

# Experiential Learning Operations Report

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ACADEMY FOR EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Franca Del Signore  
Associate Director for Experiential Learning  
Academy for Experiential Learning

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## INTERVIEWS

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Interviews conducted with Virginia Tech Experiential Learning Opportunity Providers:

- Career and Professional Development (CPD)
- Global Education Office (GEO)
- Office of Undergraduate Research (OUR)
- VT Engage: The Center for Leadership and Service Learning (VTE)

Additional Interviews conducted with:

- Center for Economic and Community Engagement (CECE)
- Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL)

Potential future interviews:

- Apex Center for Entrepreneurs
- Disability and Accessibility Caucus
- Multicultural Academic Opportunities Program
- Institute for Society, Culture, and Environment
- Technology-Enhanced Learning and Online Strategies
- Center for Food Systems and Community Transformation
- Living-Learning Centers
- Department of Agriculture and Applied Economics Extension & Outreach
- Virginia Tech Research Institutes

## INTRODUCTION

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In a newly-created role within the Academy for Experiential Learning (AEL), the Associate Director for Experiential Learning conducted interviews to inform scope of operations, recognize gaps to address, and identify areas to support in regards to experiential learning opportunities across Virginia Tech. A community of practice has been created by the AEL to engage and develop more effective approaches to collaboration and offerings. Targeting the interviews to those providers was a means to build better cohesion and understanding of the operations of each provider. By creating a more integrative support structure among those cross-campus providers of experiential learning opportunities, not only can participation tracking and data collection be achieved, but a stronger foundation developed for the Bridge Experience Program.

## METHOD & OBJECTIVES

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Interviews were conducted with cross-campus experiential learning opportunity providers as a means to gain a more in-depth understanding of the scope and operations surrounding each department, as well as the various landscapes and partnerships involved. Particular areas of interest included faculty professional development, communications, and experiential learning opportunities. After conducting these interviews, responses were examined to ascertain trends and determine areas in which the Academy for Experiential Learning could be of value.

In addition to the primary experiential learning opportunity providers, interviews are currently being conducted with Virginia Tech centers, organizations, and programs that provide or support one or more areas of interest, including faculty development, experiential learning opportunities, community engagement, and partnerships. It is aimed to continue interviewing various Virginia Tech entities that do or can play a role in achieving experiential learning goals of the university, included in the *Bridge Experiences: Quality Enhancement Plan* (Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, 2021), as follows:

- (1) “Scaling access to experiential learning for all students;”
- (2) “Foster a culture that values, supports, and celebrates experiential learning;”
- (3) “Leverage the existing support networks and build additional support with the needed infrastructure in place;” and
- (4) “Establish Virginia Tech as a nationally recognized leader in experiential learning.”

Furthermore, by gathering input and guidance from those entities that work specifically with underrepresented populations, integration of equity and accessibility into professional development and the expansion and creation of experiential learning opportunities can be performed more intentionally and inclusively.

Findings were categorized by provider – CECE and CETL were included, when applicable – and by the three primary focal areas of faculty professional development, communications, and experiential learning opportunities. As additional interviews are conducted, the diverse, but disconnected, operations and offerings can provide a more holistic and relevant context. After conducting an integrated analysis of the information collected on relevant cross-

campus stakeholders, more robust, diverse, and impactful avenues to experiential learning can be created and supported.

## FINDINGS

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### Faculty Professional Development

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Professional development opportunities offered by the experiential learning opportunity providers range from structured to ad-hoc. For the most part, there is no existence of broad programming for a significant quantity of faculty that can provide in-depth knowledge and skillsets surrounding experiential learning. While CECE offers no real professional development for faculty, VTE offers an in-depth fellowship program in which three faculty participated this past year. GEO offers guidance and support to faculty developing study abroad programs, but CETL conducts official professional development for global education. CPD has one official program aimed to help faculty mentor student employees, while also acting as a resource for any faculty member that seeks assistance with external employers. OUR offers some level of professional development, but feels a higher-level training is necessary.

**CPD:** IGrow is a program offered by CPD to supervisors of student employees. This program functions to elevate an on-campus job to a professional, work-place learning opportunity. By supporting guided reflections on work, the IGrow program aims to:

- (1) “Help students connect their campus jobs to their academics and future career goals;
- (2) Create more engaged student employees; and
- (3) Support supervisors with resources and structure for guiding supervisees,”

as provided by CPD (n.d.). No further faculty development opportunities were ascertained from CPD at this point.

