University Council Cabinet
Meeting Summary
September 12, 2022
1:30 – 2:30 p.m.
130 Burruss Hall & Zoom Videoconference

Present: Cyril Clarke (co-chair), Robert Weiss (co-chair), Holli Gardner Drewry, Chris Kiwus, Rachel Miles, April Myers, Kim O'Rourke, Menah Pratt-Clarke, Robin Queen
Rebecca Weaver-Hightower, and Serena Young
Absent with notice: Ben Beiter
Absent: Julie Ross [Note: The USS position is vacant.]
Guests: Lori Buchanan, Dwayne Edwards, and Bob Hicok

Dr. Clarke called the hybrid meeting to order at 3:30 p.m. A quorum was present. This was the inaugural meeting of the University Council Cabinet.

1. Adoption of Agenda - A motion was made, seconded, and approved to adopt the agenda.

2. Key Points

Dr. Clarke, Dr. Weiss, and Professor Bob Hicok gave an overview of the changes to shared governance that will be implemented this academic year. Dr. Clarke provided information on the role of the University Council Cabinet within the new shared governance system.

3. Actions/Decisions

1. The Cabinet approved the September 19, 2022, University Council agenda

2. The Cabinet determined that the only presentations to University Council will be those directly impacting governance. Dr. Clarke will announce this at UC on September 19.

4. University Mission Initiative - Experiential Learning (EL) Process

1. There are two thrusts to EL. First, Virginia Tech committed to SACSCOC that for our QEP, we would develop a plan for bridge experiences (internships, co-ops, study abroad, research) for undergraduates. Undergraduate Academic Affairs already has a group working on this.
2. The goals are to make experiential learning experiences credit-bearing and to embed them throughout the curricular study plans of undergraduate majors. These goals are relevant to faculty governance, so a UMI committee needs to be formed to work on integrating EL across the curriculum, including the establishment of academic standards, curriculum approval processes, learning goals, measures for faculty accountability and oversight, and outcomes assessment.

Next Steps
1. Dr. Weiss will send the previous experiential learning committee's report to the UC Cabinet (attached).
2. Dr. Clarke will draft a charge for the new EL committee that the UC Cabinet will consider at its next meeting.

3. At the next meeting, the UC Cabinet will determine the membership of the new EL committee to include representatives from the registrar's office, enrollment management, faculty affairs, and the senates with an eye toward technical expertise.

5. <u>Adjournment</u> - There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 2:30 p.m.

Faculty Perspectives on Experiential Learning
Virginia Tech, May 10, 2021

Preface

This document reflects year-long discussions by members of the Experiential Learning Faculty Advisory Board, appointed by the Faculty Senate in June 2020 to help shape the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) submitted to (and recently approved by) the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC). During the year, and as part of our shared governance process, iterations of this document were presented to the Faculty Senate, department heads, the Deans Council, the Student Government Association, and the University Council.

"Faculty Perspectives on Experiential Learning" describes faculty motivations for supporting experiential learning generally, and for championing intensive bridging opportunities--those intended to help students develop professional identities and post-graduate options as they apply their learning--in particular. The document defines these variations of experiential learning, sets out principles that should guide the development of experiential learning opportunities, and raises issues that must be addressed in order to implement programs that align with our guiding principles and our QEP commitments.

Thanks to committee members Kathryn Albright, Dwight Bigler, Robert Bush, Jennifer Clevenger, Danille Christensen, Kathryn Clarke, John Ferris, David Knight, Amanda MacDonald, Amanda Morris, Scott Pleasant, Donna Sedgwick, Brian Wiersema, and Cynthia Wood for their work shaping this document, and to Kim Filer and Vicki Pitstick for their advisory assistance.

Motivations

Virginia Tech's Beyond Boundaries vision builds on our foundation of educational excellence and aims to prepare students for the complex world in which they will work and live. As faculty, we help graduates rise to our global land-grant mission and address an array of twenty-first-century challenges to health, sustainability, resilience, creativity, and security by reflecting on how our curricular offerings encourage purpose-driven choices and assist undergraduate students in transitioning into their post-graduation life. We use deliberate and thoughtful strategies in order to facilitate student transitions from general critical skills and content to more discipline-specific learning outcomes. Experiential learning encompasses many of these strategies, focusing especially on those that are interactive, grounded, iterative, and pragmatic.

