

Building a Foundation for **Principled Innovation[®]**

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Foreword by Michael M. Crow

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Foreword

Principled Innovation: A case for character formation in higher education

Colleges and universities are being asked to demonstrate value in new and important ways. Questions about affordability, relevance and public impact have prompted academic leaders to reflect more deeply on how they serve students and society.^{1,2} As a result, institutions are reconsidering how to balance broad educational missions with workforce preparation, research and civic responsibility. In this evolving landscape, Arizona State University (ASU) believes that higher education is most powerful when it advances not only knowledge production but also the professional success of students and the pursuit of meaning and purpose.³

Through the New American University model, ASU simultaneously pursues excellence, access and positive social impact.⁴ To achieve these aims, stakeholders must continually innovate; however, innovation must also be principled. Accordingly, ASU developed the design aspiration of Practice Principled Innovation to focus on character formation,⁵ which means embedding moral and civic values into the teaching, research and service functions of the university.^{6,7} In essence, ASU believes that it is responsible for helping students, faculty and staff lead not only productive lives but also good lives.

At the same time, public universities must honor pluralism. Our initiatives to inform the character of stakeholders must respect diverse worldviews while creating spaces for civil discourse and ethical reflection. Principled Innovation at ASU is not about engendering a single set of values but rather asking each member of our community to **define his or her moral, civic, intellectual and performance principles and to strive to live by them.**³ Principled Innovation advances character education, not through promoting a single worldview but through a **reflective process** that encourages students, faculty and staff to flourish. By endorsing Principled Innovation, ASU empowers all stakeholders of our academic community to become thoughtful professionals and engaged citizens rooted in integrity and guided by purpose.^{3,9}

In short, universities cannot merely choose between research, career readiness or character formation. All three are essential if the university hopes to prepare students not just for the workforce, but for **lives well-lived**. Principled innovation is about helping our faculty, staff, and, most importantly, students place character and values at the center of their decisions and actions.



Michael M. Crow
President, Arizona State University

Innovation without values is not enough;

**we must move forward but from a
place grounded in prosocial values
and positive character.**



“ There are principles that we abide by... there are principles that we live by... we need to make sure that all of our practices... **can help us to develop practical wisdom and practical outcomes...**

Michael M. Crow³³

Flourishing: the ultimate goal

In contemporary culture, happiness is often reduced to comfort, pleasure or distraction. We scroll, consume and chase experiences that feel good in the moment but quickly fade. Yet for most of human history, happiness meant something far deeper. In classical moral philosophy, happiness was understood not as a passing emotion but as a form of excellence: a life oriented toward what is good and worthy.^{10,11} In fact, what we translate from the ancient Greeks as “happiness” is probably better termed flourishing. Aristotle referred to this condition as eudaimonia – human flourishing achieved by realizing our potential through virtuous activity.¹³ Across many philosophical and religious traditions, both Eastern and Western, flourishing is understood as the deeper purpose of human life, a view echoed in contemporary psychology.¹²

While the concept of flourishing developed within a rich philosophical tradition, contemporary scholars operationalized the idea into its core dimensions. For example, Martin Seligman posits that flourishing results from a combination of positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning and accomplishment.¹² Tyler VanderWeele further advances these ideas, with flourishing consisting of happiness and life satisfaction, driven by the upstream factors of character and virtue, meaning and purpose, and the midstream factor of close relationships. VanderWeele’s model also includes the enabling factors of mental and physical health as well as financial and material stability.³⁵ Principled Innovation incorporates these theories and provides a pathway toward flourishing through character education, with a strong emphasis on building relationships and community, which result in meaning and purpose.



Human flourishing is not simply an individual pursuit. Flourishing involves the broader social and institutional environments that make well-being possible. In other words, flourishing depends as much on the conditions surrounding a person as on the individual’s own achievements or capacities.¹⁴ These conditions should ideally enable all people, not merely a privileged few, to thrive.⁸ Within this understanding, flourishing emerges from relationships and systems that support human dignity and mutual care.¹⁵

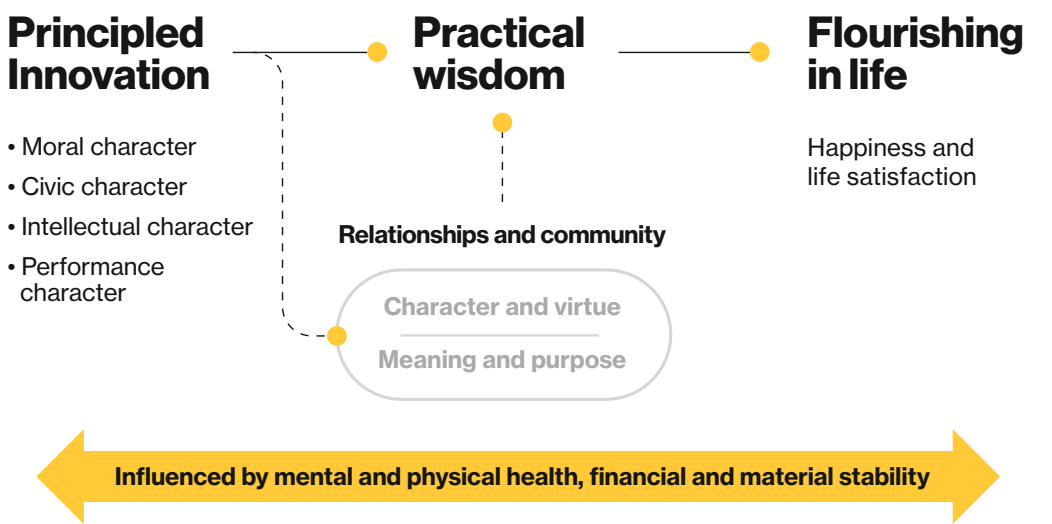
Principled Innovation is a means to our ultimate goal of flourishing for individuals and humanity. Flourishing arises when individuals live with purpose, cultivate virtue and participate meaningfully in community.^{11,17} It does not come from avoiding difficulty or maximizing pleasure. Rather, it takes shape through the development of character, the ongoing practice of choosing what is right and acting with integrity. At ASU, we consider the development of character a central pathway to flourishing.

Practical wisdom is our guide

If flourishing is the goal of Principled Innovation, then practical wisdom is the meta virtue or value that we develop through the iterative process of character development. Practical wisdom, what Aristotle called phronesis, is the capacity to exercise sound judgment about what is good and to act accordingly. Sometimes this is framed as doing the right thing, at the right time, for the right reasons, in the pursuit of a virtuous goal.¹³ Pragmatically, it involves the capacity to perceive what is ethically at stake, deliberate among competing values and emotions, and ultimately act in ways that align virtue with sound judgment. Practical wisdom integrates virtues and guides them toward wise action in real-life contexts.¹⁸

In other words, practical wisdom is knowing how and when to apply our values in different contexts in order to live our lives in ways that align with pro-social outcomes. Developed over time, practical wisdom is essential in situations where there is no clear “right” answer or action.

As we practice Principled Innovation, we can reflect on our decisions and actions, celebrate where we are effectively using our values and also identify opportunities for personal growth. We can then use what we learned as we enter into new experiences. When we are intentional about this process, we build a solid foundation of practical wisdom.



A close-up, profile view of a Black woman with short hair, looking slightly upwards and to the right. She is wearing a white top with gold buttons and a small, colorful earring. The background is a soft, out-of-focus grey.

Student spotlight

“

Principled Innovation is a reminder that intelligence alone is not enough. Character is what ensures that as T-birds grow in capability, they also grow in responsibility.

Sylvia Kunkyebe, Graduate Student, Master of Global Management,
Thunderbird School of Global Management

A few years ago Sylvia worked in international development. There she designed programs for people who are systematically disadvantaged. Through her work, she learned to include unheard voices, align solutions with community values and co-create with those most affected. Principled Innovation felt familiar because it reflected how Sylvia had been trained to balance the needs of beneficiaries with institutional priorities.

During her time at Thunderbird, Sylvia worked with the faculty members teaching the Global Challenge Lab (GCL) course, a course where students work on consulting projects with real companies. She designed new material to help students use AI responsibly. During implementation, she encountered real tensions. Students wanted speed, clients wanted quality and Thunderbird needed to manage risk. She recognized a dual obligation she had always navigated: to the people she served and to the institutions she represented.

This experience clarified a key insight. Responsible AI use is not only about institutional reputation. It is about individual judgment and character in context. Through conversations with students, clients and industry experts, she saw that ethical decisions emerge from how individuals interpret and act within real constraints.

Designing with values at the center changes the purpose of learning. It not only shapes how students perform in their GCL; it shapes how they will lead beyond Thunderbird.



**There is no such
thing as ideal
science**



**that gives us the right
to soar above the
concerns of society.**

Why Principled Innovation?

SOLARSPELL: A STORY OF PRINCIPLED INNOVATION

When Laura Hosman first began working in the Pacific Islands, she noticed a troubling pattern. Teachers often had extraordinary commitment but almost no resources. Many schools operated without reliable electricity, internet or even basic textbooks. In places where the desire to learn was strong, the infrastructure needed to support learning had simply never arrived. Hosman realized that the conventional approach, waiting for connectivity or large-scale investment, would take decades. Rather than accept that gap as inevitable, she asked: What do these communities need now, and what can we create that honors their dignity?

SolarSPELL was born from that question. It began as a human-centered commitment to design an educational library that could work anywhere. Hosman and her team built a small, solar-powered digital library, light enough to carry by hand, durable enough for harsh climates and simple enough for teachers with little to no technical training. Its content was locally relevant and freely accessible. The result was an innovation powered as much by ethics as by engineering.