**GEO/CETL:** Operating budget constraints prevent GEO from offering an adequate degree of faculty development. CETL provides the majority of professional development pertaining to global education, as well as, external from GEO, project and problem-based learning (PBL). One instance of faculty development was a collaborative effort among GEO, CETL, and the director, of the Steger Center. Faculty were involved in a study abroad to the Steger Center that included local site visits and guest speakers presenting on how to engage communities and build an excellent study abroad program. GEO tries to provide grants for, while also working with, faculty involved in program development. In addition to building a program, these trainings include building a budget and intercultural learning.

CETL co-develops and facilitates faculty development around study abroad pedagogy and teaching with GEO, as well as promotes all the global education-related faculty development courses. Currently, GEO and CETL are building faculty development opportunities for collaborative online international learning, known as COIL. Faculty development opportunities in global education offered by CETL range from workshops and faculty panels to communities

of practice. Typically, one workshop is offered per semester with a location-based program in the summer. On the other hand, GEO provides very specific training, particularly for faculty-led programs, that takes the form of onboarding and facilitation for that program. A primary objective for both CETL and GEO is helping faculty implement a study abroad program in a manner that enables students to maximize the learning objectives that accompany an international experience.

GEO has the experience and knowledge that can help articulate and assess learning outcomes around global citizenship and intercultural competence. Although these skills can translate to career readiness for any career, they are not currently documented. However, given the constraints on their capacity and operating budget, GEO is not able to take that step in faculty development.

**OUR:** OUR provides training for students much more than for faculty. There are many faculty members that will seek assistance from OUR when writing in undergraduate research on grants. In those cases, OUR provides faculty support letters and/or offers advice on structuring the proposal. A half-day undergraduate research mentoring workshop is provided by OUR each year prior to the commencement of the spring semester. However, OUR feels they do not possess the level of expertise to adequately provide this training. Furthermore, it was indicated that additional touchpoints and opportunities offered for faculty mentoring undergraduate research projects would be beneficial. A faculty grant program, designed to fund the exploration or development of creative programs to scale undergraduate research, sporadically exists, depending on availability of funds that have rolled over from the previous year.

**VTE:** There is one faculty-facing designate from VTE that helps faculty in various aspects of service learning, including how to implement projects into the curriculum and assisting in finding a community partner. VTE offers a fellowship program, involving a grant that funds faculty members for one year of professional development in the service-learning space. Within the year, VTE helps the grantees in figuring out the type of problems they can approach that meets student learning outcomes. A notable aspect of this program is ensuring mutual benefit is created, meeting the needs of both the partner organization and of the students. Reflection and facilitation are integrated into the fellowship program, assisting faculty with understanding the deeper meaning, relevancy, and effects of service learning. Building on the reflection component, critical service learning is incorporated for faculty to think more critically about their role in service. VTE also collaborates with grantees on assessments for learning outcomes, as well as service-learning impact and effect on students and faculty. However, VTE would very much welcome additional collaborations, such as with CETL, to conduct professional development in service learning.

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## Communications

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Overall, the decentralized nature of the university poses challenges for cross-campus experiential learning opportunity providers. At times, there is communication between providers, depending on the nature and needs of the experience. However, overlap and collaboration are on

a more ad-hoc basis. Communication with academic departments occurs through various means, such as a department liaison or academic advisor.

**CPD:** CPD communicates experiential learning opportunities through a department liaison and Handshake. Although CPD has a well-functioning system in place in terms of registering for, monitoring, and tracking experiences through their office for Campus internEXP and Cooperative Education and Internship Program (CEIP), they still encounter barriers to marketing opportunities. Additional communication with departments and/or directly to students has the potential to lead to a greater number of experiential learning opportunities. When opportunities arise aligned with specific departments, CPD notifies the department, but there is not a system in place to identify departmental follow through with the employer. Additionally, because CPD is not able to push opportunities with specific employers inside the classroom, from an employer relations standpoint, it can be difficult to adequately connect students with opportunities.

**CECE:** As a center not specifically focused on experiential learning, but with programming and opportunities available for students, as well as with employers, CECE was not connected with other experiential learning opportunity providers, with the exception of CPD. However, CECE works directly with faculty who offer capstone projects or teach VT Corps of Cadets, by connecting those faculty with companies. Additionally, CECE engages some faculty within academic units that are involved in employee relations and internship development.

