Learning Goals: Achieving Significant Student Learning

After you have reviewed the situational factors, decide what you want students to get out of the course. When teachers take a *learning*-centered approach, they usually identify several additional kinds of significant learning.

I recommend that teachers ask themselves: "What would I like the impact of this course to be on students, 2-3 years after the course is over? What would distinguish students who have taken this course from students who have not?"
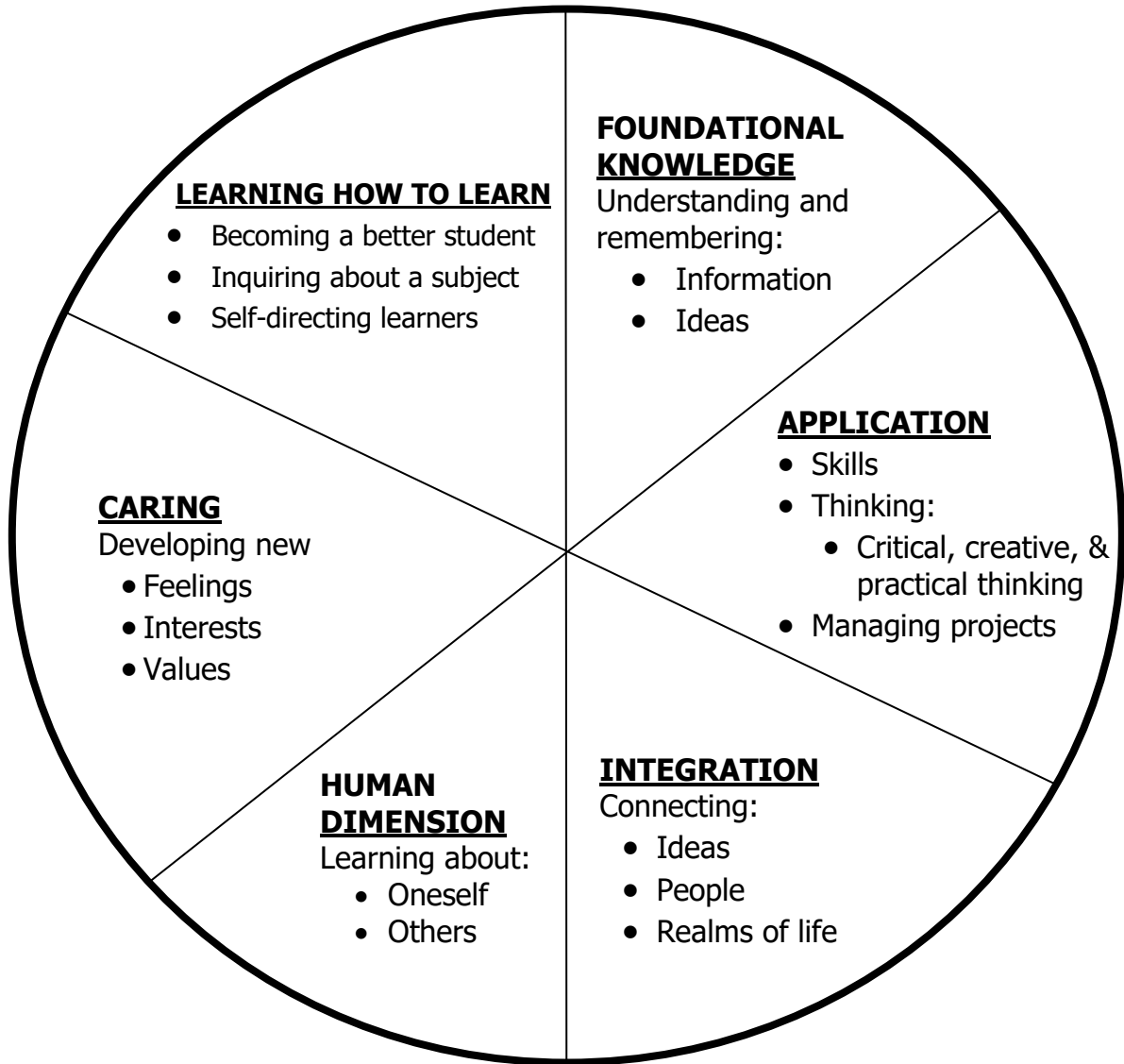
When students and teachers think about what students can learn that is truly significant, their answers usually include, but do not focus on, "understand and remember" kinds of learning. More often they emphasize such things as critical thinking, learning how to creatively use knowledge from the course, learning to solve real-world problems, changing the way students think about themselves and others, realizing the importance of life-long learning, etc.

After many years of studying people's responses to the question of what constitutes significant learning, I have proposed a taxonomy of significant learning. It consists of six major types of significant learning, with a number of sub-categories. This taxonomy is shown in Figure 1 (next page). The taxonomy identifies significant kinds of learning that you may want to include as important learning goals for your course.

Reference: Fink, Dee. (2003). *Creating significant learning experiences. An integrated approach to designing college courses*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Figure 1

A TAXONOMY OF SIGNIFICANT LEARNING

LEARNING HOW TO LEARN
- Becoming a better student
- Inquiring about a subject
- Self-directing learners

FOUNDATIONAL KNOWLEDGE
Understanding and remembering:
- Information
- Ideas

CARING
Developing new
- Feelings
- Interests
- Values

APPLICATION
- Skills
- Thinking:
  - Critical, creative, & practical thinking
- Managing projects

HUMAN DIMENSION
Learning about:
- Oneself
- Others

INTEGRATION
Connecting:
- Ideas
- People
- Realms of life

One important feature of this particular taxonomy is that each kind of learning is *interactive*, as illustrated in Figure 2 (next page). This means that each kind of learning can stimulate other kinds of learning. This has major implications for the selection of learning goals for your course. It may seem intimidating to include all six kinds of significant learning. But the more you can realistically include, the more the goals will support each other—and the more valuable will be your students' learning.