In 2024, the SolarSPELL team brought their devices to the Hopi Nation to train patient navigators at Hopi Cancer Support Services. The team worked together with tribal leaders to create new content and build relationships. As Hosman put it, “The fact that we had the approval from the tribe itself and that all of the content in that library was vetted



by the people that they know... that builds trust”.²⁰ Building on these kinds of relationships, SolarSPELL has continued to scale. As of 2025, more than half a million learners across the globe have engaged with SolarSPELL.

In late 2025, Arizona State University recognized SolarSPELL with the President’s Award for Principled Innovation. The honor was not simply for inventing something clever. It was for demonstrating how innovation, when guided by moral purpose and with a commitment to human flourishing, can become a force for good in the world.²¹

ASU is a comprehensive public research university, measured not by whom it excludes, but by whom it includes and how they succeed; advancing research and discovery of public value; and assuming fundamental responsibility for the economic, social, cultural and overall health of the communities it serves.

Innovating with intention, values and purpose is integral to the pursuit of flourishing for all.

As reflected in our charter, ASU places a high value on both innovation and inclusivity. We strive to be innovative, as a model of the New American University, and to be interdisciplinary in our approach to challenges, cutting across traditional boundaries and siloes.⁴ We believe it is not enough to be the most innovative university in the country, if we do not innovate with purpose and care. While the charter grounds all efforts towards innovation and excellence at ASU, a set of nine Design Aspirations guides ASU's ongoing evolution as a New American University. Eight Design Aspirations launched at the start of President Crow's tenure, with the ninth, Practice Principled Innovation, adopted in 2023. With innovation at the core of ASU's identity, why was the ninth Design Aspiration adopted only recently?

The recent adoption of Practice Principled Innovation was not because we hadn't been innovating with character and values in mind, but because in a time marked by rapid technological advancement, polarization and societal disruption, we recognized the urgency of reaffirming our commitment to ethical and prosocial innovation. Everything we do at ASU should be guided by principles that reflect our shared sense of responsibility to each other and to the communities we serve.

Why make this explicit now? Around us, we see the consequences of innovation untethered from positive values or personal character: the rise of misinformation fueled by AI-generated content, the erosion of trust in democratic institutions and the exploitation of personal data in ways that prioritize profit over well-being. These dilemmas challenge us to pause and ask:

Are we intentionally and systematically preparing our students, faculty and staff not just with technical skills, but with a self-determined moral and ethical compass to navigate and shape the world for the better?

Institutions of higher learning are not merely pipelines to employment, they are formative environments where students shape their identities and begin to define the kinds of lives they want to lead.



ASU Design Aspirations

We have adopted Principled Innovation as the 9th Design Aspiration or organizational value at ASU.

1 Leverage Our Place

ASU embraces its culture, socioeconomic and physical setting.

2 Enable Student Success

ASU is committed to the success of each unique student.

3 Transform Society

ASU catalyzes social change by being connected to social needs.

4 Fuse Intellectual Disciplines

ASU creates knowledge by transcending academic disciplines.

5 Value Entrepreneurship

ASU uses its knowledge and encourages innovation.

6 Be Socially Embedded

ASU connects with communities through mutually beneficial partnerships.

7 Conduct Use-Inspired Research

ASU research has purpose and impact.

8 Engage Globally

ASU engages with people and issues locally, nationally and internationally.

Practice Principled

Innovation

ASU places character and values at the center of decisions and actions.

What is Principled Innovation?

In general, Principled Innovation is the ability to imagine new concepts, catalyze ideas and form new solutions guided by principles that create positive change for humanity and result in practical wisdom and human flourishing. More specifically, Principled Innovation is the guiding framework we use across the university to inform our decision-making and approach to innovation, ensuring it is anchored in our values and principles. The Principled Innovation Framework consists of four interdependent character domains, each with two practices. We recognize that the eight practices are not exhaustive, but are meant to be starting points.





Moral
Character

Empathy



Honesty



Altruism



Civic
Character



Inclusion



Intellectual
Character

Reflection



Humility

Resilience



Teamwork

Performance
Character



Our definition of character and values

A quick note as we begin: conversations about “character,” especially in educational settings, carry historical weight, cultural complexity and sometimes mixed emotions. At ASU, we view character as social, cultural, contextual and developmental, emerging through a dynamic interaction between individuals and the environments in which they live and work. Colleges and universities are vital social institutions, places not only for intellectual development but also for character formation. By character, we mean the set of moral, civic, intellectual and performance qualities that define how a person habitually thinks, feels and acts in relation to ethical and practical challenges. It reflects both who a person is and who they are becoming.^{8,23}

Similarly, we use the term “values” interchangeably with “virtues.” We understand that values and virtues are different in the philosophical sense,³⁷ but we have learned that discussing “prosocial values” is more accessible for many people. However, our approach is drawn from a neo-Aristotelian tradition of virtue ethics that emphasizes that human flourishing requires not only shared ideals, but also the cultivation of enduring moral capacities enacted through practice. In other words, we believe that pro-social values in action³⁸ must become habitual (embodied) attributes of individuals to result in true human flourishing.

A yellow sticky note with the word "CHARACTER" written in a black, hand-drawn, uppercase font. The note is slightly tilted and has a soft shadow beneath it.

Character develops over a lifetime through our experiences, relationships, actions and the environments in which we live and learn.

A yellow sticky note with the word "VALUES" written in a black, hand-drawn, uppercase font. The note is slightly tilted and has a soft shadow beneath it.

Values are the principles or concepts that are most important to us.

A note on virtue ethics

Principled Innovation is grounded in virtue ethics. Virtue ethics, associated with Aristotle, is concerned with the question: “What kind of person should I become?” Virtue ethicists argue that flourishing is not achieved accidentally or through isolated decisions. Rather, it emerges through the ongoing cultivation of character. As discussed previously, flourishing is a complex idea, but in general we ascribe to VanderWeele’s definition that flourishing is a “state in which all aspects of a person’s life are good.”¹⁶ For VanderWeele, flourishing is driven by: meaning and purpose, character and virtue, close social relationships, physical and mental health, and material and financial stability.¹⁶ Principled Innovation is focused on character and virtue and meaning and purpose within the context of community.

Virtues are enduring character traits (such as honesty, empathy, courage, humility and civility) that help individuals and communities thrive. Virtues are considered intrinsically valuable because they are good in themselves, not merely because they help us achieve other goals. In this book, we often refer to virtues as values in action: qualities that orient us toward human flourishing and shape how we think, act and relate to others. Virtues matter because they are the qualities that help us move toward our higher purpose (or telos) and fulfill our potential as human beings.

From a virtue ethics perspective, character is formed through practice. Just as musicians develop skill through repeated rehearsal, people develop virtues through repeated action. By consistently acting with honesty, courage, compassion or humility, these qualities gradually become part of who we are. Virtue ethics is therefore concerned not only with what people do, but with what they are becoming. It invites us to reflect on the habits we cultivate, the character we form, and the kinds of individuals, organizations and societies those habits ultimately create.

At ASU, we emphasize virtue ethics through the design aspiration “Practice Principled Innovation” because universities do more than prepare students for careers or produce knowledge. As laid out by President Crow in the introduction, universities also shape the habits, judgment and character of the people who attend and work in them. In complex environments where rules may be incomplete and outcomes uncertain, virtue ethics helps individuals develop the practical wisdom needed to navigate ambiguity with integrity, courage and care. Rather than asking only “What are the consequences or results?” or “What are the rules?”, a virtue ethics approach also asks, “What kind of person, community and institution are we becoming through these choices?” This approach is broad and flexible enough for a pluralistic set of stakeholders. While we outline certain values (virtues) in this book, individuals and communities may interpret and prioritize them differently. Different prioritization does not mean moral relativism. Rather, virtue ethics recognizes that enduring higher order goods or human values can be expressed and prioritized differently across people, cultures, professions and contexts. Our goal is not to prescribe to a single fixed set of values, but to offer a shared language and framework for our community to interpret, adapt and apply within and across disciplines.

This book aims to do just that by introducing values nested within character domains. These values emerged from ASU’s Charter which embodies inclusion, public value and responsibility. The values described in the following pages are a way for any individual, organization or institution to reflect on what it means to live a flourishing life and promote, through Principled Innovation, a flourishing society.



Personality is your predisposition—your basic instincts for how to think, feel and act.



Character is your capacity to prioritize your values over your instincts.

Adam Grant, Professor of Business, Wharton School²²

Moral character



“ Character, in the long run, is the **decisive factor** in the life of an individual and of nations...

– Theodore Roosevelt²⁴

Moral character

AFFORDABILITY AT ASU: A NEW APPROACH TO HIGHER EDUCATION

Mariana Torres did not always see college as part of her future. That changed in eighth grade. “We took a school field trip to ASU, and that was the first time I’d ever seen a school and could envision what a university looked like,” she said. “We spent the day on campus, and I loved it.” That moment sparked hope. But hope alone is not enough. When Mariana began applying to colleges, she made a practical decision grounded in her family’s circumstances. “ASU has a great business school,” she explained. “It has the best overall cost savings for my family and me, and is close to home.” Affordability made her choice possible.²⁵

At a time when rising tuition pushes higher education out of reach, ASU starts with a core question: who might be left out? The university keeps tuition increases modest and invests nearly \$700 million each year in financial aid. As a result, almost half of ASU students graduate without debt, and those who borrow carry lower-than-average debt (about the cost of an entry-level car).²⁶

This approach requires courage. Many institutions signal prestige through higher prices and limited access. ASU rejects that model. It proves that a university can pursue excellence while expanding opportunity. Mariana’s story shows what is possible when innovation is driven by concern for human wellbeing. A student visits a campus and begins to imagine a different future. That future becomes real because someone designed systems to remove barriers. Empathy shaped the solution. Fairness guided the design. Courage made it possible.