**GEO:** Because all VT-supported international programs must first be approved by the Global Education Approval Committee (GEAC), experiential learning programs with a global component are shared with the appropriate GEO office. However, if research or service learning is a part of the experience, those offices may not be notified. GEO and VTE, however, are typically both involved in any international service-learning project. For example, VTE was involved in funding some of the costs for students participating in the Food Security in South Africa program. This, again, can be a result of the requirement for any type of VT-sponsored international project/engagement to seek approval from GEAC. However, GEO, along with the other providers, seek collaboration and communication among providers.

**OUR:** OUR stated that only about 10% of the research conducted by Virginia Tech students is known to their department. When CPD identifies enrollment in research-based experiential learning through one of their programs, that information is manually sent to OUR. The department would greatly appreciate a mechanism that informs their office of all undergraduate research being conducted at the university -or at least starting with more than what is currently known.

Because OUR is a small group, they develop as many cross-campus partnerships as possible. The limited size and resources of OUR make it difficult to adequately communicate both externally and within their own data systems. As a result, OUR has developed a homegrown means of communication by creating data collection and marketing opportunities through various touchpoints. OUR aims to capture student information that can be analyzed and utilized during these touchpoints. Faculty information is collected during the mentoring workshop OUR conducts before each spring semester. Additionally, OUR captures data for mentors reported on

student applications to present at symposia or for funding. Department affiliation is critical information to collect, due to the importance of identifying with which departments they are making inroads. Information on applicants to funding, symposia, and programs is captured in different systems that do not communicate with each other. It is a goal of OUR to reconcile these data, examine the information, and ascertain a means to compile in a better, useful manner.

**VTE:** When asked how they engage with other university units, VTE verbalized that it is difficult due to lack of centralization. However, VTE feels communication is good within Student Affairs, itself. The tracking of service learning is difficult for VTE, who indicated that centralization of these experiences is needed. Furthermore, when asked about gaps and frustrations, the response included the need for better tracking of (types of) experiences, more centralization of experiences, and more spaces for collaboration among those doing similar work. VTE has been working with the registrar's office to have a flag available for curricular service learning on the transcript. Additionally, more space needs to be created for those working on similar types of projects, indicating the need for much more collaboration to increase capacity.

VTE interacts with Outreach and International Affairs offices, particularly GEO. Collaboration with GEO occurs with co-curricular service applications and presentations for GEO faculty training. VTE also interacts with OUR for the Dennis Dean Undergraduate Research Conference, with students presenting their service-learning experience.

### Experiential Learning Offerings

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Experiential learning opportunities at Virginia Tech are vast and range in impact, formats, focus areas, and geography. The experiential learning opportunity providers possess expertise in their category of experiential learning, with a clear understanding of challenges, barriers, and deficits. Operationally, the opportunity providers have solidified experiences and programming within and despite the confines that exist. Beyond the opportunity providers, Virginia Tech possesses a number of experiential learning options within student organizations and academic departments. When opportunity providers, subject matter experts, and those with experiential learning offerings and ideas collaborate, a higher impact and a greater number of opportunities are realized.

**CPD:** The CEIP and Campus internEXP are two experiential learning opportunities offered by CPD. In alignment with the Bridge requirements, these programs include faculty/advisor approval of project proposal, reflections and assessment components, and a faculty of record with the course uploaded into Canvas. There are both full-time and part-time options for participating in the CEIP. The format of the full-time option can vary between a traditional co-operative and a full-time internship. Participation can occur during the semester or summer, with a duration of six or nine months. Although no credits are awarded for the internship - as well as no associated fee (as of this year) - enrollment in the full-time option maintains a student's full-time status. This full-time status is beneficial for student loan repayment and international student status. Students participating in the part-time internships are still taking classes and must maintain credit hours. The asynchronous Canvas course for CEIP consists of learning objectives, mid-semester reflection and final-semester reflection. The course



is grounded in seven professional competencies for career readiness. As such, the students do an assessment of their professional competencies at the beginning of the program, from which they create learning objectives that support development in one of those competency areas. Throughout the semester, students document their on-the-job learning, as well as other aspects of the experience. CPD reviews all the student work in the CEIP course and provides career coaches to furnish guidance and feedback.

