

**Report of the Working Group to Enhance Experiential Education for Undergraduate Students at
Rutgers University-New Brunswick**

Rutgers University-New Brunswick emphasizes a holistic approach to experiential education. This approach includes actively equipping students with the knowledge of how to obtain meaningful experiences (e.g., internships and co-ops, student teaching, peer instruction, research with faculty, organizational leadership, international experience, service-learning, etc.), reflecting on those experiences in a structured way, and, in turn, ensuring that they can articulate those experiences to potential employers and graduate schools.

Working Group Report

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Working Group #1 (Fall 2021):

This group collected data for the Academic Master Plan Fall 2021 charge. The data was utilized as a part of the brainstorming process for Working Group #2, and thus we thank the members below for their efforts.

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Working Group #2 would also like to thank the members of the **2016 Task Force to Enhance Experiential Education for Undergraduate Students at Rutgers University-New Brunswick**. Their work, chaired by Rick Hearin (retired) and Carl Van Horn, served as the basis for the initial discussion and a defining narrative for this report.

Working Group Report:

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

In October 2016, Richard Edwards, then Chancellor, Rutgers University-New Brunswick, charged a Task Force on Experiential Education to complete a study of experiential education programs within schools on the New Brunswick campus, with the express objective of identifying these programs for possible replication among departments and programs that do not currently mandate experiential education options as part of their undergraduate curricula. The Chancellor observed that if our undergraduate students complemented their academic work with applied experience in actual work settings, they would become more competitive for career-entry positions. In addition, he acknowledged that high-quality internships, co-ops, and supervised research would enrich the educational experience of both undergraduates and faculty.

Building on the significant work of the 2016 task force, a new committee was established as part of now Chancellor-Provost Conway's Fall 2021 Academic Master Plan process based on conversations within the AMP steering group and various committees. Experiential Education continued to be viewed as an essential priority and one that warranted a committee focused solely on this effort to promote student success. This group extensively collected data through a survey of employers and students, a review of five years' worth of Post-graduation Survey Data, benchmarking with other AAU and Big10 Institutions, and stakeholder meetings. In Spring 2022, a second working group was charged with developing a plan to create a repository of experiences across the campus and track student participation within those experiences.

Based upon the review of existing and new data points, the following recommendations are included in this report:

- Goal One: Create clear recommendations for students that include definitions for each type of experience, mapped skills and competencies, a list of opportunities available at Rutgers, and what students might consider during each year of the traditional college career.
 - Recommendation I: Utilize a standard definition for high-impact experiential education activities.
 - Recommendation II: Create an easy-to-navigate web-based clearinghouse of all experiential education opportunities.
- Goal Two: Track and report student participation in experiential education activities.
 - Recommendation I: Develop two tracking categories to include verified and unverified experiences.
 - Recommendation II: Identify a common platform designed to track student involvement across the experiential spectrum.
- Goal Three: Create a university-wide culture for all students that values the importance of experiential education.
 - Recommendation I: Communicate the importance of experiential education on persistence and retention, creating individual community, and post-graduation success.
 - Recommendation II: Develop incentives to encourage students to participate in experiential education until it is more fully integrated into the curriculum.
 - Recommendation III: Fund staff, as part of a centralized unit, to coordinate efforts across the campus.

THE RATIONALE FOR ENRICHING EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION:

College graduates face intense competition for high-quality jobs and limited placements in graduate studies. Strong academic credentials alone may not be sufficient for students applying for desirable opportunities. In the current labor market, employers often prefer applicants with related work experiences that demonstrate the ability to transition into their organization. A survey conducted of recruiters [\(see Appendix A\)](#) by the Experiential Education Working Group (Fall 2021) found that when an employer had to choose between two candidates with equal academic credentials, the following were the top-five experiences they would look for (in ranked order): Internship, Field Experience, Cooperative Education, Student Organization Leadership, and Civic or Community Engagement. Additionally, a survey conducted by the National Association of Colleges and Employers in 2021 reported that companies offered employment to two-thirds (66%) of their former interns. This finding is nearly identical to the Post-Graduation Survey Data collected by the Office of Career Exploration and Success each year, with an average of 63% of undergraduates with interns reporting that the experience converted to a full-time job offer.

Most Rutgers–New Brunswick undergraduate professional schools, including the School of Environmental & Biological Sciences and departments within Rutgers Business School and School of Engineering, require a structured field-based experience and award between 1 and 12 academic credits. Many departments in the School of Arts and Sciences offer elective internship opportunities for academic credit. And central units such as the Office of Career Exploration and Success and the Eagleton Institute of Politics provide funded opportunities for students to experience public service. Experiential education has long been integrated into the education of health care providers, teachers, engineers, business managers, and public administrators. Faculty in these Schools and departments believe that students’ intellectual development and grasp of concepts taught in the classroom are enhanced by field experiences where they are expected to apply their knowledge. Faculty and students understand that field experiences in a business, research laboratory, or non-profit organization reinforces and deepen the understanding of concepts and theories taught in the seminar/classroom setting.