This is an example of activating values in the moral character domain to innovate. It shows that we can help others by considering questions such as: What is right in this situation? What is fair? What is honest? What is empathetic? The moral character domain also asks us to step back and consider our goals and whether they are headed in a pro-social direction. Just as many universities seek prestige and higher rankings at the expense of access, ASU has decided not to make that trade.

Moral character guides our decision-making and actions from multiple perspectives



As students climb “A” Mountain and experience broad views of Tempe, the journey becomes a reflection of moral character and perspective-taking in action.

Moral character

What is moral character? What does it mean to be a moral person and to make moral decisions? These are not easy questions, and we believe there is no single answer.

Moral character guides our decision-making and actions from multiple perspectives. It allows us to honestly evaluate situations with open-mindedness, integrity, equity and justice in order to respond in a meaningful and responsible manner.



Empathy



When practicing Principled Innovation, we engage moral values such as:



Honesty



Fairness

Moral values help us keep sight of the dignity of all people and of the realness of the human experience. Understanding and awareness of values that are important to individuals and communities, both our own and those of others, provide a compass for our decisions and actions.

Courage



While it's not always straightforward to determine what is the "right" or "wrong" approach in any given situation, by understanding our moral imperatives and engaging these moral values, we are more likely to make decisions and create solutions to challenges that improve the well-being of all. Especially those who have been underrepresented and underserved. This is central to how we practice Principled Innovation.





Empathy

The quality of being in tune with the emotions of others, including the ability to imagine and understand how other people might be feeling or thinking.

Empathy invites us to extend beyond our own perspective and truly care for each other. Empathy is an emotional connection with others that comes out of an awareness of their lived experience and emotional states. Empathy provides a way to gain insights into the perspectives and identities of others. These insights can help us better understand how to address systemic challenges and design solutions that most effectively meet the needs of a diverse range of people.

There are many different ways to develop empathy, sometimes it happens naturally, through conversation with others and shared experiences. Often though, we must intentionally work to develop empathy, using methods such as interviews, observations and even “immersive” experiences where we try our best to step into someone else’s shoes.

In *Migrant Mother*, Dorothea Lange documents Florence Owens Thompson during the depression. The image became a symbol of poverty, resilience and the urgent need for empathy and relief.



Student spotlight

“

Ember started as something that felt almost too idealistic... But through this experience, it turned into something tangible. It made me realize that when you truly understand a problem... you can build something that actually reaches people.

Sai Shruti Pochiraju, Sophomore, Fulton Schools of Engineering, Computer Science, Principled Innovation Academy Participant – The Loneliness Challenge

The Principled Innovation Academy recently held “The Loneliness Challenge” where teams of students imagined new ways to alleviate loneliness across different populations. Sai and her team developed Ember to support grieving mothers who lost a loved one. But they didn’t start there. “We started with night shift workers...” Sai said. Then, their mentor, Dr. Maissa Khatib, pushed the team to reflect on the question: who is truly voiceless? The students redirected their attention toward those left out of systems and where loneliness is most acute.

They explored multiple groups. “... reentry prisoners, postpartum mothers.” Yet they kept returning to one image: “a woman in her fifties, sitting in a house that used to be full, wondering if anyone was going to call.” They realized that “the gap... between the enormity of her loss and the silence that followed, became our problem.” This insight grounded their work in a clear human need.

From that insight, Ember took shape. “Not a therapist. Not a hotline. Someone who has been exactly where she is.” The idea was simple but powerful: connect women through shared loss and build support around that connection. The team reoriented their mindset to treat grief “as a system failure, not a personal one.”

Then the group changed how they designed the intervention. “We stopped writing about a problem and started writing about a person: Sarah.” Every decision ran through a set of questions: “does this feel human?” and “does this restore her dignity?” They cut anything that did not. The work became less about solving and more about honoring and centering around dignity, care and responsibility in every decision.

In the end, “Principled Innovation gave us language... to put the person first. Ember exists because we refused to let the solution be louder than the person it was meant to serve.”

Honesty

The disposition to being open, trustworthy and truthful in a sincere and straightforward way.

Honesty can be an awareness within ourselves, as well as a practice in relation to others. When rooted in humility and empathy, honesty allows us to bring our authentic selves to our work and build meaningful relationships that honor each other's humanity. As an organizational practice, it encourages creative risk-taking and reflects a commitment to growth and improvement.

Honesty is not always simple. Our approach to truly practicing honesty, and balancing it against other character values, will depend on the context and specific situation. This is why empathy (thinking about someone else's perspective) is an important component of honesty. When paired with humility, another moral value to which honesty is closely related, honesty prompts us to seek to understand others' perspectives and be humble enough, and honest enough, to admit when we are wrong.



When we are honest with ourselves and with others, we nurture trusting and authentic relationships and environments that support engagement and collaboration.



Fairness

The equitable, just and reasonable treatment of others.

From a young age, children have an innate sense of what is fair and what is not.^{27,28} Fairness, as it relates to our relationships, gets more important as we get older. While seemingly straightforward, making decisions and taking actions that value fairness can be quite complicated, given the diverse range of people’s perspectives and needs. In this way, empathy is closely tied to fairness, as empathy is necessary to act fairly.

Fairness is also closely tied to equity. When we practice Principled Innovation, we have to consider how our decisions and approaches will affect a wide variety of people. Will our innovations or actions result in equitable treatment of all? Will the benefits be distributed in a fair way? If one group will benefit more than another, is this fair, given the particular context, or not?

Arizona State University represents fairness through inclusion, creating pathways for students from diverse backgrounds to learn, contribute and succeed with dignity and equal opportunity.



Courage

The willingness to act according to one's moral convictions, even when doing so involves risk, uncertainty or opposition.

Courage enables us to stand up for what is right, particularly when moral values such as fairness, honesty or empathy are challenged. In the practice of Principled Innovation, courage allows individuals and organizations to confront difficult truths, question assumptions and address systemic problems that may otherwise remain ignored. It requires the strength to speak up, to challenge unjust practices and to pursue solutions that promote the well-being of others, even when such actions may be uncomfortable or unpopular.

Courage is not the absence of fear or uncertainty. Rather, it is the ability to move forward despite those feelings when our values call us to act. Practicing courage involves balancing competing considerations, weighing risks and remaining committed to moral principles in the face of pressure.



Rosa Parks sits at the front of a Montgomery bus after segregation was ruled illegal in 1956. Her courage helped advance fairness, proving that dignity and equal treatment must be shared by all.





Practicing Principled Innovation at ASU: Moral domain

- Identify and acknowledge fundamental values
- Utilize moral and ethical decision making

Moral character guides our decision-making and actions from multiple perspectives, allowing us to honestly evaluate situations with open-mindedness, integrity, equity and justice in order to respond in a meaningful and responsible way.

The moral domain guides us with the question “How do you know what is right?,” serving as a critical foundation for decision-making and action. The moral values that inform the moral domain include empathy, honesty, fairness and courage.



25,000

students impacted

Dreamscape Learn

At ASU, Dreamscape Learn (DSL) is developing Virtual Reality (VR) content and curriculum for chemistry and sustainability courses, grounded in Principled Innovation. A Community of Practice (CoP) was established to support the exploration of how to embed PI in VR content for first and second-year students. The CoP focuses specifically on the Moral and Civic Domains, so as to align with ethical decision-making practices necessary in chemistry and sustainability learning. The reflection opportunities provided through PI integration helps learners to connect meaningfully to the VR narratives. For example, in the chemistry course, students take on the role of a scientist investigating arsenic contamination in a river. They identify the source while considering the ethical implications of possible solutions. In this case, students are confronted with crashing their futuristic rover into the river to balance out the arsenic poisoning, without consulting the affected community.

By pairing immersive technology with values-based reflection, DSL demonstrates how Principled Innovation shapes not only what students learn, but how they learn to think. Since the initial implementation of Principled Innovation within DSL, nearly 25,000 students have been impacted through engagement in course content

Civic character



“ Character development never occurs in isolation. **We inevitably shape and are shaped by the culture and community around us, whether we recognize it or not.**

– Michael Lamb, Jonathan Brant, and Edward Brooks²⁹

Neil A. Armstrong trains for Apollo 11 at the Space Center in Houston. His confidence reflects how character is strengthened through preparation, teamwork and the communities that shape us.



Civic character

THE FRIENDSHIP BENCH: CIVIC CHARACTER ON DISPLAY

Every Tuesday, Pencie Culiver leaves her residence at Mirabella at ASU and walks to a quiet spot outside Coor Hall. There she sits on a bench with a simple sign that says: “I’m All Ears.” Students drift toward her, some hesitant, some smiling, sharing worries about classes, stories about friendships and questions that feel too heavy to hold alone. Pencie listens. She offers comfort, laughter, perspective and the steady presence that comes from a lifetime of experience.

For students, these moments matter. One shared that after just a few minutes, she felt lighter. Another said talking with Pencie felt like talking to a grandmother. In a time when both young and older adults can experience loneliness, these brief encounters bridge two generations who need one another.