Campus internEXP is very similar to CIEP in terms of courses and assignments. While CEIP is all off-campus, Campus internEXP is all on-campus or VT sponsored (a few offices sponsor an intern, but they are working remotely). The goal of Campus internEXP is to take advantage of the variety of professions on the VT campus. Participation in the program requires 10 – 15 hours per week working with a campus department. A course coordinator collects all the department internship offerings, organizes the opportunities, and manages the overall operations, such as when the offering is input to Handshake, the marketing and promoting, facilitation with hosts, and application timelines. It is the host, however, that reviews all student applications and makes the hiring decision. The coordinator is also the instructor of record for the course, providing modules on professional development and other various topics that help students achieve success.

**CECE:** The Center for Economic and Community Engagement is involved in a State-wide initiative supporting the professional development of students, called Virginia Talent+ Opportunity Partnership (V-TOP). V-TOP is targeted toward talent development and retention in the state of Virginia, providing work-based opportunities to students. Currently this program serves the higher education sector, but will begin to include K-12 and young professionals with the goal of bridging the gap between secondary and higher education institutes, students, and businesses (Center for Economic and Community Engagement, n.d.). V-TOP is comprised of a collaboration between the Commonwealth of VA and the State Council of Education, with funding provided by the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV). As part of the New River Valley region, Virginia Tech is located in Region 2 of the V-TOP program, while there also exists the Roanoke-Alleghany region and the greater Lynchburg region. CECE partners with higher education institutes in Region 2 to target specific engagement opportunities for employers and students. While the program aims to expand work-based learning opportunities for students, a number of resources are also available to the employers. For example, a staffing agency is offered at no cost to small and mid-sized employers. Additionally, businesses with under 150 employees are eligible for matching funds to support the building and developing of internship programs. Online courses that are both employer and student facing are available for free.

CECE indicated that there is much interest on the part of employers to offer internships and better connect with Virginia Tech students. However, barriers to entry exist that prevent employers from engaging with and developing internships in a feasible manner. The matching funds program available for smaller-sized businesses to offer unpaid internships is difficult to navigate. CECE suggested that the CPD pilot program to cover student expenses for unpaid internships can lead to better availability for employers unable to pay students. Building a network of support for funding would facilitate an increased number of paid internships available to students. Additionally, CECE, in conjunction with their Region 2 partners, can help with

internship opportunities among local and regional employers. Furthermore, CECE noticed targeted opportunities for international students among Region 2 partner colleges that could offer better access to opportunities for VT international students.

**GEO:** Although there are a few experiential learning opportunities offered by GEO, the office is predominantly a support system for faculty or organizations that partake in an activity or experience outside of the United States. One global study offered directly by GEO is the Refugee Migrant and Displacement Studies in Paris, France. Additionally, GEO has been on the development side of a handful of programs, as well as collaborated with the Steger Center on experiential learning programming. GEO, however, aims to become more of a centralized unit for international engagements, building a more supportive structure for faculty. However, the lack of global experiences having weight for tenure and promotion poses significant barriers to faculty buy-in regarding implementing global education into curricula.

The majority of experiential learning programs within global education are those that are faculty-led. Student exchanges is an area in which GEO aims to expand, providing Virginia Tech students and their counterparts from the exchange university with semester-long study abroad opportunities. This program enables a greater number of international students to partake in the Virginia Tech experience, which, in turn, can enrich the university and its students with a wider breadth of opportunities and competencies. Partner programs involve a university or third-party provider with which a Virginia Tech student engages in a course or experience abroad. In these instances, the curriculum has been reviewed with accompanying transfer credits approved by Virginia Tech. Autonomous studies are those programs that are not considered a Virginia Tech experience, that a student has found and would like to pursue. In those cases, GEO offers support to align academic credit for the experience. If no credits are involved in any type of global education experience, that program is supported by VT Engage. A committee is currently being formed to review non-credit international experiences. However, GEO is involved directly in this committee formation and, by default, via the risk and compliance review by GEAC.

With initiatives like COIL and community engagement, GEO aims to expand study abroad to involve more concrete global competencies. One type of experiential learning that is dormant and without a true home is that of international internships. GEO indicated that international internship providers have voiced that it is difficult to break into Virginia Tech, as there are no tangible university structures, processes, or contacts. However, there are many avenues for this type of experiential learning to come to fruition. There are faculty across Virginia Tech that have vision and/or inroads to develop various international internships, particularly the two colleges already highly engaged in experiential learning, Engineering and Business.