While experiential education is already well established at Rutgers, the evidence suggests a need to enrich and expand these opportunities. Of the graduates who responded to the 2021 Post-Graduation Survey [\(see Appendix B\)](#), 52% participated in an internship or co-op, with the majority participating in internships. However, only 41% of those involved in an internship earned academic credit for their experience. Fewer respondents participated in student organization leadership (44%), academic research with faculty (21%), or studying abroad (6%). 10% of graduates responded that they have not participated in any experience with academic workload (47%), work/employment (35%), not Interested (27%), and awareness (23%) being some of the top reasons for non-participation. It is also important to note that respondents self-reported participation and experiential options vary widely in quality and relevance to students’ academic and career interests.

Expanding field-based experiences is also especially valuable to first-generation college students, a large and growing cohort among the Rutgers-New Brunswick student population. The university’s role in brokering and supervising field placements is essential for students who may lack family connections and professional networks, which are the traditional methods some use to obtain these opportunities. Additionally, the recent focus on student mental health and engagement points to experiential education as a potential solution to bring classroom learning to life for a student population still reeling from a virtual environment during the pandemic. In a recent article published in the [Chronicle of Higher Education](#), Niesen de Abruna, the former president of the Association of Chief Academic Officers, posed two questions, “How can we change the model that we have in higher education,” and “from coverage of disciplines to experiential learning, which is really connected to the careers that most of our students are going to have?” The answer, she believes, can help colleges engage students more effectively.

The Working Group (Fall 2021) also reviewed data collected in 2019 from various experiential education programs at AAU and Big 10 institutions [\(see Appendix C.\)](#) to identify best practices for high-quality experiences. Rutgers University–New Brunswick has an opportunity to lead the effort in ensuring that students graduate with high-impact experiences and applied skills that employers seek.

Our view of the current state of Experiential Education at Rutgers can be summarized by the themes identified by two stakeholder meetings (Undergraduate Research Council and Experiential Education Stakeholders Meeting) in the fall:

- Strengths: Lots of opportunities; more academic programs embedding opportunities; some departments require them (learning opportunities for others)
- Challenges: Lots of opportunities (no central repository, especially for undergraduate research); equity questions with requirements
- Opportunities: Expand the definition; FWS as an opportunity; links to educational pathways
- Goals: Connecting systems for students; building a culture of reflection and articulation; formal documentation of experience

Rutgers should emphasize a holistic approach to experiential education. This approach includes actively equipping students with the knowledge of how to obtain meaningful experiences (e.g., internships and co-ops, student teaching, peer instruction, research with faculty, organizational leadership, international experience, service-learning, etc.), reflecting on those experiences in a structured way, and, in turn, ensuring that they can articulate those experiences to potential employers and graduate schools. The Working Groups conclude that Rutgers University should make *high-quality* experiences available to as many undergraduate students as possible and establish the administrative and financial support to accomplish these goals. Incorporating high-quality experiences outside the classroom into academic preparation is essential for our student's academic and career success.

GOALS & RECOMMENDATIONS:

Goal One: Create clear recommendations for students that include definitions for each type of experience, mapped skills and competencies, a list of opportunities available at Rutgers, and what students might consider during each year of the traditional college career.

Recommendation I: Utilize a standard definition for high-impact experiential education activities.

There are many types of opportunities within the umbrella of experiential education. We will first focus on internships and co-ops, research with faculty, student teaching, clinical rotations, peer instruction, organizational leadership, international experience, and community service learning at the undergraduate level for this committee's work. However, not all experiences are created equal. Thus, experiences that shall qualify for our work will relate to the student's future aspirations, have supervision and mentorship, and include individualized learning objectives. In an ideal situation, the experience will consist of an academic component to ensure adequate unpacking of the experience to allow students to reflect on what they learned during the experience and understand how they might communicate that learning to a future employer or graduate school admissions representative.

Recommendation II: Create an easy-to-navigate web-based clearinghouse of all experiential education opportunities.

To help students explore the many experiential education opportunities available to them across the campus, a new web platform located at experiences.rutgers.edu shall be created as a searchable clearinghouse for opportunities across campus. The site will also define the various types of experiences available at Rutgers, illuminate the value of these experiences to developing 21st Century skills in demand by future employers and graduate schools, and illustrate pathways to access opportunities throughout the undergraduate experience successfully.

Pathway titles shall include:

- Community Engagement
- International Experience
- Internships and Fieldwork
- Organizational Leadership
- Peer Mentoring & Instruction
- Research with Faculty

This new web home may be developed utilizing existing university Drupal web resources while also incorporating a more robust third-party resource that might also track student participation.

Goal Two: Track and report student participation in experiential education activities.

Recommendation I: Develop two tracking categories to include verified and unverified experiences.

