

Institutional Insights – Round 1

To discover more about the context for First-year Composition and Mathematics, University System staff are meeting with representatives from each institution to discover more about composition and math. These open conversations have been instructive and informative, and are foundational to our ongoing work in this area. Below are the summarized insights from these conversations so far.

First-year mathematics is an empowering foundation for everyday problem-solving, critical thinking, and informed citizenship; it should fundamentally transform the way students see and experience the world around them. Beyond formulas and abstract calculations, the curriculum should cultivate quantitative fluency—giving students the number sense, analytical tools, and data literacy needed to interpret real-world claims and communicate complex ideas with precision. Just as importantly, introductory courses should foster flexible cognitive habits: teaching learners how to sit with ambiguity, embrace productive struggle, view failure as an informative step, and leverage practical "street math" to navigate real life. As the only math course many students will take, the experience should not only nurture intellectual resilience and proactive help-seeking behaviors, but also permanently broaden their perspective—leaving them with the lasting realization that mathematical thinking is a universal lens that belongs to everyone.

First-year composition is a transformative practice of inquiry and reflection, shaping how students organize their thoughts, think critically, and understand their place in the world. Far from being about producing a static, finished deliverable, the curriculum must center on the messy, generative nature of the writing process itself—grounded in the principle that good writing is never truly "done," but constantly evolving through inquiry, drafting, reflection, and revision. Introductory courses should treat writing as a tool for thinking: teaching students how to untangle complex ideas on the page, sit with ambiguity, and discover what they genuinely think before communicating those insights with intention and clarity. By approaching writing as an ongoing act of meaning-making, the experience should empower students to develop their authentic voice, navigate diverse viewpoints, and claim their agency as active participants in broader academic, civic, and global conversations.

First-year general education in mathematics and composition is not as a set of isolated requirements, but as a unified foundation for critical inquiry, sense-making, and self-discovery. Together, these disciplines should reframe learning as an ongoing, iterative process rather than the pursuit of static answers—challenging students to embrace

ambiguity, engage in productive struggle, and view revision and reflection as vital intellectual habits. While mathematics should cultivate the quantitative lens and data fluency needed to navigate everyday environments critically, composition should provide the reflective space to process complex thinking, refine authentic voice, and engage in meaningful dialogue. Far beyond technical formulas or surface mechanics, both courses should fundamentally transform how students see, interpret, and experience the world around them, empowering them with the resilience, intellectual agency, and universal tools necessary to understand their place within broader academic, civic, and global communities.