GEO, along with TLOS, University Libraries, and CPD, is involved in a badging/micro credentialing process that is both akin to the Pathways program and directly involves courses offered in Pathways. Involving a cluster of classes that produce a set of competencies within a specific thematic area, this initiative would enable students to present meta-data to employers, evidencing the core competencies garnered. For the GEO micro-credentialing, there would be three levels in which students gain skills and competencies in global learning. With a primary outcome of building capacity in global learning, the three courses would enable students to

understand the relevance of global learning, how it connects to academic and professional facets, and partake in reflections and synthesis of concepts. Each semester, the courses will provide resources that instill the student with the capacity to engage in the global learning arena in such areas as designing a study abroad experience, becoming a leader in Mozaiko, or conducting research. GEO envisions this program as preparation for and culminating in a Bridge experience.

**OUR:** As a predominantly student-facing department, OUR provides services and support to students throughout their undergraduate research engagements. The OUR Ambassador Program is comprised of veteran research students that become the face of the office. The ambassadors provide drop-in office hours to students that are interested in pursuing undergraduate research, respond to emails, facilitate students getting started on a research project, and answer any questions that may arise. OUR would like to transform the Ambassador Program into a more formal, weighted experience for the student ambassadors, but faces challenges making that progress. The idea of paying the students has been explored, but access to funding is not available. There has been thought to offer the experience for credit, but OUR is not a credit-bearing department.

Ongoing and ad-hoc research programs and projects occur throughout the year. Virginia Tech's Institute for Critical Technology and Applied Science (ICTAS) is currently funding the ICTAS Fellowship, available to students as a second-year program. This fellowship is an opportunity for students that have conducted research for a semester or an entire year and need funds to continue their research endeavors of working on an independent project. As a means to support and amplify student research, a Bridge-funded undergraduate research fellowship was created this year with Bridge program funds. With the intent of supporting students that did not have funding to participate in a Bridge Experience Program, \$51,000.00 was awarded as eighteen different grants. Of these eighteen grants, thirteen were provided to a diverse set of research abroad projects conducted in Malawi. The remaining five grants funded summer research projects conducted at Virginia Tech. It is unknown if this Bridge-funded research fellowship will continue past this first year.

In terms of overall undergraduate research, OUR engages with the majority of research students solely via the showcases OUR holds to present projects. During summer programming, the research conducted in Roanoke may be internally or externally funded, but that information is not known to OUR. It is believed that a need exists to offer additional training and support for students in a more intentional manner, such as a regular workshop series. Such an endeavor has the potential to more inclusively inform OUR of undergraduate research projects conducted across campus. Furthermore, this training can act as a conduit to rendering research more accessible to those students that would not typically pursue such opportunities and tracks.

Organized research programs in which OUR is involved are funded both internally by Fralin Biomedical Research Institute, the School of Neuroscience, and Fralin Life Sciences Institute, and externally, typically by the U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF) and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). The programs can change, be eradicated, or have a fluctuating affiliation with Virginia Tech. For example, Virginia Tech has worked with programs funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in the past, while, this year, there are no NIH-funded research projects being conducted by the students. The lack of NIH-funded projects could

be a result of the program not operating this year – whether it was eradicated or there are fluctuations in the funding cycles - or no applications from Virginia Tech were made to the program this year.

There are a number of organized and independent research projects occurring throughout the year. Programs that create pipelines to increase diversity and access to research - and, inevitably, graduate programs and careers in research - have been funded internally and externally. Fralin Life Sciences Institute funds two of these pipelines, the First-Year Fralin Undergraduate Research Fellowship (FURF) and Forging Interest in Research and Engagement (F.I.R.E.) Starters. These programs aim to involve students in research early in their undergraduate careers. FURF is offered for one semester every spring. The F.I.R.E. Starters program, funded in conjunction with Virginia Tech's Institute for Society, Culture and Environment (ISCE), begins in the fall semester and engages students for one year. Externally funded pipeline programs, with which OUR interacts, are provided by the NSF Research Experiences for Undergraduates (REU). Funding from REU is offered across the country and centered around themes that directly relate to the areas of research funded by the NSF. Virginia Tech engaged in several REU-funded research projects this year.

