**Intellectual Inquiry**

**The Core Liberal Arts Curriculum at Roanoke College**

**The Liberal Arts**

A liberal arts education is “education for liberation.” It liberates us from the limitations of our own personal experiences. It opens our eyes to the world, challenges what we believe, asks us to support ideas with facts and reason, and arms us with the skills needed to thrive in a complex and changing world.

**The Inquiry Mode**

Learning, in college and after, most often takes the form of asking and answering important questions. The Intellectual Inquiry (INQ) curriculum helps students learn how to distinguish important questions, how to frame them, and how to marshal research and a host of other skills to answer them. Rather than passively receiving a body of introductory information, students in INQ courses actively pursue answers to interesting and urgent questions, acquiring the relevant facts and methods in the process. Students are introduced to inquiry in two seminars.

INQ 110 “Intellectual Inquiry” introduces critical inquiry by focusing students on a specific question while helping them develop and practice key academic skills such as critical reading, writing, and research.

INQ 120 “Living an Examined Life” asks students to engage with a tradition of ethical thinking and use that tradition to inquire into a specific ethical problem.

**Skills**

Some learning skills are so critical that they need to be taught “across the curriculum” so that students practice and apply them repeatedly in a variety of contexts. These skills are introduced and emphasized in the 100-level INQ courses and reinforced in 200-level INQ as well as major courses.

**Critical Thinking.** What is a reliable source? Why consult multiple sources with multiple viewpoints? What is “active reading,” the kind that thinks along with and interrogates the author? How does one achieve independent, adult authority in thinking about the important issues of the day? Students in the first-year seminars explore the answers to these questions, learning critical thinking practices they will use throughout their college experience—and their lives.

**Writing.** Communication skills are critical to all work and to life in general. The first-year seminar INQ 110 is a writing-intensive course in which students use the process of writing and revision as a tool of thought. Writing is such an important skill that its continued development is required in all INQ courses.

**Speaking.** Formal and informal oral communication is emphasized in the other first-year seminar, INQ 120. All INQ courses except those emphasizing quantitative reasoning will help students continue to develop their oral communication skills.

**Quantitative Reasoning.** All citizens, whatever their fields of specialization, need to be numerically literate, need to understand graphs, statistics, and all manner of quantitative information. INQ 240, “Statistical Reasoning,” teaches its skills through inquiry into particular applications, such as voting systems, health statistics, and other practical issues. This course provides a foundation for quantitative reasoning that is reinforced in later INQ and major courses.

**Collaboration.** In the INQ program, collaborative discussion, small-group work, and seminar-style sharing of individual research is common. The capstone, INQ 300, asks students to collaborate in proposing a solution to a contemporary issue.

**Knowledge**

A liberal arts education at Roanoke College aims to produce citizens informed by depth of knowledge in at least one academic field of study, complemented by a breadth of experience across the traditional divisions of knowledge sufficient to enable integrative learning and thinking.

**Inquiry & Evidence.** The traditional three divisions of knowledge--the arts and humanities, the natural sciences and mathematics, and the social sciences—ask and answer questions in unique ways. These disciplines ask different questions, employ different methods of analysis, and use different types of evidence to support conclusions. The 200-level INQ courses assure that all RC graduates are conversant in these traditional perspectives and can apply them to address issues and problems.

**Global Perspective.** We live in an interconnected global society. For this reason, at least one of the 200-level INQ courses taken by each student must explore a global question. Another way that students gain a more global perspective is through the INQ curriculum’s foreign language requirement.

**Capstone Experience**

In INQ 300 “Contemporary Issues,” the capstone course taken in a student’s third or fourth year, collaborative research and reporting is most prominent. In this course, students from various fields pool their expertise and draw upon their prior INQ work, collectively developing a solution or approach to a contemporary problem.