Experiential learning is a pedagogical approach that offers students opportunities to develop their understanding and skills as they address problems and concepts in context.[1]

The variety of successful experiential learning opportunities that have developed organically across Virginia Tech's colleges testify to faculty interest, strengths, and belief in this teaching philosophy and pedagogical approach. Students are introduced to real-world challenges in many ways, including undergraduate research, internships, cooperative education, externships, study abroad, and service learning.

Students who learn through hands-on endeavors develop transferable competencies, but experiential learning is more than simple "job training." Instead, it comprises a spectrum of opportunities along multiple

[1] Association for Experiential Education, "What Is Experiential Education?"; David Thornton Moore, "Forms and Issues in Experiential Learning," *New Directions for Teaching and Learning,*, no. 124 (Winter 2010): 3-13.

dimensions and can be a means to achieve learning outcomes in curricular, co-curricular, and extra-curricular spaces. Tackling real-world problems can motivate students to synthesize theory, concepts, and habits of mind in the context of their own passions and interests. Furthermore, reward systems (e.g., digital credentialing) can acknowledge student growth and celebrate on-the-ground successes.

In addition to producing new knowledge and new achievements for students, engaged research and practice offers a range of public benefits. For instance, experiential learning can "enrich democratic dialogue, create exciting aesthetic advances, and fashion meaningful collaborations among diverse partners."[2]

The Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) submitted in 2021 focuses on a particular kind of experiential learning: Bridge Experiences. These experiences allow students to apply specific disciplinary knowledge to contemporary problems while immersed in environments relevant to their career goals. These opportunities specifically intend to bridge college and post-college life by helping students achieve the following outcomes:

- Understand the range of skills and competencies needed to support self and community.
- Integrate and connect learning across academic and professional settings.
- Act in public and professional settings in ways that exemplify the Ut Prosim spirit.
- Begin to develop a professional identity.
- Reflect on identity development as individuals and as representatives of Virginia Tech.

Bridge experiences are not intended to lock students into particular career trajectories; rather, discovery-oriented opportunities that recognize the dynamic nature of the workplace can allow space for students to reflect on their evolving goals and talents. Most often, students take the lead in identifying and pursuing these opportunities. These experiences should significantly impact the student's perspective on a specific career path, can be funded or unfunded, and can be curricular (possibly credit bearing) or extra-/co-curricular (non-credit). As faculty, we are especially interested in promoting the development of *accessible and equitable* experiential learning experiences that can fit within the parameters of the Bridge Experience.

Dimensions of Experiential Learning

Experiential Learning can be described along several dimensions: content, physical context, and learning outcomes.

The first two dimensions exist on spectrums that span the poles of *theory* (rational contemplation and abstraction of general principles) and *praxis* (informed and reflective action toward specific ends):

- **Content**
    - Theory pole: Fundamental concepts and skills developed and demonstrated by addressing generalized, structured, or sample problems
    - Praxis pole: Specific disciplinary knowledge applied to specific contemporary problems
- **Physical context**
    - Theory pole: Experiences take place in a structured educational environment (e.g., a classroom)
    - Praxis pole: Immersion in specific professional environment

[2] Gregory Jay, "The Engaged Humanities: Principles and Practices for Public Scholarship and Teaching," *Journal of Community Engagement and Scholarship,* June 19, 2012.