In the summer, OUR provides programming for students conducting research across all organized programs, while being specifically involved with the Fralin Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowships (SURF) program. Currently, OUR is working with twelve funded, both internally and externally, programs this summer. Programming consists of a summer orientation on how to be successful, finding ways to get paid, and familiarizing students with Virginia Tech and the Blacksburg area -as many of these students are not from Virginia Tech. Throughout the summer, OUR provides one seminar per week in areas of professional development, writing a personal statement, putting research experience on their resume, and graduate school applications. OUR hires peer mentors during this time period to support the programming and to arrange activities. Due to the need for additional staffing, training workshops are offered on an ad-hoc basis. Workshop topics include preparing for conferences, presentation of research, and how to design presentation posters. An additional communications workshop is provided to the Fralin SURF students, offered by Virginia Tech's Center for Communicating Science. A symposium is held at the end of the summer, providing students the opportunity to present their research.

**VTE:** Housed under Student Affairs, student engagement is a high priority for VTE. Their aim is to facilitate the development of holistic students by providing opportunities for learning and growth of their civic and leadership identities. High quality civic and community engagements that produce benefit for both the student and the host organization is the goal of VTE, but admittedly there are challenges to achievement. Inadequate training of students and faculty perpetuates the challenges, in large part due to the lack of weight for nonprofit/community-based engagement in faculty promotion and tenure. Additionally, the over-capacity of hosting students has become difficult/burdensome on community partners.

Community engagement is the overall umbrella for experiential learning opportunities within VTE. Projects in which students can take part involve a range of curricular and co-curricular activities. Commitment to community engagements range, and can often involve just

one-off activities with community partners, such as *The Big Event* that occurs on an annual basis. An invasive species removal event occurs weekly with students volunteering anywhere from one time to every week. Many opportunities are provided by VTE, with the higher impacts of experiential learning more limited to a fewer number of extensive program offerings, such as the alternative breaks and immersion programs.

VTE provides a global immersion experiential learning opportunity in Poland, whereby students work with Ukrainian refugees in Warsaw. This program is an extended opportunity for students enrolled in the accompanying course, called “Speak up for Ukraine,” offered by the Department of Human Development and Family Science. This course includes an online English enrichment program that enables students to partner with and assist refugees in improving their English-speaking skills. VTE helps sponsor and host the summer trip to Poland, where students meet their refugee partners. VTE is involved in funding additional high-impact experiential learning projects and training in which students participate, including Team Malawi and Service Without Borders. VTE engages faculty already involved in high-impact community-based projects, particularly the extended semesters that help students dig into the deeper components of service-learning projects.

IWill is a VTE cohort model program that involves women in leadership. At the beginning of the semester, students that enroll in this program become involved in different discussions on various topics to instill and enhance leadership qualities. The topics progress throughout the semester, as students learn about different leadership styles, understand their personal identity, and realize their leadership strengths and styles. Culminating in possessing a deeper understanding of themselves, IWill supports participants in their identity and leadership journeys that can result in long-term, positive effects and opportunities.

## CONCLUSIONS

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Concrete expertise and operational rigor among the experiential learning opportunity providers is evident. Every interviewee demonstrated high levels of passion for their job, dedication to the students, and motivation to make improvements. The decentralized structure of the university creates challenges for all the providers. One of the largest impediments is the disconnect of the providers from engagements in their relevant areas. Because GEO possesses a centralized system through which pieces of study abroad offerings are passed, this office is informed when relevant international engagements occur. However, even with these systems in place, GEO is not aware of the instances when students participate in a study abroad experience that is not offered through Virginia Tech. Additionally, occurrences of non-conforming practices have prompted GEO to propose more centralized operations among university stakeholders. Therefore, it is impossible to capture complete and thorough data that can be analyzed on a university level. As a result, reported statistics are skewed and incomplete.

High-impact experiences can be under or not utilized, as cohesion among providers, academic departments, and students is weak. CECE, external to what has been considered an experiential learning opportunity provider, indicated the desire of employers to engage with Virginia Tech students and college partners having opportunities for international students. Thus,

while students, and particularly international students, are unfruitful in their search for opportunities, employers are encountering the same result in their search for students.

Numerous pathways to marketing opportunities are utilized by the service providers, ranging from Gobbler Connect and Handshake to academic department liaisons and in-classroom training. Nonetheless, the providers demonstrated frustrations with both receiving and disseminating information. CPD indicated the unavailability of marketing employers to students. Although CPD has established a number of career fairs, there are student opportunities with employers of which are not taken advantage. When concrete opportunities are communicated by an employer, CPD forwards that information to relevant departments, but there is no feedback loop to determine what exactly ensues. If the opportunity was not communicated to students or students were informed but did not act, that employer may stop engaging with Virginia Tech. Lack of action from the students can be a result of many variables other than actual interest, particularly for those that are underrepresented or introverted.

