

THE TASK FORCE ON EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING REPORT

August 17, 2016

Introduction

The Task Force for Experiential Learning¹ was formed during the fall of 2014 at the request of President Carol Quillen. The Task Force was asked to evaluate experiential learning programs at Davidson College and to make recommendations to the President and the Institutional Strategic Initiatives (ISI) group. The overarching objectives for the task force are to examine ways in which experiential learning can enable Davidson graduates to be:

- Self-aware, thoughtful, knowledgeable global citizens *who are at ease with differences among people and cultures*;
- Team-builders who are *able to work effectively with a wide range of people and partners*;
- Original, creative thinkers and problem-solvers *who move easily between the classroom and the world*;

Further, how can experiential learning programs at Davidson be shaped to educate each Davidson student for a life of leadership, service, and disproportionate impact?

Because the term “experiential learning” can potentially include almost any of life’s experiences, the task force focused our work primarily on experiences that are *high impact practices* as defined by George Kuh, Emeritus Professor at Indiana University at Bloomington and Director of the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment. High impact practices:

- Reinforce classroom work and require students to apply what they learned to real life problems;
- Are intentional and have defined learning outcomes;

For the purposes of this report, the task force restricted our analysis to the following institutional experiential learning opportunities at Davidson: Community-based Learning / Immersive Civic Engagement Experiences², Internships³, Research Experiences⁴, and Study Abroad⁵ (See Appendix 1).

Using the list of individuals from the class of 2015, the task force examined the records of the four offices/programs (listed above) to determine the number of individual students who engaged in “significant” experiential learning programs during their four years at Davidson. We found that **91.5%** of 2015 alums participated in at least one of the four categories of experiential learning opportunities. Further, **62.6%** of these individuals participated in more than one category of experiential learning, e.g. study abroad plus academic research, civic engagement plus an internship. Finally, 60.5% of 2015 alums studied abroad, 54.5% were involved in community-based learning / immersive civic engagement experiences 47.4% engaged in

¹ Verna Case (Lead), Chris Alexander, Stacey Riemer, Jamie Stamey, Leslie Marsicano, Amanda Ewington, Gerardo Marti, and Fuji Lozado. Consulting committees: Student Study and Research (SS&R) Committee, Int’l Education Committee, EPC, Community Based Learning faculty advisory group.

² Course-based, community-based learning and immersive summer internships and fellowships through the CCE.

³ Well-defined internship programs with learning goals, such as Davidson in Washington or the DavidsonIE Internship.

⁴ Academic year semester-long research, independent study, and/or honors courses mentored by Davidson faculty and summer research fellowships funded by Davidson programs (DRI, etc.) and mentored by Davidson faculty.

⁵ Students who did academic coursework abroad with either a Davidson or a non-Davidson program.

research experiences during the academic year or in the summer⁶, and 22.8% did a well-defined internship as reported to the Center for Career Development.

National Context

Experiential learning pedagogy is not a new concept. At the turn of the 20th century, scholars such as John Dewey, William James, Kurt Lewin, and Jean Piaget laid the philosophical groundwork of experiential learning theory. Since that time, Kolb⁷ and other educators have recognized and extolled the value of *hands-on, active, problem-based, service, and engaged* learning. While experiential learning has been given many names over the years, the pedagogical focus remains the same, *i.e.*, the learner's immersion and interaction with real world situations and problems.

The Association of American Colleges & Universities' (AAC&U) Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) initiative builds on the traditional goals of the liberal arts and recognizes the practical value of real-world applications and experiential learning that prepares students for "economic, societal, civic, and personal" success.⁸ In 2008, Kuh and the AAC&U published the report *High Impact Educational Practice: What They Are, Who Has Access to Them, and Why They Matter*.⁹ The report was based on national studies focused on transformative educational practices including: Greater Expectations, the LEAP Initiative, and the National Survey for Student Engagement (NSSE). The report shared a set of pedagogical practices that were transformative in nature in that they "support student persistence and heightened achievement on essential learning outcomes." These pedagogical practices, including undergraduate research, diversity and global learning, service or community-based learning, and internships, have proven particularly effective "for students from communities that historically have been underserved in higher education."