The third dimension, **Learning Outcomes**, pertains to the number and degree to which the experience has outcomes that are curricular vs. extracurricular/co-curricular:

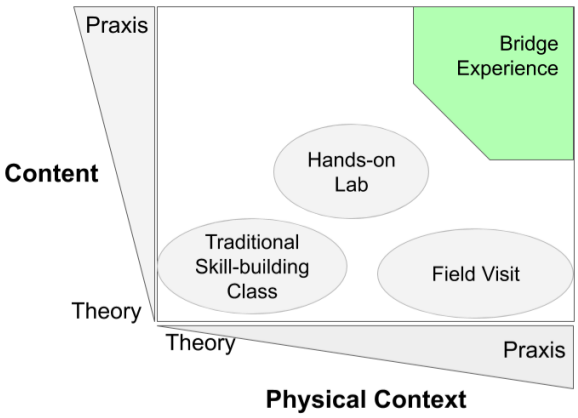
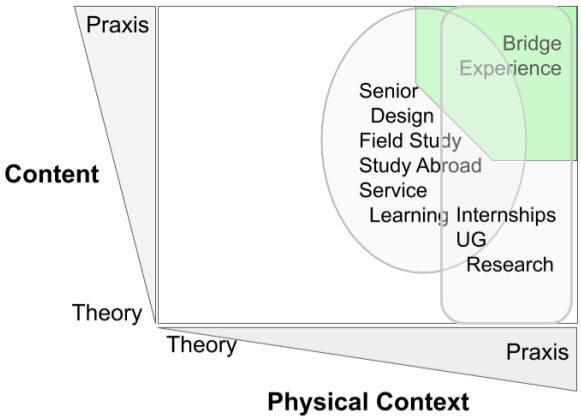
- Experiential learning opportunities with ***Curricular Learning Outcomes (CLO)*** satisfy specific curricular requirements of a degree program, generally involve a substantial faculty role, and may earn academic credit.
    - Academic credit is a measure of the curricular progress made toward degree requirements during the experience, rather than an evaluation of the impact it has had on a student.
    - Development of CLOs and assessment of competence/mastery are determined by faculty, consistent with the AAUP Statement, "The faculty has primary responsibility for such fundamental areas as curriculum, subject matter and methods of instruction. . . . The faculty sets the requirements for the degrees offered in course, determines when the requirements have been met."[3]
    - Achievement of these CLOs may earn academic credit.
- Experiential learning opportunities with ***Extracurricular/Co-Curricular Learning Outcomes (ECCLO)*** help shape students' personal and professional identities, but are not part of the formal curriculum. These experiences
    - Introduce students to disciplines, ways of thinking, cultures and contexts, problems, and potential career paths that are not specified in the curriculum of the student's degree program.
    - Prepare students for life after graduation.

Varieties of experiential learning can be distinguished based on how they calibrate these three dimensions.

In addition, experiential learning can be more or less intensive. **Exploratory Opportunities** emphasize fundamental skills, guided practice, and exposure to new disciplines, ways of thinking, cultures and contexts, problems, and potential career paths. These experiences can be useful for learning throughout a student's time at Virginia Tech. **Bridging Opportunities,** on the other hand, help prepare students for post-graduation life and develop a professional identity. They allow students to apply specific disciplinary knowledge to real-world problems, and often take place in a professional environment, during the final years of a student's academic career.

The following table suggests how typical experiential learning options--whether exploratory or bridging--might calibrate content and physical context with regard to the poles of theory and praxis:

[3] AAUP Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities

Exploratory Opportunities: These kinds of experiential learning emphasize fundamental skills, guided practice, and exposure to new disciplines, ways of thinking, cultures and contexts, problems, and potential career paths. These experiences can be useful for learning throughout a student's time at Virginia Tech.	
Bridging Opportunities: These kinds of experiential learning help prepare students for post-graduation life and develop a professional identity. They offer opportunities to apply specific disciplinary knowledge to real-world problems, and often take place in a professional environment, during the final years of a student's academic career.	

Experiences featured in these figures are meant as examples rather than as a comprehensive list. Actual experiential learning experiences may be exploratory, bridge, or somewhere in between; they may be designed by faculty as a means to effectively deliver course content and contribute to academic credits earned (CLOs), or they may be offered in order to achieve non-credit-bearing outcomes (ECCLOs).