This is the heart of ASU’s Friendship Bench initiative. A simple design choice meant to spark connection and mutual care. There is no curriculum, no script, no requirements. Just a bench and an invitation to be fully present with another person.



What emerges is civic character in action. Students learn to seek intergenerational wisdom and recognize their responsibilities within a broader community. Older adults find renewed purpose through their role as mentors. The Friendship Bench shows how an institution can foster human flourishing not only through academic excellence or innovation, but through intentional spaces that strengthen empathy and community.³⁰

Civic character values support a collaborative approach to solving systemic problems



Students at ASU Farm demonstrate teamwork by learning, cultivating and solving challenges together, strengthening both community and sustainable practices.

Civic character

In the Principled Innovation Framework, civic character is defined as a commitment to the public good through one's own local, national, and global awareness and engagement. Civic values support a collaborative approach to solving systemic problems in order to contribute to the well-being of others and to a flourishing society.

The desire to understand and work with others reminds us that we are social beings who thrive in community. Solutions to our challenges, big and small, are better for all involved when they address and integrate the needs and cultural wealth of the impacted communities.



Perspective

Taking



When practicing Principled Innovation, we engage civic values such as:



Inclusion



Civility

Practicing civic character can be a complex undertaking, especially when balancing your own individual interests with what's good for broader society. Of course, it's a natural inclination to look out for yourself and those in your immediate community. Civic character doesn't preclude this, it builds on it, with an understanding that collaborating to address systemic challenges and contributing to the flourishing of others helps improve the lives of all.

Altruism



Reciprocity

Perspective taking

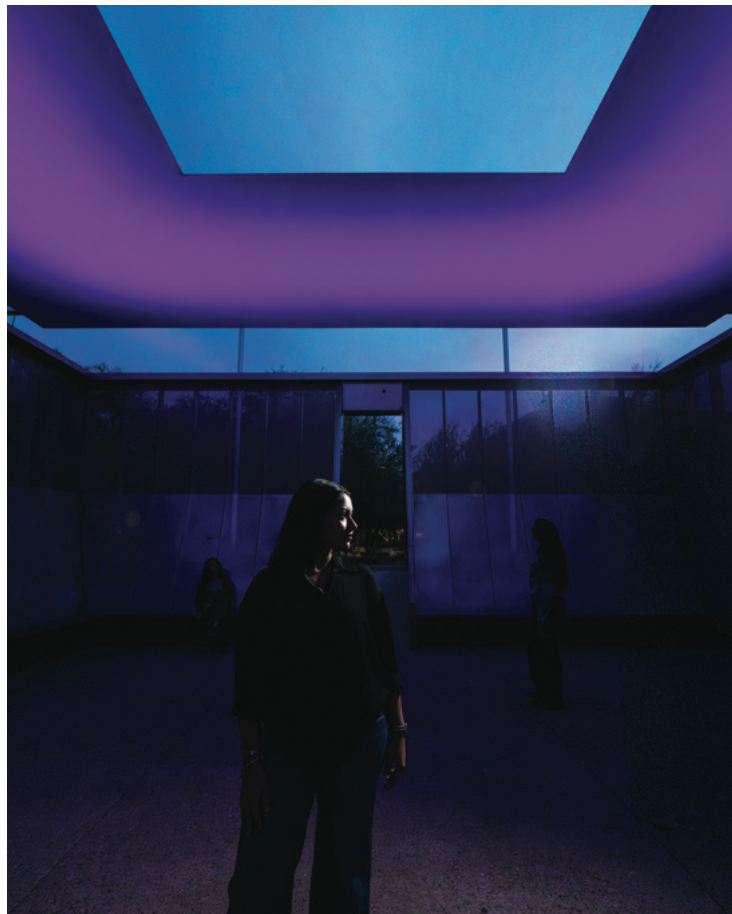
The ability to take on another’s point of view to better understand how they think or feel and consider options we may have initially missed.

The work of perspective taking or placing ourselves in others’ shoes, is essential to navigating differences between values and to finding solutions to problems. It is necessary to ensure that the innovations, decisions and actions we pursue will meet the needs of others and that multiple voices have been included in the process.

Perspective taking has a central role within Principled Innovation. It is the first step toward many other aspects of character. It provides our minds with the new information we need to be empathetic toward others, as well as to demonstrate altruism, civility and inclusion.



James Turrell’s Skyspace: Air Apparent - invites visitors to look upward anew. By shifting perception through light and space, it reflects perspective taking and seeing beyond first assumptions.



Inclusion

Seeking to create environments which respect, bring together and build upon the multiple perspectives, lifestyles and experiences of each member of the community.

Inclusion means creating welcoming, psychologically safe environments in which all kinds of people know that their beliefs and experiences are important. Inclusion ensures not only that different voices are at the table, but also that they are encouraged and supported to contribute their perspectives and ideas.

Acting with inclusivity is an important part of innovation. Through both sharing and hearing multiple perspectives, we come to better understand the challenges that our communities face, which can include inequitable systems or other barriers to opportunity. Inclusion can help us generate new ideas and spark creativity and should be publicly valued and embraced in a climate of innovation.



Inclusion ensures not only that diverse voices are at the table, but also that they are encouraged and supported to contribute their perspectives and ideas.

A close-up portrait of John T. S. Gondo, a Black man with short hair, looking slightly upwards and to the right with a thoughtful expression. The background is a soft, out-of-focus gradient of warm colors.

Student spotlight

“

Principled Innovation taught me that the most powerful solutions are never built alone; they are co-created with the very people they are meant to serve.

John T. S. Gondo, Graduate Student, Master of Global Management, Thunderbird School of Global Management

Before John came to Thunderbird, he spent over a decade at one of Zimbabwe's leading financial services groups. He grew from systems developer to Senior Manager, leading teams on large-scale digital transformation initiatives. John knew how to build systems that got results. Principled Innovation challenged him to ask whether those systems truly worked for people.

In his Systematic Design and Social Innovation class, John's team embedded the PI Framework into their customer discovery process. They resisted jumping to solutions. They slowed down and led with empathy, sitting with the pain points of real people before arriving at answers. That shift changed everything. It transformed their project from a technically sound idea into a genuinely human-centered one.

Collaboration deepened John's learning. As a Global Principled Innovation for AI Research Fellow, he worked alongside faculty, mentors, teammates and community members who brought different perspectives to the same challenge. PI gave him the language and discipline to hold those perspectives together. Now John doesn't just tolerate differences; he actively seeks them out.

For John, the experience reshaped how he approaches innovation. In a world where AI is transforming global business, no single viewpoint is enough. The most responsible solutions emerge when we listen across differences, share knowledge generously and remain humble.

Civility

Treating others with sincere respect and as members of a shared community, including those who may challenge our beliefs or opinions.

Civility is necessary to bring people with differing views and values together so that they can begin to understand, and be understood by others. We all know that once we get to know people as individuals, it can be easier to have civil dialogue about difficult subjects. Without civility, this process cannot get very far.

Yet treating others with civility when you strongly disagree with their perspective can be challenging. Interestingly, the reverse may also be true. It can be easier to treat someone civilly and avoid a difficult conversation in order to avoid confrontation. And in today's world, you may find that there are few natural opportunities for you to interact with people you disagree with and engage in dialogue. To practice Principled Innovation, we have to intentionally seek out these opportunities and approach others with civility and care.



The signing of the Declaration of Independence reflects civility in action, where debate, disagreement and shared purpose helped shape a nation through dialogue and mutual respect.



Altruism

Recognizing others’ needs and seeking their general well-being and success.

Altruism is sometimes seen as a synonym for generosity, but it’s not quite the same. It involves seeking to help someone else, even at some cost. It is typically a product of empathy and perspective taking, as it requires understanding the experiences of others and wanting to help address their challenges.

When practicing Principled Innovation, this value reminds us of the need for generosity and caring, of giving of ourselves to help others. In working to find solutions to systemic, complex challenges, there will often be a need for altruistic behavior, in which one individual or group may need to prioritize the needs of another individual or group over their own.



Pat Tillman chose service over personal success, leaving an NFL career to enlist after 9/11. His sacrifice reflects altruism through courage, humility and commitment to something larger.





Reciprocity

The practice of mutual exchange and shared responsibility in relationships and communities.

Reciprocity reflects the understanding that healthy communities are built through relationships in which people both give and receive support, knowledge and care. Rather than viewing civic engagement as a one-directional act of helping others, reciprocity recognizes that collaboration involves mutual learning and shared contribution. When individuals and communities work together to address challenges, everyone has something to offer and something to gain.

In the practice of Principled Innovation, reciprocity encourages partnerships that respect the knowledge, experiences and cultural wealth of all participants. It reminds us that solutions to complex problems are strongest when they are developed with communities rather than simply for them. By fostering relationships grounded in trust, reciprocity helps ensure that innovation contributes to the flourishing of both individuals and the broader community.

Watts College Day of Service brings students, faculty, staff and community partners together, reflecting reciprocity through shared service, learning, and care for local communities.