For the purposes of the work of this task force, high Impact Practices were defined as evidence-based practices that engage and challenge students. Experiences with high impact should:

- immerse students in discovery, analysis and problem solving;
- engage students in the big questions (Science and Society, Culture and Values, Global Interdependence, the Changing Economy, and Human Dignity and Freedom).
- prepare students for citizenship and work;
- emphasize personal and social responsibility; and,
- use assessment to deepen learning and establish a culture of shared purpose and continuous improvement.

⁶ Please note that many of the 2015 students who participated in Civic Engagement or Research Experiences repeated the experiences in the summer and academic year. Some students also took multiple classes offering civic engagement opportunities. Fifty-two percent of 2015 students had multiple research experiences and 36% had multiple civic engagement experiences.

⁷ Kolb, D.A. 2015. *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*, 2nd Ed., Pearson Education, Inc., NJ.

⁸ Humphreys, D. (2009). *College outcomes for work, life, and citizenship: Can we really do it all?* Liberal Education, 95(1), pp.14-21.

⁹ Kuh, G. (2008). *High impact educational practice: What they are, who has access to them and why they matter*. Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges & Universities.

Of course, none of these ideas are new.

In light of evidence demonstrating the value for high impact practices and as students seek learning that is relevant to their lives, many institutions are incorporating experiential learning into their curricula. Some institutions are going as far as establishing at least one hands-on learning experience as a graduation requirement.¹⁰

Why is this important at a liberal arts institution and at Davidson specifically?

AAC&U sees liberal education as a philosophy of education that empowers individuals with broad knowledge and transferable skills, and a strong sense of values, ethics, and civic engagement.¹¹ Others have demonstrated how engaged learning promotes complex ways of knowing,¹² understanding of self and others, and participation as citizens in the greater communities.

“The primary purpose of Davidson College is to assist students in developing humane instincts and disciplined and creative minds for lives of leadership and service.” This statement commits us to a mission beyond classrooms and laboratories. It commits us to producing young people who combine keen intelligence with deeply felt commitments to their fellow human beings. It commits us to producing graduates who do more than think well. They do....plus they have confidence in their own agency and their ability to lead others.

Experiential learning makes vital contributions to Davidson’s central mission. Classrooms can teach what it means to have humane instincts. But classrooms can’t teach how those instincts feel as a vital, orienting force in a life. Classrooms can illustrate how good questions and sound reasoning lead to disciplined and creative minds. But classrooms also provide safety nets. They set boundaries on the range of relevant information. They establish parameters for well-reasoned answers. The world beyond the campus is not so accommodating. Coursework on campus can describe principles of leadership and point to helpful examples of it. But strong leadership is rooted in strong relationships, respect and trust -- qualities that grow from human interaction around shared work.

Studying abroad, learning through service, participating in internships and research connect students to diverse cultures and values. They give students opportunities to use their critical thinking skills to develop solutions to real problems with real consequences for real lives. They force students to develop the interpersonal skills that are vital to effective leadership. These experiences also create opportunities for students to take risks. Davidson's current capital campaign emphasizes alumni who have become game changers in their professions. Young people cannot change the game if they don't come off the bench. Getting into the game requires

¹⁰ Berner, M. 2015. Colleges Strive to Meet Demand for a More Hands-On Education. The Chronicle of Higher Education. http://chronicle.com/article/Colleges-Strive-to-Meet-Demand/230189/?cid=at&utm_source=at&utm_medium=en

¹¹ <https://www.aacu.org/resources/liberal-education>

¹² Baxter-Magolda, M.B. & King, P.M. (Eds). 2004. Learning partnerships: Theory and models of practice to educate for self-authorship. Sterling, VA: Stylus.

a tolerance of risk, complexity, ambiguity and uncertainty that is not well-developed among students who are accustomed to clear expectations and signposts that direct them to the "right" outcomes. Experiential learning helps students build confidence in their ability to understand diverse perspectives, to solve complex problems in the midst of too much or too little information, and to lead others in their professional lives and in the lives of their communities.