Guiding Principles

Virginia Tech aims to be "an inclusive community of knowledge, discovery, and creativity dedicated to improving the quality of life and the human condition within the Commonwealth of Virginia and throughout the world." As faculty, we believe that Experiential Learning is essential to achieving this mission. Accessible, inclusive experiential learning experiences, designed to deepen and enrich the disciplinary knowledge and skills of a program of study, can be transformative. Accordingly, we support the development of new opportunities that help students transition to life after college. Recognizing the good work of those who laid the foundation for an enhanced educational model, and seeking to support and strengthen new and existing opportunities, we affirm the following guiding principles:

- **Flexibility.** Because disciplinary, geographic, administrative, and physical contexts differ dramatically across Virginia Tech's campuses and academic disciplines, flexibility is imperative with regard to where experiential learning experiences take place and how they are categorized within credit systems.

- **Equity and Access.** All students--regardless of personal resources, academic discipline, geography, relationship to identity groups, or existing social networks--should be enabled to develop the skills and knowledge necessary for transitioning into professional contexts. In addition, faculty and staff require access to the time and physical resources necessary for implementing and assessing personalized, intensive bridge experiences.
- **Recognition and Respect.** Designing, coordinating, and participating in bridge experiences requires expertise and effort on the part of faculty, staff, and students, and these activities should be formally recognized within the reward structures and workload plans of the university.[4] In addition, the perspectives of faculty and students from all corners of campus should be heard and considered as enhanced experiential learning programs are established and revised.
- **Evidence-based Practice.** Consistent excellence and improvement arises from regular assessment, as well as engagement with relevant scholarly literatures**,** such as works that explore the roles of faculty in encouraging productive transfer of learning. Meaningful assessment depends on adequate baseline data about existing opportunities, past outcomes, and barriers to participation in experiential learning at Virginia Tech.

Implementation Issues

If implementation of the QEP is to be consistent with our guiding principles, the following issues will need to be addressed:

1. *Assigning Academic Credit*

Integration of existing efforts: Currently, many departments offer credit for experiential learning opportunities that satisfy Curricular Learning Outcomes, including field studies, internships, co-ops, undergraduate research, and study abroad. What is less clear is how these existing credit structures will accommodate bridge experiences.

- Will existing experiential opportunities that meet bridge experience learning outcomes need to be "rebranded" as such?
- How will non-credit-bearing bridge experiences be captured on a student's record?
- If a student completes a bridge experience while enrolled in one major and then changes to another, will that first experience "count," and for whom?

Recognizing co- or extra-curricular experiential learning: if non-credit-bearing activities, such as 0-credit on-campus internships, are deemed acceptable bridge experiences, how are they to be assessed and recognized (e.g., with a designation from the Registrar?). In addition--and especially crucial as student engagement in these activities scales up--how would the creation and supervision of non-credit bridge experiences be built into faculty workload plans?

Possible solutions: Some units and departments are already working to recognize student efforts. In 2018, University Libraries and the Office of Undergraduate Research collaboratively developed and launched the university-wide Undergraduate Research Excellence Program (UREP), which encourages students to participate in both curricular and co-curricular experiential learning. UREP lets students track their engagement with undergraduate research, make plans to participate in future experiences, and celebrate their successes along the way. Students receive a digital badge after completing each category, and graduation cords if they complete the entire program successfully. Programs similar to UREP can help

[4] Moore, 2010; D. T. Moore, "Behind the Wizard's Curtain: A Challenge to the True Believer." *NSEE Quarterly,* January–February, 1999.

faculty motivate students to participate in experiential learning over the course of their undergraduate careers, while also signifying completion of bridge experiences, when appropriate.

The Department of Sociology, which is participating in the Experiential Learning pilot, currently offers academic credit for internships, field studies, undergraduate research, and study abroad programs. In one adaptation spurred by the pilot, the department has enhanced its existing internship program by articulating objectives that align with "Essential Components of Career-Bridge Experiential Learning (CBEL)" guidelines. Students who participate in bridge opportunities receive the same academic credit as in previous years, but they may also earn a cord for graduation and be acknowledged as a CBEL learner at graduation. Future plans include entering CBEL posters/papers (part of the enhanced requirements) into a departmental contest for "Best CBEL project."