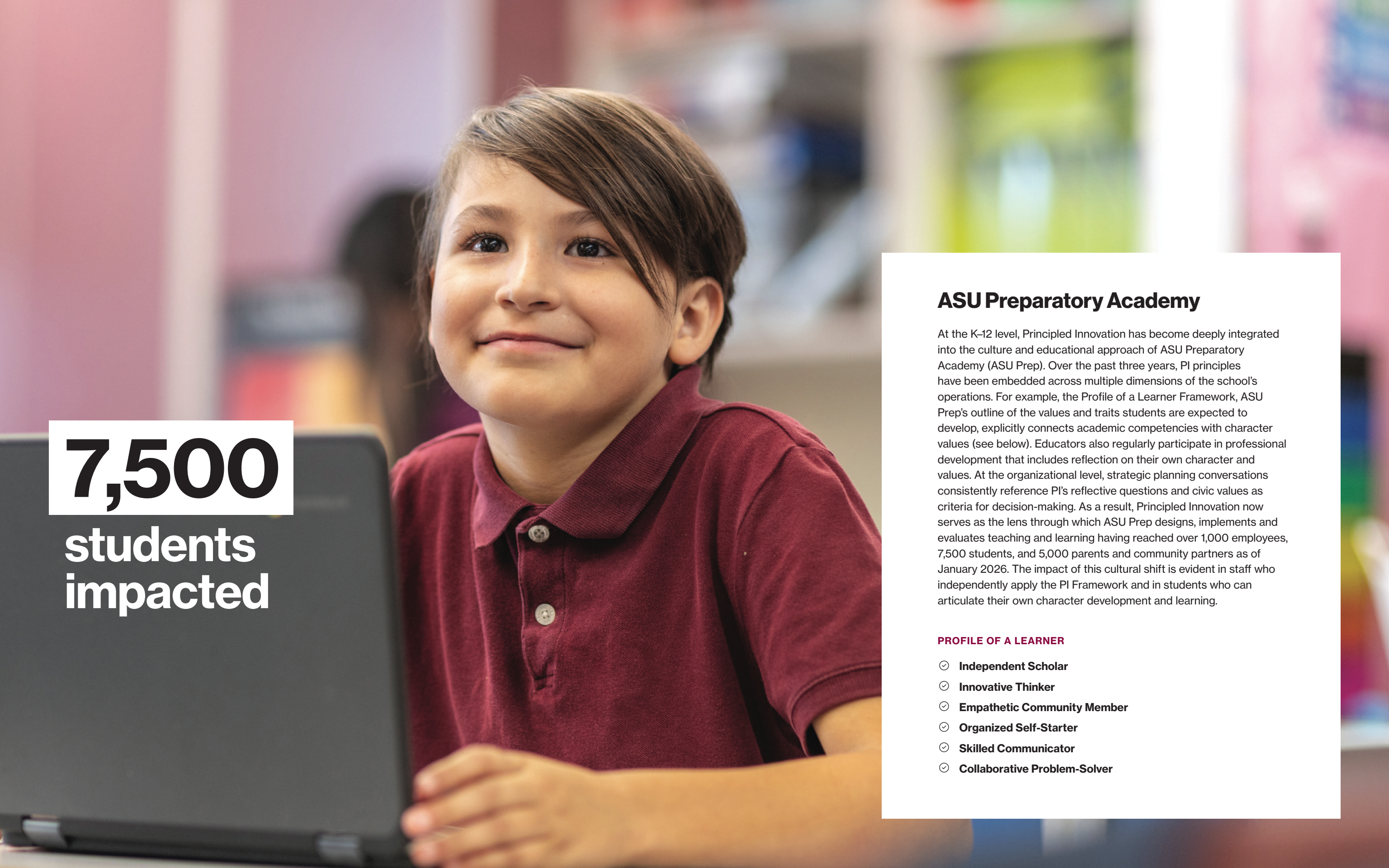
Practicing Principled Innovation at ASU: Civic domain

Understand culture and context

Engage in multiple and diverse perspectives

The civic domain focuses on how individuals work together to address systemic challenges and contribute to the public good. Civic character emphasizes collaboration, community engagement and a commitment to improving the well-being of others.

In the practice of Principled Innovation, this involves cultivating civic values such as perspective taking, inclusion, civility, altruism and reciprocity; values that enable individuals and communities to navigate differences, build trust and work collectively toward solutions that benefit society as a whole.



7,500
students
impacted

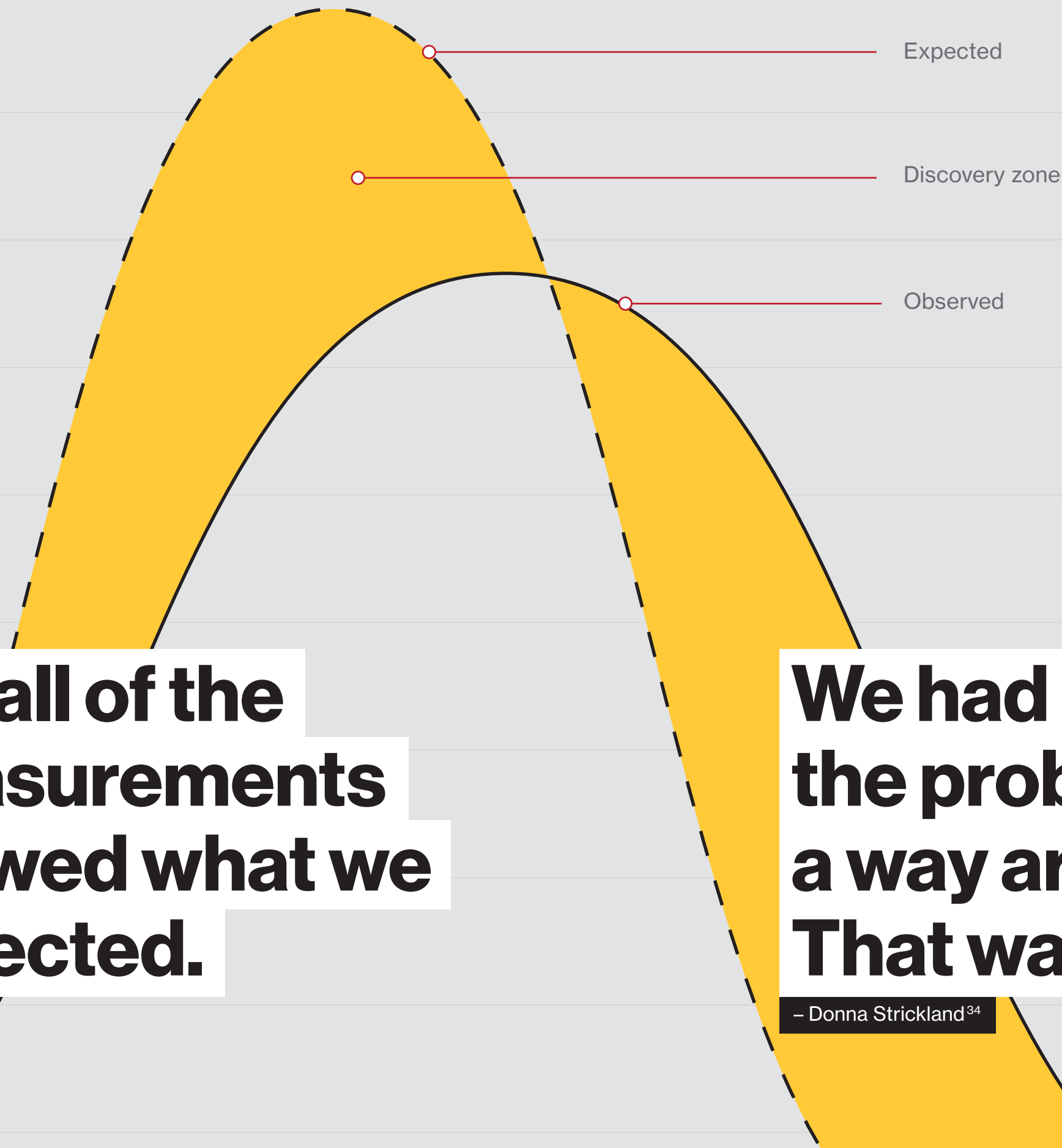
ASU Preparatory Academy

At the K-12 level, Principled Innovation has become deeply integrated into the culture and educational approach of ASU Preparatory Academy (ASU Prep). Over the past three years, PI principles have been embedded across multiple dimensions of the school's operations. For example, the Profile of a Learner Framework, ASU Prep's outline of the values and traits students are expected to develop, explicitly connects academic competencies with character values (see below). Educators also regularly participate in professional development that includes reflection on their own character and values. At the organizational level, strategic planning conversations consistently reference PI's reflective questions and civic values as criteria for decision-making. As a result, Principled Innovation now serves as the lens through which ASU Prep designs, implements and evaluates teaching and learning having reached over 1,000 employees, 7,500 students, and 5,000 parents and community partners as of January 2026. The impact of this cultural shift is evident in staff who independently apply the PI Framework and in students who can articulate their own character development and learning.

PROFILE OF A LEARNER

- ✓ Independent Scholar
- ✓ Innovative Thinker
- ✓ Empathetic Community Member
- ✓ Organized Self-Starter
- ✓ Skilled Communicator
- ✓ Collaborative Problem-Solver

Intellectual character



Not all of the measurements showed what we expected.

We had to figure out the problems and then a way around them. That was the fun part.

– Donna Strickland³⁴

Intellectual character

USING SKEPTIK IN SKEPTICAL TIMES

In a world awash with clickbait and persuasive rhetoric, the mere accumulation of facts is often not enough. Sound character demands a deeper kind of vigilance. Skeptik, built by ASU researchers, embodies precisely this kind of intellectual character. Rather than simply verifying whether a statement is true or false, Skeptik analyzes the structure of arguments in news articles exposing logical fallacies and rhetorical sleights.