Task Force Recommendations

For experiential learning opportunities to play a crucial role in accomplishing Davidson's mission, they must meet high standards that challenge students to confront risk and failure, to build strong relationships with others, to think holistically, and to understand how observing a problem first-hand can lead to asking questions that can solve problems. Most of the current opportunities in Civic Engagement, Internships, Research, and Study Abroad at Davidson are effective in engaging students at the high impact level. As we have also seen, the vast majority of our students have at least one experiential learning experience while enrolled at Davidson. That said, the task force feels that there are many areas where we can improve:

1. As the Davidson student population becomes more diverse, how do we ensure that all students access the experiential learning opportunities that are important for their future?
2. How do we know that the experiences our students are engaging in are high quality?
 - a. Metric and assessment data are collected for some, but not all experiential learning opportunities. There is also no coordination of assessment efforts across programs.
 - b. Quality standards (with intentional educational components) need to exist for all immersive programs.
3. Given that student needs will change and that the educational landscape continues to evolve, how do we assess the need for new immersive experiences and ensure that we are offering experiences that will best serve our students and are consistent with our institutional goals?

After grappling with these and other questions, the task force recommends that appropriate college offices and programs be asked to:

1. Provide information and resources so that all students have knowledge of and access to the hands-on, in-depth learning experiences, including:
 - a. Publicizing all experiential learning opportunities using a variety of channels...including websites, social media, testimonials from other students, etc. Decide on a central "repository" that has some information on all available opportunities. While this is available now, the websites are found in a variety of places and don't always link to the other sites (<https://www.davidson.edu/about/distinctly-davidson/research/research-and-scholarship-opportunities>; <https://www.davidson.edu/offices/international-studies-program/travel-grants>; <https://www.davidson.edu/student-life/civic-engagement/summer-programs> and <http://www.davidson.edu/summer-experiences>).
 - b. Encouraging all students to participate in at least one high-impact experiential opportunity early in their undergraduate career through:

- i. Holistic pre-major advising.
 - ii. Continuing and expanding summer and academic year experiential learning opportunities for first- and second-year students, *e.g.*, the month-long RISE program for students who are rising sophomores, offering an additional competitive 10-week research program for rising sophomores (from all disciplines), offering special opportunities for academic-year research experiences to highly motivated first year students, and providing sophomore students with an opportunity to guide their own learning experiences through Digital Learning and Research Development initiatives.
 - c. Recruiting and developing faculty with an interest in mentoring experiential learning experiences by:
 - i. Recognizing and rewarding faculty work related to experiential learning as part of the Faculty Activity Report, promotion, and tenure processes.
 - ii. Offering Center for Teaching and Learning, Center for Civic Engagement, Center for Career Development, and Study Abroad Office workshops, panels and discussions that enable faculty to develop high impact experiential learning experiences relevant to the liberal arts.
 - iii. Identifying resources and providing funding for faculty development around experiential learning, as well as other incentives for participating with students in these opportunities.
 - d. Seeking additional funding for high-quality community-based learning / immersive civic engagement experiences, internships, research and study abroad from granting agencies, partnerships, and individuals, with specific goals of:
 - i. Endowing some Davidson experiential learning programs.
 - ii. Strengthening the EXPLR internship credit for internships that are unpaid and require institutional credit (XPL 099: <https://www.davidson.edu/offices/career-development/students/acquiring-an-internship/internship-compensation-and-credit/explorer-099-internship-credit>).
 - iii. Determining additional ways to improve the learning outcomes of internships, including establishing a faculty advisory group for internships.
 - iv. Developing connections and opportunities to create additional internship programs that are grounded in assessment and that reflect the evolving higher education landscape, such as the Davidson IE Internship Program.
2. Develop guidelines and goals for high-impact experiences by:
- a. Collaborations among offices and programs involved in experiential learning to set guidelines and goals that may be held in common among all experiential learning opportunities or may be modified to address specific types of learning experiences. We recommend that an oversight group be formed that would be involved in setting the guidelines and goals and that this group also be charged with having an eye to the future and suggest new ways in which our students can

benefit from experiential learning. We suggest that group include: Associate Dean of Faculty, Associate Dean for International Programs, Associate Dean of Students and Civic Engagement, Assistant Director for Internships, Director of Innovation and Entrepreneurship, and Director of Digital Learning Research and Design.