2. *Equity and Access*

To engage in this kind of active and applied learning, programs, courses, and learning activities should be designed with the student in mind. We know that activities like internships, service-learning, and study abroad incur costs such as travel, lodging, tuition, child care, the purchase of professional clothing, and the social costs of relocation. In order to allow all students--regardless of family income, family responsibilities, place of residence, existing social networks, and other factors--to participate in sufficiently intensive and productive experiences, the university must attend to the material and social resources that help students across the university afford participation. These include:

Physical and Financial resources: Administrators should assess and seek to address differences in material resources (including time, personnel, budgets, and physical facilities) available to academic units. The importance of experiential learning to the university as a whole should be clarified, and priority rankings should be revised as needed in order to avoid simply adding to existing workloads. Fundraising efforts need to be built and supported across academic units, and funding and personnel structures established that will continue to sustain these efforts after the QEP period.

Structural limitations: Additionally, departments wanting to create and enhance career-bridge experiential learning experiences will need aid to overcome structural limitations. For instance, some academic fields have well developed internship infrastructures that offer paid and/or year-round opportunities, while internships in other fields may be largely unpaid or seasonal. Pressure on the stock of existing opportunities in Blacksburg and the New River Valley is also a concern, especially since students from other nearby universities often compete for the same positions. Departmental goals related to field studies, internships, and service-learning need to be matched to existing opportunities, and efforts to assess, develop, and publicize new partnerships and opportunities must be supported at the department, college, and university levels. Finally, student participation may be limited by relatively rigid curricula and Plans of Study, so consideration of these constraints is warranted.

Social support: Developing social support for students embarking on entirely new experiences is also a priority, as is helping students tap into professional networks.

3. *Faculty workload*

Developing, offering, and assessing high-quality, high-impact, intensive experiential learning opportunities takes considerable time and effort on the part of faculty and staff. Not every faculty member in every department needs to be involved in this effort, but those who are need to be recognized and rewarded. Faculty assigned to teach credit-bearing experiential learning experiences can track that effort in annual reviews and P&T dossiers. However, the time and effort required to place students in non-credit-bearing opportunities, track their progress, and assess their learning is often invisible labor, especially if it falls to non-tenure-track faculty. A recognition and reward structure needs to be established for this kind of faculty

involvement, regardless of whether students receive academic credit for their participation. In addition, clarity is needed regarding where the development and assessment of EL opportunities falls in terms of workload agreements. Because experiential learning is by definition pedagogical, and because activities marked as *service* are often undercounted and undervalued, we recommend designating faculty involvement in bridge experiences as *teaching*.

4. Flexibility of Location

Intensive experiential learning opportunities at the upper-division level (i.e., bridge experiences) should focus on integrating disciplinary concepts and skills with interdisciplinary capacities by offering targeted internships, cooperative education, undergraduate research, service learning, practicums, and study abroad programs developed in consultation with partners within and outside the academy. While many such bridging opportunities will be located off campus, there are instances where on-campus options are appropriate. Developing more of these opportunities will be important if we are to meet goals regarding quantity and quality of student placements.

5. Thoughtful implementation and consistent faculty involvement

Awareness of SOTL Best Practices: Not all existing experiential learning on campus is informed by expert recommendations regarding pedagogical design and implementation. In addition, not all units currently have access to baseline data about their students or seek to understand barriers to participation. Efforts to help departments assess their existing opportunities, measure outcomes of student participation, and elevate best practices will be necessary.

Transfer of Learning: While research has shown that specific kinds of faculty engagement are necessary to help students reflect on and connect coursework to their experiences "in the field," the application of reflection measures varies widely across Virginia Tech departments and campuses.[5] How can the university work to implement quality learning experiences across the board?

[5] D. Boud, R. Cohen, and D. Walker, eds., *Using Experience for Learning* (Bristol, PA: Open University Press, 1993); J. Eyler and D. E. Giles, Jr., *Where's the Learning in Service-Learning?* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999); D. Perkins and G. Salomon, "Are Cognitive Skills Context-bound?" *Educational Researcher* 18, no. 1 (1989), 16–25; S. W. Weil and I. McGill, eds., *Making Sense of Experiential Learning: Diversity in Theory and Practice* (Bristol, PA: SRHE and Open University Press, 1989).