Figure 2

INTERACTIVE NATURE OF SIGNIFICANT LEARNING
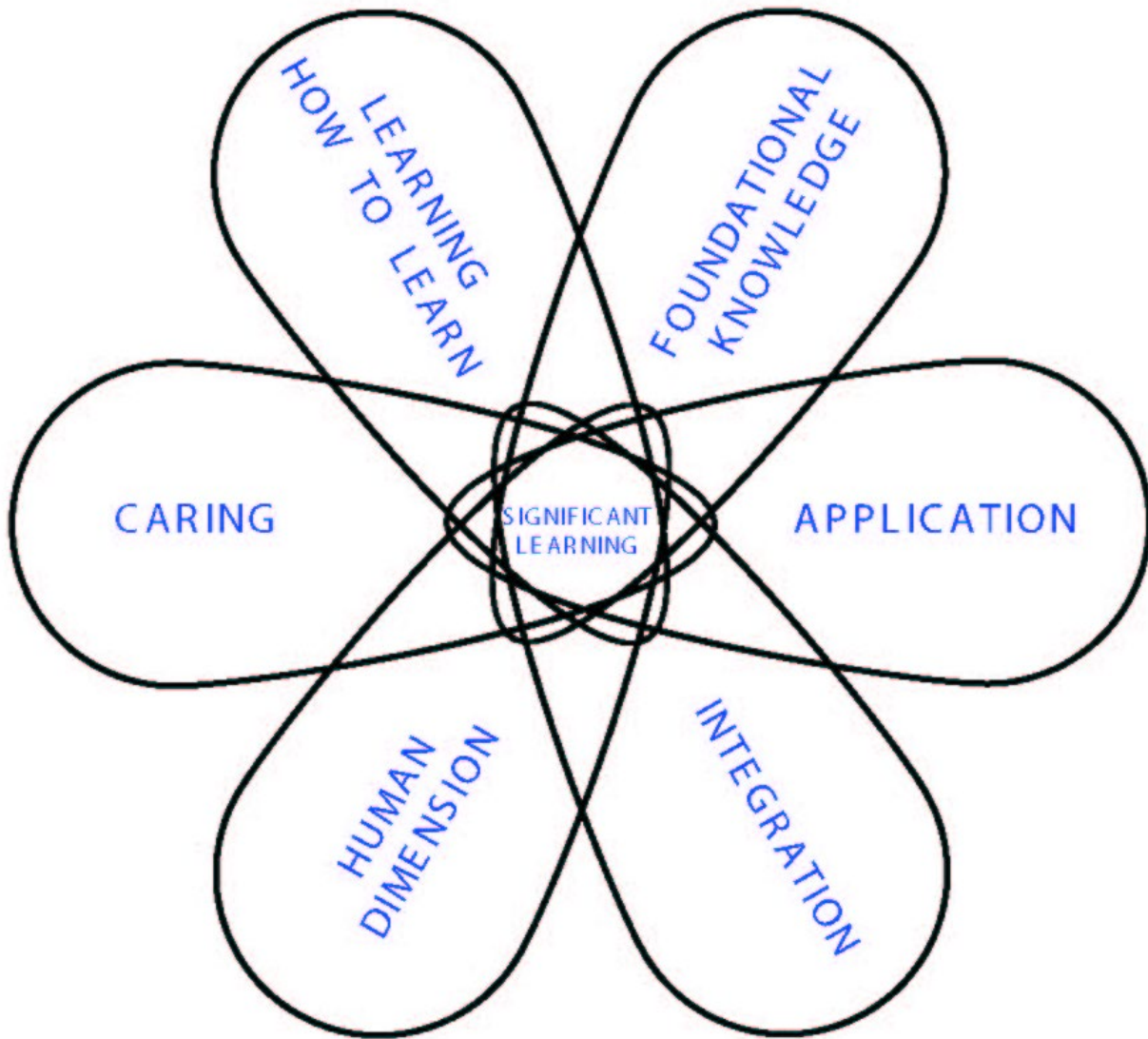
Step 2. Worksheet

Questions for Formulating Significant Learning Goals

"A year (or more) after this course is over, I want and hope that students will _____."

Foundational Knowledge

- What key information (e.g., facts, terms, formulae, concepts, principles, relationships, etc.) is/are important for students to understand and remember in the future?

- What key ideas (or perspectives) are important for students to understand in this course?

Application Goals

- What kinds of thinking are important for students to learn?
    - ♦ Critical thinking, in which students analyze and evaluate
    - ♦ Creative thinking, in which students imagine and create
    - ♦ Practical thinking, in which students solve problems and make decisions
- What important skills do students need to gain?
- Do students need to learn how to manage complex projects?

Integration Goals

- What connections (similarities and interactions) should students recognize and make…:

    - ♦ Among ideas *within* this course?
    - ♦ Among the information, ideas, and perspectives in this course and those in other courses or areas?
    - ♦ Among material in this course and the students' own personal, social, and/or work life?

Human Dimensions Goals

- What could or should students learn about <u>themselves</u>?
- What could or should students learn about <u>understanding others</u> and/or <u>interacting with them</u>?

Caring Goals

- What changes/values do you hope students will adopt?

  Feelings?
  Interests?
  Ideas?

"Learning-How-to-Learn" Goals

- What would you like for students to learn about:
  - ♦ <u>how to be good students</u> in a course like this?
  - ♦ <u>how to learn about this particular subject</u>?
  - ♦ <u>how to become a self-directed learner</u> of this subject, i.e., having a learning agenda of what they need/want to learn, and a *plan* for learning it?