A method to track experiences, not only for the providers, but also on the transcript, poses an additional issue. Ambiguity from the transcript prevents acknowledgement of the type of experience in which a student participates. As VTE has been trying to get a flag on the transcript to indicate a community-based project, additional types of experiences are also not distinguished.

Because global education and service-learning lack weight for tenure and promotion for faculty, GEO and VTE struggle with enticing and engaging faculty in developing these areas within their curricula. Compounded by inadequate operational budgets, overall capacity limits, and the decentralization/insufficient collaboration, expanding experiential learning opportunities and programming in the areas where high-impact can be greatly realized, is difficult for both GEO and VTE.

In many cases, student funding is an issue. Because nonprofits and small businesses are unable to pay students, those opportunities are not as abundantly seized. Funding within departments also poses challenges, as seen with OUR and the Ambassador Program. CECE indicated a large deficit of utilized opportunities due to funding and transportation issues for the students. In some cases, an experiential learning opportunity can be formalized from an existing student engagement or area of need within a department, but barriers prohibit departments, and therefore students, from pursuing this avenue. Furthermore, staff deficits that can be filled with students possessing the savvy and expertise required within departments that do not have funding are unable to participate in Campus internEXP.

With the ultimate goal of 100% participation in a Bridge experience, as well as rendering opportunities accessible and equitable, many gaps have been identified that require addressing for the departments within which the providers operate, academic departments, and some systemic operations within the university. To address those gaps, the changes that those with the pertinent knowledge and expertise are trying to make need to be attainable.

With the formation of the Academy for Experiential Learning, as a connector and facilitator, inroads have been made in supporting departments across campus. Intentionally seeking to understand those gaps and barriers that result in disconnected and prohibitive

practices, while elevating experiential learning opportunities, the AEL is taking steps toward helping the university achieve the goals of the QEP on both micro and macro levels. With the expertise, partnerships, and resources available within and to the university, Virginia Tech can become a recognized leader in experiential learning with the appropriate support in place.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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In seeking to connect stakeholders with those that can help address needs, particularly in a reciprocal manner, these interviews were a step to begin that process. It was recommended to OUR that CETL could provide faculty development for research mentors. In speaking with CETL about this matter, it was also recommended that the project- and problem-based learning (PBL) institute could include an additional track of research in the future. To reach the goal of becoming a recognized leader in experiential learning, as well as prepare and bring awareness to all students, it is recommended to elevate the work being done in the PBL space. As a conduit to experiential learning, as well as having the potential to be experiential learning, itself, PBL is intricately intertwined with the goals of the AEL and the QEP.

Along those lines of better developing faculty as research mentors, as well as new developments within the PBL Institute that will occur in the coming years, opportunities to integrate and better prepare departments for the Bridge experience should be utilized. Similarly, as GEO ventures into developing and launching Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL), as well as their goal to foster high impact global education experiences, working together to build new and on transitioning programs in a manner relevant to the Bridge program provides additional avenues for the AEL to pursue. As GEO has demonstrated interest in a strong collaboration in applicable faculty development and faculty-led programs, AEL can support GEO and the faculty, as well as facilitate development through the lens of the Bridge program.

A connection was made between CECE and the Cranwell Center for International Students as a result of these interviews. Because a primary concern for international students is finding experiential learning opportunities, particularly with off-campus employers, the opportunities for international students witnessed by CECE may help address a concern for accessible opportunities. It is recommended that further connections be made with CECE to fully utilize opportunities from those employers that are looking to engage with more students. Additionally, it would be prudent to assist those employers in developing programs for students, as the modules provided by the State of Virginia are somewhat difficult to follow and may not always be applicable.

On that same note, there is a need to offer greater value to community-based organizations. Further training of both faculty and students is necessary for continued growth of experiential learning in the nonprofit, community-based sector. Particularly given the mission of Virginia Tech, more intention and effort at a university level should be placed on community-based and nonprofit partners. Aside from creating a workplan for the student, delivering onboarding activities, and engaging in relevant communications and supervisory tasks, which is often times a very large ask of such type of an organization, the burden of the experience should rest solely on the university, faculty lead, and/or student. As such, it would be advantageous to

create long-lasting, sustainable partnerships, with continuity of presence and knowledge from the university.

