigor**, and the **development of expertise**.

- **For faculty**, character is expressed through **integrity** through honesty, fairness, consistency, and ethical responsibility in teaching and evaluation. It also includes **professionalism** in preparation, follow-through, and respect for students and colleagues, as well as **intellectual rigor** in the standards set for inquiry, craft, and disciplinary engagement. Faculty further support the **development of expertise** by helping students build knowledge and judgment over time rather than rewarding superficial completion alone.
- **For students**, character arises through **integrity** through honest authorship, accountability, and responsible participation in shared academic life. It also includes **professionalism** in preparedness, dependability, and conduct; **intellectual rigor** in pursuing depth, revising assumptions, and engaging difficult work seriously; and the **development of expertise** through the practice of repetition and reflection.



Inquiry is driven by the conditions and habits that allow learning to become exploratory, reflective, and generative. It includes asking meaningful questions, testing possibilities through process and revision, and developing the judgment needed to assess ideas in relation to context, performance, and user experience. Inquiry is not simply openness or creativity on its own; it is the disciplined pursuit of knowledge through active investigation and thoughtful response. It takes shape through **self-direction**, **experimentation**, **acumen**, and **creativity and innovation**.

- **For faculty**, inquiry points to **self-direction** by creating room for students to pursue meaningful questions and take ownership of their learning. It also includes supporting **experimentation** through iteration, risk, and reflection, while helping students develop **acumen** as the informed judgment needed to assess alternatives, weigh consequences, and make decisions in context. Faculty support **creativity and innovation** not simply by encouraging novelty, but by encouraging exploration and original responses to meaningful conditions and questions.
- **For students**, inquiry is practiced by **self-direction** through initiative, persistence, and engagement beyond minimum requirements. It includes **experimentation** through making, testing, and revising ideas; **acumen** through increasingly nuanced judgment; and **creativity and innovation** through the development of thoughtful and imaginative responses to the questions and conditions at hand.

Tiered Framework Diagram: VALUES and Capacities

The five value pillars and their related capacities identify recurring qualities and modes of engagement that support the college's teaching and learning culture in everyday academic life.

INQUIRY

Self-Direction – taking ownership of one's learning through initiative, goal-setting, and independent exploration

Experimentation - testing ideas through iteration, curiosity, risk, and self-motivated discovery

Acumen - developing sound judgment and the ability to make informed decisions in context

Creativity and Innovation - generating new possibilities, approaches, and meaningful design responses

CHARACTER

Integrity - acting with honesty, accountability, and ethical consistency

Professionalism - demonstrating dependability, respect, preparedness, and responsible conduct

Rigor (Intellectual) - pursuing depth, critical thought, and careful engagement with ideas

Expertise - building knowledge, skill, informed pursuit, and mastery over time

DISCOURSE

Mindfulness - listening attentively, remaining attuned to other perspectives, and remaining aware of one's impact on others

Communication - expressing ideas clearly, directly, and respectfully

Collaboration - working with others in ways that value shared effort and diverse perspectives

Criticism - offering and receiving feedback that is thoughtful, constructive, and useful

ACCORD

Empathy - making an effort to understand the experiences and needs of others

Respect - engaging others with dignity, fairness, and consideration

Balance - managing academic demands alongside personal and social responsibilities in sustainable ways

Wellness - supporting the physical, mental, and emotional conditions that make learning possible

STEWARDSHIP

Organization - providing and maintaining learning structures that reduce confusion and support students' capacity to engage meaningfully with their work

Prioritization - honoring time, deadlines, energy, and shared commitments so that expectations remain reasonable, progress remains steady, and learning occurs with intentional focus.

Safety - helping create environments where people can participate in work without fear, harm, unnecessary risk, or exclusion

Health - sustaining spaces and practices that support concentration, well-being, and collective care