- b. Publicizing and informing the broader campus community about the guidelines and goals of each high-impact experiential opportunity.
3. Regularly assess the quality of Davidson's high-impact experiential programs by:
 - a. Establishing quality standards and measurable learning outcomes for experiential learning opportunities as defined in this document.
 - b. Developing assessment instruments for learning, in addition to surveys that assess qualitative value of high-impact opportunities.
 - c. Consistently reporting metrics related to participation for all Davidson experiential learning opportunities and developing effective means for tracking non-Davidson experiences.
 - d. Showcasing student accomplishments resulting from participating in experiential learning opportunities:
 - i. Establish a day to celebrate original work by all students - combined poster symposia, gallery shows, performances, etc.
 - ii. Identify and publicize multiple venues available to students who wish to share their work beyond the campus community.
4. Recognize that higher education is changing and that much of the change is driven by technology and internet access, creating a "New Learning Ecosystem" for the 21st century. This new concept of education breaks down the walls of the "classroom" to encompass co-curricular activities, the community, and the world. Experiential Learning is an integral part of the new ecosystem and can no longer be seen as ancillary to the curriculum. Randy Bass, Georgetown University, is one of the leaders in a movement to "rebundle" higher education. Bass recently stated, "I think that the next phase of higher ed's existence has to be about creative integration."¹³ The task force suggests several steps to provide students with opportunities to demonstrate their creative integration of learning inside and outside of the classroom and that allow Davidson College to reimagine the educational opportunities that will shape our future.
 - a. Provide students with co-curricular transcripts at the end of their four years as an official record of a student's leadership, service, and accomplishments in student organizations and professional or educational development programs.¹⁴
 - b. Encourage and support all students in the creation of their own Davidson Domain sites.
 - i. Ask students to address what they have learned through their high impact experiences, to disseminate the products of that learning, and to reflect on the value of the experience as part of their education.

¹³file:///localhost/Users/vecase/Library/Application%20Support/Zotero/Profiles/o38o366j.default/zotero/storage/TWF2R G4D/Blumenstyk%20-%20202016%20-

%20Why%20Georgetown's%20Randy%20Bass%20Wants%20to%20'Rebundle'%20Co.html

¹⁴ <https://www.naspa.org/rpi/posts/the-value-of-a-co-curricular-transcript>

- ii. Mentor students regarding the best practices for developing and presenting their academic and professional identities through an Eportfolio.
 - iii. Develop processes and procedures for evaluating student domains in order to assess the success of experiential learning at Davidson.
- c. Recognize that students can be powerful agents for directing their own learning. Davidson students want to produce original work that can make a real difference for the world, rather than simply producing a report. The task force recommends that the college:
 - i. Provide resources/opportunities for faculty and staff to think about innovative pedagogy that includes students in the process of creating class work or co-curricular experiences that are relevant and meaningful.
 - ii. Build in reward structures for increasing student agency for all learning opportunities on campus, such as student-designed syllabi, student-led design charrettes for experiential learning projects that determine desired outcomes and define actions to accomplish those outcomes, and student built learning networks around particular topics or projects.
 - iii. Establish a new staff position (perhaps titled 'Experiential Learning Coordinator') whose work would assist Davidson College in accomplishing many of the above goals for experiential learning and would facilitate coordination among experiential learning programs to avoid duplication of efforts.

APPENDIX 1

Why focus on civic engagement, internships, research and study abroad?

- *Civic Engagement* - In recent years, some have argued that there is a substantial disconnect between the stated mission of higher education institutions and their provision of actual opportunities that help students "recognize and act upon their responsibility to their education community and wider society" (Dey, 2009). Well-designed community-based learning / immersive civic engagement experiences provide students with exceptional experiential learning opportunity by mimicking the diverse problem-solving activities of corporate, governmental, and community groups worldwide. Such activities embody AAC&U's "essential learning outcomes for the 21st century" in the liberal arts by answering the call for institutions of higher education to focus on the importance of social responsibility, the integration of student learning and development, and the broadening of perspectives through experiential learning.