Not only within community-based experiential learning engagements, but within academic departments, creating student-led societies that propagate longevity and continuity for the host entity – whether nonprofit or for-profit employer – curtails frustration and efforts for the host, the department, and the students. Generating student leadership for this purpose, can result in (1) experiential learning opportunities for those students in the leadership roles, (2) long-term partners in both the for- and nonprofit sectors, (3) ease and attenuated efforts for faculty and the host, (4) engendering more strategic, benefit for the university, the department, the students, and the host organization., and (5) enable higher impact experiential learning opportunities as projects are able to evolve, grow, and complexify. Involving the AEL, as well as the experiential learning opportunity providers, in this endeavor can result in highly fruitful outcomes for all involved stakeholders.

Both GEO and VTE have the expertise to offer learning outcomes and assessments on skills that are often inherent to experiences within the global education and service-learning spaces. Those skills associated with global citizenship, intercultural competence, and civic mindedness solidify self-identity, while engendering highly desirable and employable skills. However, the lack of collaboration and capacity impedes tangible development to address and nurture these leaning components that currently are not documented. Because the AEL can both support and provide expertise in this area, it is recommended that the AEL becomes a primary proponent in bringing this vision voiced by GEO to fruition. As learning outcomes resulting from high-impact experiential learning that the Bridge program aims to achieve, establishing training and support to delineate their various components and contextual meanings can provide value across disciplines.

A specific gap identified by OUR was the need to offer additional training and support for students conducting research. In conjunction with the need for more student training in the nonprofit sector, as well as those for faculty development, it would be helpful to establish pathways to scalable training. As one of the links to all these areas, the AEL should work with the experiential learning opportunity providers and CETL to spearhead filling these gaps. Building committees for each area, led by that pertinent provider and comprised of relevant faculty and staff could be a point of departure for devising appropriate, relevant programming in these areas. The programming and structure of CPD's CEIP and Campus internEXP are great examples from which to learn, pull, and replicate, where appropriate.

In summary, as AEL acts a connector and facilitator, also offering subject matter expertise, working in conjunction with the experiential learning opportunity providers, faculty, and staff, the overall strategy of addressing these needs and gaps pertaining to experiential learning should start to take fold as the team becomes more established and aware of the activities and needs across campus.

- Cataloging and identifying current experiences and involved faculty that have PBL and/or Bridge components;
- Tapping into inherent experiential learning structures on campus, such as the living-learning centers;



- Assist experiential learning opportunity providers in developing high-impact, Bridge-level opportunities, faculty development, and student training
- Align and allocate expertise with the AEL to co-design, train and navigate areas of need and interest among the experiential learning opportunity providers, such as international internships, academic departments, and host organizations
- Identifying proponent faculty in PBL and experiential learning to act as mentors and coaches;
- Allocate funding for and/or help troubleshoot programs that can qualify as experiential learning, but lack specific resources, such as the OUR Ambassador Program impediments;
- Ensure the 3900 system delineates the type of experiential learning, global education, service-learning, research, etc., with an automation of forwarding the relevant information to the appropriate department
- Advocate that University Advancement aligns with the objectives set forth in the QEP, by raising and allocating funds that can provide greater accessibility and equity to students;
- Connect with student-led organizations to advise on Bridge opportunities, such as converting Service Without Borders work into a qualified Bridge experience;
- Engage and connect departments and student groups to devise structures of continuity and student leadership;
- Facilitate departments to utilize and springboard from in-class precursors, like PBL, client-based activities, philanthropic and community-based activities, to high-impact experiential learning;
- Promoting experiential learning through various means and media, including defining the term and outlining the components and criteria
- Augment and strengthen cohesion and structure to overall experiential learning by differentiating and devising different tracks pertaining to levels and goals, facilitate the progression, and pre-onboard those faculty/departments that are:
  - 1) already involved with/offering/requiring experiential learning
  - 2) offering/requiring courses or experiences with elements of experiential learning
  - 3) nonacademic departments with inherent experiential learning, such as the living learning centers
  - 4) interested in the idea and have a vision
  - 5) in need of more assistance, starting from scratch

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Thank you for your time and candidness during the interviews, which have elicited areas in need of support, improvement, and change. Your insights, expertise, and conversations have provided an understanding and knowledge of your departmental operations, goals, and visions that the AEL aims to support in a manner that creates greater collaboration, ease, and benefit for you, your departments, faculty and staff, and the VT students.

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