What Skeptik offers isn't a verdict or a definitive "right answer," but a way to help readers ask the right questions: Does that conclusion really follow from the evidence? By underlining suspect claims, offering layered explanations and opening up interactive conversation, it encourages readers to slow down and think for themselves.

In doing so, Skeptik underscores that the intellectual domain of character is not about knowing more, it's about cultivating discernment, humility and critical self-awareness. In a sense, the tool is a values-based technological partner: it doesn't replace our judgment, but strengthens our capacity to judge well.³¹

SkeptikGreenland's Melting Ice Is No Cause for Climate-Change PanicCase Title: Greenland's Melting Ice Is No Cause for Climate-Change Panic

Greenland's Melting Ice Is No Cause for Climate-Change Panic

One of the most sacred tenets of climate alarmism is that Greenland's vast ice sheet is shrinking ever more rapidly because of human-induced climate change. The media and politicians warn constantly of rising sea levels that would swamp coastlines from Florida to Bangladesh. A typical headline: 'Greenland ice sheet on course to lose ice at fastest rate in 12,000 years.'

With an area of 660,000 square miles and a thickness up to 1.9 miles, Greenland's ice sheet certainly deserves attention. Its shrinking has been a major cause of recent sea-level rise, but as is often the case in climate science, the data tell quite a different story from the media coverage and the political laments.

The chart nearby paints a bigger picture that is well known to experts but largely absent from the media and even from the most recent United Nations climate report. It shows the amount of ice that Greenland has lost every year since 1900, averaged over 10-year intervals; the annual loss averages about 110 gigatons. (A gigaton is one billion metric tons, or slightly over 2.2 trillion pounds.) That is a lot, but that water has caused the planet's oceans to rise each year by only 0.01 inch, about one-fifth the thickness of a dime.

Annual Greenland Ice Loss (1900-2021)

Source: Programme for Monitoring of the Greenland Ice Sheet (PROMICE)

In contrast, the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change projects that for the most likely course of greenhouse-gas emissions in the 21st century, the average annual ice loss would be somewhat larger than the peak values shown in the graph. That would cause sea level to rise by 3 inches by the end of this century, and if losses were to continue at that rate, it would take about 10,000 years for all the ice to disappear, causing sea level to rise more than 20 feet.

To assess the importance of human influences, we can look at how the rate of ice loss has changed over time.

In that regard, the graph belies the simplistic notion that humans are melting Greenland. Since human warming influences on the climate have grown steadily—they are now 10 times what they were in 1900—you might expect Greenland to lose more ice each year. Instead there are large swings in the annual ice loss and it is no larger today than it was in the 1930s, when human influences were much smaller. Moreover, the annual loss of ice has been decreasing in the past decade even as the globe continues to warm.

Improper Criteria

Cherry Picking

Vagueness

Incorrect Reading of Chart

Causal Inference

Failure to Account for Statistics

Intellectual character values enable individuals to become curious, reflective and critical thinkers

Intellectual character

What is intellectual character? What does it mean to think and reflect critically about our ideas and beliefs? What does it look like to seek the truth with integrity? How might we become more aware of how our decisions and actions have a larger impact on society?

Intellectual character values enable individuals to become curious, reflective and critical thinkers who ask the right questions and seek answers from rigorous resources. These values drive quality thinking and shape our decisions and actions.



Curiosity



Practicing Principled
Innovation engages the
following interconnected
intellectual values:

Reflection



Rigor



Critical

Thinking



Engaging our intellectual values encourages us to take a closer look at everything around us. In a time where disinformation and propaganda run rampant in our society, it's vital we draw on the skills and practices necessary to navigate this landscape by being curious and open-minded about the world around us.



Humility





Curiosity

The inclination to ask challenging questions of ourselves and others, and the commitment and willingness to discover deep truths by following reason and evidence.

Curiosity is our natural tendency to seek more information. It drives us to ask questions like “Why?” or “What if?” to dig deeper and expand our understanding. Curiosity drives our desire to learn or try or create something new. That questioning mentality helps us remain open-minded to new perspectives and ideas creating a space to then imagine new concepts and solutions. Curiosity encourages us to remain empathetic towards ourselves and others by seeking information, overcoming our assumptions and making connections.

When curiosity works together with the values of inclusivity, perspective-taking and empathy to interrupt our biases and assumptions, it helps us build trust with others. By making observations and engaging in authentic questioning through an empathy-activated “compassionate” curiosity, we allow for deeper insights. Like any form of curiosity, a compassionate curiosity is one that grows and evolves with practice and experience.

Leo Villareal's Point Cloud invites viewers to engage curiosity through art, technology and design, transforming how space and perception are experienced together.



Reflection

Making the time and space to process our thoughts, feelings, experiences and actions.

Reflection is a concept that sounds simple but consistently putting it into practice can be challenging. If we don't intentionally create the time and space to reflect, it is easy to let powerful learning opportunities slip by. In a group setting, reflection can be especially powerful as a means to share multiple perspectives, build empathy and understanding, and clarify or reinforce shared values and goals.

Practicing reflection is an essential part of Principled Innovation. Learning from our past experiences requires humility and honesty to accept the fact that change is necessary. This may look different for each person depending on the situation or context and could include personal reflection like journaling or meditation. Group reflection is a key part of effective collaboration to use when brainstorming new ideas or debriefing an event. Taking a moment to pause and reflect before making any decision or taking any action deepens our understanding and reveals insights for making positive, meaningful change.

Pausing to reflect deepens our understanding by learning and growing from experiences, enabling us to take more meaningful action moving forward.





Rigor

Applying disciplined, methodical and reflective processes to understand our world and use knowledge responsibly.

Being rigorous in the intellectual character domain means engaging in careful, systematic inquiry. This includes locating credible information, evaluating evidence and distinguishing among fact and opinion.

While truth-seeking centers on the pursuit of what is true, rigor focuses on how we pursue that truth. It requires intellectual discipline, attention to evidence and a commitment to critical thinking. It also involves using information in ways that are fair and attentive to complexity. To practice rigor, we must recognize the limits of our knowledge, question our assumptions and remain open to revision.

Rigor at Arizona State University means pursuing knowledge with discipline and purpose. Whether in labs, communities, studios or stages, thoughtful practice leads to deeper understanding.



Critical thinking

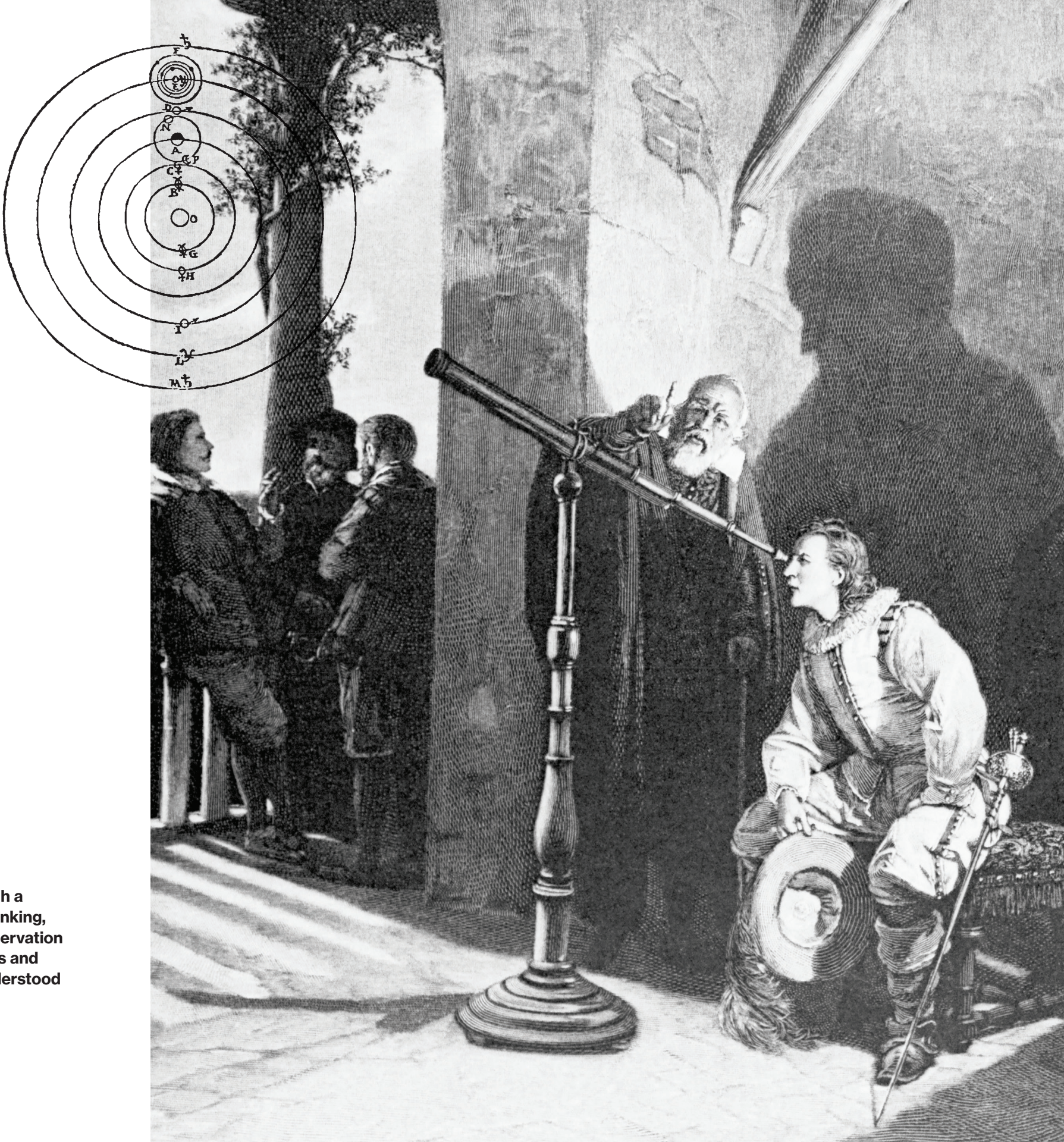
The process of refining our beliefs through analysis, interpretation of evidence, inference, explanation, self-regulation, open-mindedness and problem-solving.