A significant body of evidence¹⁵ demonstrates the positive impact that community-based learning / immersive civic engagement experiences have on student learning and development in ways that can support a successful transition to impact. When done effectively, such experiences can promote learning and development across multiple domains (Baxter-Magolda & King, 2004; Kezar & Rhoads, 2001; Rhoads, 1997); positively impact academic performance including GPA, writing skills, critical thinking skills, values development, and self-efficacy (Astin et al, 2006; Eyler & Giles, 2003); reduce stereotypes and facilitate inter-cultural competence or understanding of those different from oneself (Dunlap & Webster, 2009; O'Grady, 2000; Rhoads, 1997); increase student engagement in the learning process (Kezar & Rhoads, 2001; Kuh, 2009; Zlotkowski, Longo & Williams, 2006); and impact students' sense of social responsibility (Dey & Associates, 2009; Jacoby, 2009; Zlotkowski, Longo & Williams, 2006).

- *Internships* - Data from the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) 2014 Internship & Co-op Survey:
 - The conversion rate for interns (interns hired into full-time positions) rose this year to 51.2%.
 - Employers made full-time offers to 64.8% of their interns; the acceptance rate dropped from 85.6% in 2013 to 79.0% in 2014.

¹⁵ While it is not the purpose of this document to provide an exhaustive summary of the research on civic engagement, interested parties can find annotative bibliographies of such research on the following webpages: <http://www.compact.org/wp-content/uploads/resources/downloads/aag.pdf> , http://www.servicelearning.org/instant_info/bibs/a-z_list/index.php, http://www.servicelearning.org/instant_info/bibs/cb_bibs/sl_glance/index.php, <http://www.compact.org/about/statistics/>

- Employees who complete an internship or co-op program with their employer are more likely to be with the company at both the one-year and five-year retention benchmarks.
- *Research, scholarship, and creative work* - Original research and creative works are high impact experiences that foster engaged learning according to national surveys.¹⁶ Jeffrey Osborn and Kerry Karukstis, former presidents of the Council for Undergraduate Research, discuss the numerous benefits of research, scholarship, and creative activity. Student gains include: knowledge and skills, academic achievement and educational attainment, professional growth and advancement, and personal growth; and for faculty in enhancing mentoring and teaching, achieving research, scholarly, and creative goals, integrating scholarship and teaching, and increasing satisfaction and personal development. Institutions gain as well by building a community of scholars, creating a shared sense of purpose and achievement, deepening relationships with alumni, fostering innovation and risk-taking, enhancing curriculum, and engaging the local community.
- *Study abroad* - A robust body of research demonstrates that these students benefit from their experiences abroad in powerful ways. Multiple studies show that living, studying, and working abroad for an extended period of time enhances creativity and problem-solving skills. Students who study abroad think in more “integratively complex” ways that allow them to make non-obvious connections between ideas and data and they develop a higher tolerance for ambiguity and alternative value systems. They are more likely to graduate and enjoy a wider range of professional options.¹⁷

Study abroad defines “high-impact” practices as those that:

- Measurably increase foreign language proficiency (with understanding that language acquisition is not a goal for all Davidson-sponsored programs abroad);
- Build cross-cultural communication skills and competency;
- Increase students’ ability and eagerness to consider multiple perspectives;
- Enhance self-confidence, independence, and problem solving skills;
- Result in students’ capacity to articulate the impact of their experience on subsequent curricular or career choices;
- Adhere to AAC&U “High-Impact Educational Practices” of common intellectual experiences, learning communities, and Diversity/Global Learning;
- Adhere to The Forum on Education Abroad’s standards of best practice.

¹⁶ http://nsse.iub.edu/NSSE_2014_Results/pdf/NSSE_2014_Annual_Results.pdf#page=30

¹⁷ For a rich summary of these findings and others that highlight the value of education abroad, see Michael Vande Berg, R. Michael Paige, and Kris Hemming Lou (Eds). 2012. *Student Learning Abroad: What Our Students Are Learning, What They’re Not, and What We Can Do About It*, Stylus, Sterling, VA. See also Annie Murphy Paul, How Studying and Working Abroad Makes You Smarter, <http://time.com/79937/how-studying-or-working-abroad-makes-you-smarter>