Critical thinkers consider their own beliefs in the light of others' ideas in order to think for themselves and question what is going on around them. Rigorous critical thinking means not only are we able to explain why we think something is true, but we are also able to change our minds in response to new or conflicting information. A goal of critical thinking is to engage intellectual humility, being able to express our claims about the world with caution and an open mind rather than entrenching ourselves in debate.

In a world where we are bombarded with new information, opinions and ideas from many different perspectives and contexts, activating critical thinking ensures we are considering our own beliefs and others' while seeking to question the world around us.



Galileo Galilei looking through a telescope reflects critical thinking, as he used evidence and observation to challenge accepted beliefs and transform how humanity understood the universe.



A portrait of Mrugakshi Dhonde, a young woman with dark hair and bangs, looking slightly to the side with a gentle smile. The background is blurred, showing warm, indoor lighting.

Student spotlight

“

Principled Innovation essentially provided a platform to work on a problem I was always interested in... without having any previous experience or pre-decided team... [it] helped us filter the problem's complexity, layer by layer.

Mrugakshi Dhonde, Fulton Schools of Engineering, Principled Innovation Academy participant – The Loneliness Challenge

Mrugakshi and her team approached loneliness as a complex problem to understand before proposing solutions. They began by breaking it into demographic groups. Conversations with PI mentors pushed them to rethink that approach. Instead of categorizing people, they clustered root causes. This shift helped them see loneliness not as an individual condition, but as a product of broader systems.

They examined how convenience culture operates at the intersection of lifestyle and inequality. They questioned how systems like food delivery and online shopping shape human behavior and reduce interaction. Rather than accepting these systems as neutral, they analyzed how they contribute to isolation and what assumptions they reinforce.

“As young adults, our parents blaming the phone for everything is a staple internet humor. But today, maybe they aren't so wrong.” The team reflected on how technology increases efficiency while deepening isolation. “The world is closer than ever and farther than it ever has been.” These reflections sharpened their understanding of how everyday systems reshape connection.

Through this process, the team developed a more precise understanding of the problem. FEAST emerged from that insight. FEAST is a potluck-style hybrid grocery store and restaurant where people cook and share meals together. The team translated their understanding of social systems into a tangible solution that creates opportunities for connection. Principled Innovation guided them to question assumptions, analyze systems and make sense of complexity before acting.



At the Herberger Institute, Liz Lerman teaches that humility is essential to artistry – honoring strengths while welcoming critique, growth and the wisdom of others.

Humility

Being honest with ourselves about what we can offer, acknowledging that there's always more to learn and admitting our mistakes with a genuine desire to advance the best interests of the community.

Humility involves recognizing both our own strengths and shortcomings and being willing to honestly evaluate our abilities and beliefs. Because humility requires self-reflection, it goes hand-in-hand with honesty. This means accepting our strengths as well as our weaknesses. While we might, in fact, have the answers much of the time, none of us ever have all the answers. We need to be open to the views and perspectives of others and recognize that we have much to learn from those who are different from us.

Finding the best solution to a problem we face requires that we learn about our own biases and shortcomings. And that requires getting outside of our echo chambers and hearing from people who have different ways of seeing the world. Addressing challenges in ways that create positive change for humanity, practicing Principled Innovation, means we must be open to new ideas and approaches.

Practicing Principled Innovation at ASU: Intellectual domain

- Develop habits of an informed systems thinker
- Reflect critically and compassionately

The intellectual character domain can help us evaluate if our solutions are based in facts as well as determine if our own biases are clouding our judgment. Through the intellectual domain, values such as curiosity, reflection, rigor, critical thinking and humility enable us to ask the right questions and seek answers from evidence-based resources.



A photograph of two graduates, a man and a woman, walking towards the camera. They are wearing maroon graduation gowns with gold stoles. The man's stole has "FIRST GENERATION" written on it. They are standing in front of a large glass building with a curved facade. The text "10,700 students impacted" is overlaid on the left side of the image.

10,700
students
impacted

The Graduate College

Intellectual values are very important in graduate education. As such, the Graduate College at ASU has embedded Principled Innovation into the core structures of graduate education. Rather than treating values as an add-on, the college integrates ethical reflection directly into how students learn, teach and produce knowledge. As of January 2026, the Grad College, which serves more than 40,000 students, has directly engaged 10,700 mostly first-year graduate students through the Principled Innovation Foundations course, Teaching Assistant training and other efforts.

While these efforts are reaching large numbers of students, it's the individual impact that tells the main story. One recent Thunderbird graduate said of her experience applying PI to her work in AI, "The Principled Innovation framework has been essential in creating a shared language grounded in human values, accountability, and transparency, enabling alignment across stakeholders...." By training students on PI, the intellectual domain not only impacts individual reflection, it also becomes a shared way of thinking in the college, guiding how students and professionals reason through complexity.

Performance character



**“ We may
encounter
many defeats
but we
must not be
defeated.”**

– Maya Angelou³⁶

Maya Angelou was a renowned author and activist known for works that explored resilience, justice and the enduring power of the human spirit.



Performance character

ADAPTING TO THE UNIMAGINABLE



Hardie Kressler once expected a traditional college experience close to his New Jersey home. But just before he would have started his first year, a severe spinal cord injury upended every plan he had made. Overnight, the familiar pathways to higher education became inaccessible. In the face of profound uncertainty, Hardie was forced to adapt, reimagining not only how he would pursue a degree, but what that journey could look like. The question was no longer whether he had the talent or motivation to succeed, but whether any university model could meet him where he was.

ASU Online became the answer to Hardie's question. Designed not as a secondary option but as a commitment to broaden who can fully participate in higher education, it provided a flexible and responsive pathway forward. Through a combination of personalized support, accessible design and a network of faculty and staff working collaboratively to support his success, Hardie was able to live his college dream. This shared effort reflects a deeper truth: meaningful innovation in education is a team endeavor, requiring institutions to adapt alongside the students they serve.



For Hardie, completing his degree was not just an academic milestone, it was a testament to his resilience. For ASU, his story represents Principled Innovation in action, innovation guided by moral purpose and stained through collective effort. ASU Online demonstrates that when universities design with empathy and justice, and when communities work together to remove barriers, technology becomes more than a tool, it can be a pathway to human flourishing.³²

Performance character allows us to reimagine systems and create new possibilities

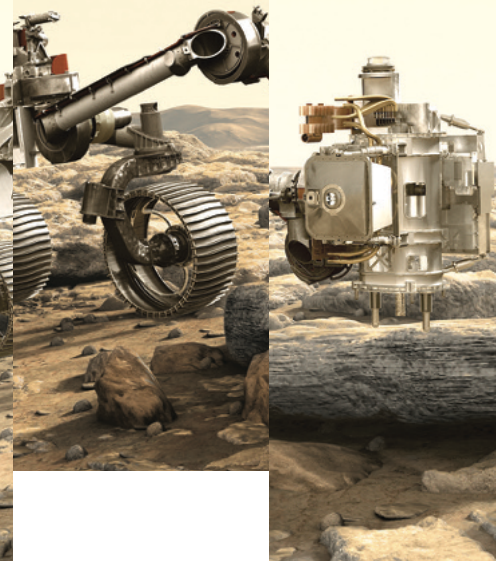
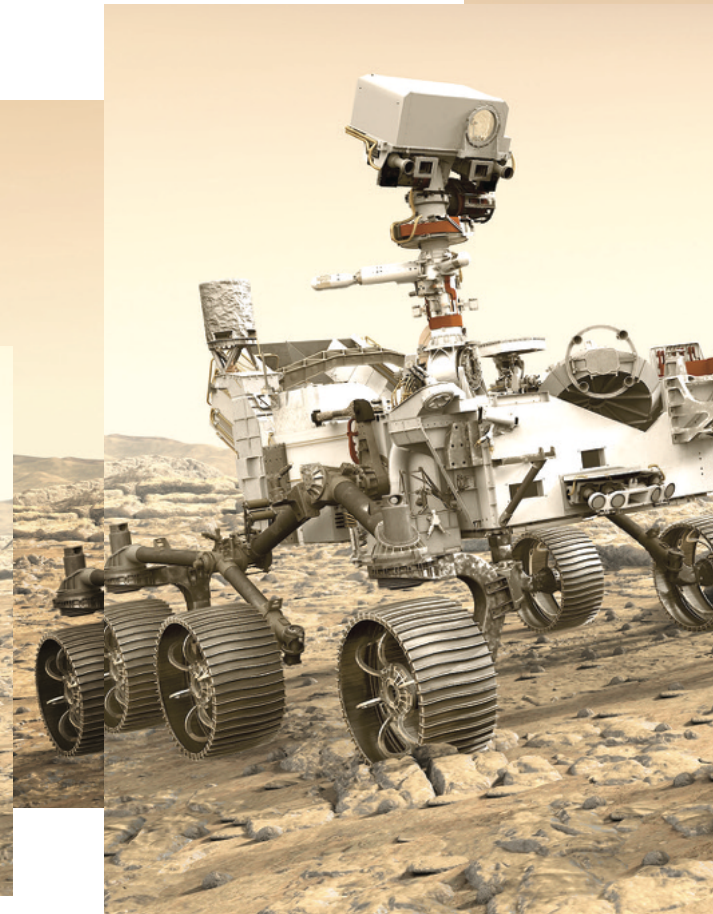


Rendering of NASA's Perseverance Rover, equipped with the Mastcam-Z imaging system developed with leadership from Arizona State University to capture detailed images of Mars.

Performance character

What is performance character? What does it mean to design creative solutions with an understanding of the context in which the challenge exists? How can we navigate complex and uncertain situations with careful consideration for the possible outcomes of our decisions?

Performance character helps us connect the quality of our actions to the strength of our convictions. In essence, performance character is about how we get things done. As we make decisions, big or small, performance character helps us act with thoughtfulness and intention, allowing us to reimagine systems and create new possibilities that result in positive change.



When practicing Principled Innovation, we engage the following performance values, which draw on, and give life to, our other values:



Creativity



Adaptability

Resilience



Creativity, adaptability and resilience help us navigate uncertainty and transform good intentions into good outcomes. Teamwork allows us to engage multiple perspectives and design and implement creative and effective solutions to the toughest social and educational challenges.

Performance character is a critical part of Principled Innovation because it puts into action values from the moral, civic and intellectual domains so that we can persevere in making positive change in the world.



Teamwork



Herberger Institute Dean Renée Cheng and professor Bruce Mau represent creativity in action, showing how fresh thinking can help shape the future of health and learning.

Creativity

Generating fresh and useful ideas and possibilities by perceiving the world in new ways and making contextual connections between things that may seem unrelated.

Many people associate creativity with artistic or musical talent, or perhaps only with big breakthroughs. We approach creativity as a mindset and a habit that anyone can develop. It involves generative and expansive thinking that goes beyond the obvious or typical connections to think about problems in different ways, through new perspectives. The context and environment that we find ourselves in can have a big impact on supporting and engaging our creativity.

Creativity requires a willingness to stay curious about things we notice, especially when they may contradict our current understanding. It requires an openness to new perspectives and ways of thinking. To support the practice of Principled Innovation, creativity can be cultivated by creating inclusive environments that bring together and honor the voices and input of people with different experiences and perspectives. It can be facilitated by asking questions and trying out new experiences.

The more varied experiences and perspectives we have to draw from, the more connections we can make to bring about new solutions and the deeper our well of creativity can become.

Adaptability

The ability to adjust our thinking, strategies and actions in response to changing conditions or new information.

Adaptability helps individuals and teams remain effective in complex and uncertain situations. When working to address difficult problems, circumstances often change and new insights emerge. Adaptability allows us to reconsider our assumptions, adjust our approaches and continue moving toward meaningful solutions.

In the practice of Principled Innovation, adaptability encourages openness to learning and a willingness to refine ideas in response to feedback and context. Working alongside creativity and resilience, adaptability helps transform challenges into opportunities and supports the successful implementation of principled solutions.

Adaptability allows us to reconsider our assumptions, adjust our approaches and continue moving toward meaningful solutions.



ASU scientist Jesse Senko works with fishermen to test lighted nets that protect sea turtles. Their partnership reflects adaptability through Principled Innovation shaped by real-world needs.



Student spotlight



Principled Innovation played a key role in helping form this team, and it continues to be used in all our team actions and projects.

Shaela Patel, Junior, Watts College, Next Generation Service Corps, Conservation Biology and Ecology

Next Generation Service Corps (NGSC) Mission Teams bring students together to explore and address social issues they care about. In choosing her team, Shaela noticed that while some focused on animal rights and sustainability, the critical intersection between those areas was largely unexplored. Using the Principled Innovation values of courage and creativity, she created a new Mission Team: Wildlife Conservation.

Shaela built the team from the ground up. Other Mission Team Leaders had established contacts, but Wildlife Conservation started from scratch. She spent the summer brainstorming event ideas and reaching out to conservation professionals to gain support and insight. She relied on resilience to move the work forward.

From the beginning, the team committed to learning before acting. They returned to a central question: “just because we can, should we?” That mindset led them to engage in nine networking opportunities and six service projects this past year. They explored topics ranging from orangutan conservation in Borneo to wildlife rehabilitation here in Phoenix.

Together the team helped remove 20 gallons of trash from local parks with the help of park employees, increased student awareness through social media and presented at ASU's Change the World event. “We were able to do outreach and education, informing students on how conservation affects not only humans but also nature,” Shaela said. Together, Shaela and her team demonstrated resilience, creativity and teamwork to move the mission team forward.



Dallas Salas graduated from Arizona State University at 18 with a degree in neuroscience, overcoming homelessness and leukemia through extraordinary resilience and determination.



Resilience

The capacity to maintain mental, emotional and physical health as conditions change and challenges emerge, engaging care and self-compassion to shape one's own response and move forward.

Resilience can be reflected in our ability to move through adversity, to persevere along the path toward change and to maintain commitments to ourselves and others. We can bolster our resilience in many ways: by connecting with our sense of purpose and seeking out inspiration; by taking time to reflect on our mental and physical health and holding personal boundaries; and by connecting with others to feel a sense of belonging. Resilience exists where inclusion thrives, in learning cohorts, leadership groups, teams of colleagues and other communities. When we embrace multiple perspectives and prioritize creating a supportive and welcoming environment, people are able to better withstand turbulence and create positive outcomes.

Implementing change can be a messy, non-linear process. Creative and new ideas are often met with resistance due to entrenched systems and ways of thinking. Ambiguity, resistance and setbacks are inevitable along the path of innovation (and in life in general). Resilience is an important ingredient in seeing our creative prototypes turn into large-scale innovation. Courage complements resilience as we iterate to implement better choices, reflecting on what's working and not working along the way. Collaboration can also support resilience by providing social connections and a shared sense of purpose that helps us continually refresh and sustain our energy.

Teamwork

The act of working together toward a common goal.

Teamwork involves a common understanding of a group’s goals as well as the way those within the group work towards them. Individual learning and growth become collective strengths, leading to more powerful outcomes.

An important prerequisite for successful teamwork is psychological safety for all members of the group. Psychological safety is present when all are welcomed to share their ideas and opinions openly without fear of judgment or retaliation against those ideas or against their identities. Ideally, teamwork becomes infused into the culture of a group or organization, reflected in its systems and ways of being.

Within the framework of Principled Innovation, teamwork is fundamental to involving diverse perspectives and prompting the critical reflection that drives creative solutions. Teamwork is closely tied to inclusivity and perspective-taking, and also requires empathy.



At the Principled Innovation Fall Convening, diverse voices collaborate around shared goals. Teamwork turns individual insight into collective impact and meaningful change.





Practicing Principled Innovation and ASU: Performance domain

Design creative solutions

Navigate uncertainty and mitigate consequences

The performance domain helps us determine the methods and ways we work together to accomplish our goals. As we make decisions, performance character helps us act with thoughtfulness and intention, allowing us to reimagine systems and explore new possibilities that result in positive change.

When practicing Principled Innovation, the performance character values of creativity, adaptability, resilience and teamwork, help inform and shape our approach to taking action together with purpose.



4,700

students
engaged

Principled Innovation Academy

At ASU, the Principled Innovation Academy (PIA) is a student-centered engine for high-impact learning. Students apply to collaborate on interdisciplinary teams to develop solutions to real-world challenges. Supported by mentors who guide them through the process, PIA student participants leverage ethical frameworks and design tools to ideate and create. As of January 2026, more than 4,700 students across ASU have engaged with PIA content and 1,718 students have participated in the workshops since its initial implementation in 2023. Students focus on tackling topics such as AI in education, emotional well-being and sustainability.

Performance character informs how students collaborate with creativity and courage as they explore innovative solutions as well as build resilience throughout the design process.

Summary

Review of Principled Innovation and associated domains

Now that you've reached the end of this book, we hope you have a deeper understanding of Principled Innovation and how character domains and values can support you in developing your character and contributing to human flourishing. To review:

Moral character – Guides our decision-making from multiple perspectives, allowing us to honestly evaluate situations and respond in a meaningful and responsible manner. Moral character helps us answer for ourselves the question, “How do you know what is right?”

Civic character – Supports a collaborative approach to solving systemic problems in order to contribute to the well-being of others and serve the public good. Civic character helps us answer the question: “How should I treat others and build community?”

Intellectual character – Enables individuals to become reflective, critical thinkers who ask the right questions and seek answers from rigorous-based resources. Intellectual character helps us answer the question, “What is true, wise or supported by evidence?”

Performance character – When informed by moral, civic and intellectual values, performance character helps us marry the quality of our actions to the strength of our convictions. Performance character helps us answer the question, “How can we get things done together?”

Principled Innovation is the ability to imagine new concepts, catalyze ideas and form new solutions guided by principles that create positive change for humanity and result in practical wisdom and human flourishing.

Further exploration

This book is designed to be foundational, introducing Principled Innovation and its relationship to character and values. There is much more to learn and explore on these topics, including readings, videos, tools and other resources to help you dig deeper and put your understanding into action. Visit the website below to continue your learning and exploration.



Special thanks

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Innovation is never neutral; it reflects what we value.

**The question is not whether we will
shape the future, but how. Join us in
ensuring character, wisdom and care
guide what comes next.**

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