As stated in Goal One, not all activities are created equal. Some activities relate to an intentional university program that ensures they include the necessary components of a high-impact experience (verified). In contrast, others are coordinated by the student on their own (unverified). Rutgers should encourage participation in verified experiences and work with campus partners to develop mechanisms to implement a high-impact experience to the fullest extent possible.

Verified Experiences: The committee recommends that we work with Classroom Scheduling to create additional course modes—like the internship course mode—to allow academic units to further code activities and track participation associated with academic-based experiential education (e.g., undergraduate research, service-learning, student leadership, fieldwork, etc.) that is high-impact in nature. Additionally, Rutgers–New Brunswick shall follow the lead of Rutgers–Newark by establishing a Chancellor-Provost code for experiential education-related courses not associated

with a single school. New courses aligned with this code must be reviewed and approved by an interdisciplinary review committee comprised of faculty and selected administrators. This will allow central units with co-curricular experiences to connect them to coursework for no credit or elective credit. All courses that receive the experiential education course mode through an academic school or provost code must include the components of a high-impact experience outlined in Goal One.

Unverified Experiences: For those students participating in an experience that is not connected to a verified Rutgers program, we will rely on students to submit their achievements utilizing a badging-like system. Students will self-report their experiences while answering the following questions:

- What are the two most significant achievements you had during your experience?
- In what ways have you developed a skill during your experience?
- How might what you learned during your experience assist you in a future job or graduate program?

Recommendation II: Identify a common platform designed to track student involvement across the experiential spectrum.

Rutgers is saturated with various third-party and homegrown vendors designed to track student participation in various experiences, both in and out of the classroom. However, rarely do these systems communicate with each other in a thoughtful and intentional manner. A vendor review committee shall identify a centrally managed vendor platform used by the various experiential education providers across campus or connect to existing data resources utilized by partners (e.g., Rutgers Handshake, getINVOLVED, etc.). The platform shall make it easier for students to identify opportunities across the experiential education pathway titles (see Goal One), develop a co-curricular transcript, and allow units to track student participation in engagement opportunities if they do not have a system already established or are missing features (e.g., Aresty Research Center; Leadership and Involvement; experiential education scholarship programs). The platform must be able to import data on a daily interval from other university systems (e.g., Registrar, Academic Scheduling, Handshake, Involvement, etc.). The platform should also include a badging system (see Appendix D) to gamify student submission of experiences.

To incentivize a more collaborative experiential education technical ecosystem, we recommend that the annual university budget planning process be leveraged to require units to report existing technology and methods of tracking students already in place and encourage units to work within existing technological infrastructures before approving budgetary requests. Additionally, we recommend that a new “Student Management System” budget code makes it easier to establish an annual audit of technology utilized across the campus to ensure systems integrate and do not duplicate one another when possible.

Goal Three: Create a university-wide culture for all students that values the importance of Experiential Education.

Recommendation I: Communicate the importance of experiential education on persistence and retention, creating individual community, and post-graduation success.

The importance of experiential education on a student’s post-graduation success should be emphasized from day one of their collegiate careers. This includes incorporating it into New Student Orientation and leveraging academic partnerships (e.g., FIGS, STS, Byrne Seminars, EOF, TRIO Programs, SAS Career Explorations, etc.) to promote the importance of experiential education through events, workshops, seminars, and “train the trainer” initiatives. A standard lesson plan framework for first-year transition courses should be developed and shared with instructors to demonstrate the importance of experiential education. And Rutgers Communications (RComm) should redirect the Rutgers–New Brunswick “Beyond the Classroom” link to the new experiences.rutgers.edu site.

Recommendation II: Develop incentives to encourage students to participate in experiential education until it is more fully integrated into the curriculum.

Many of the incentives are based on a badging approach to tracking student participation. While verified experiences will lead to an automatic badge within a platform based on a data feed, incentives to encourage students to report their experiences with a built-in reflection component (see Goal Two, Recommendation I) would be crucial. We recommend that unique graduation stoles are provided to students who complete a certain number of verified experiences. Stoles would be a visual indicator at graduation that the student is graduating with verified experiences that employers seek. The university should also work with the Handshake Career Management Platform to identify ways to embed badges into the student's profile as a means for employers to identify students with experience.

Outside of technological integrations and related incentives, the working group also recommends expanding the On-campus Work Network (OWN) to transform federal work-study positions into more high-impact internships by establishing mandatory training for *all* supervisors managing Federal Work-Study students, integrating career readiness competencies into FWS evaluations, and making participation in at least one professional development program per semester compensatory for all Federal Work-Study Students. We also recommend integrating skills required and badges earned into the preferred requirements of campus-based job descriptions (e.g., Resident Assistants, Peer Instructors, Learning Assistants, etc.).

Finally, to ensure all students have access to opportunities across the experiential education spectrum, a fund to support students seeking experiences should be developed similar to the [Rutgers-Camden Scholarship](#).

Recommendation III: Fund staff, as part of a centralized unit, to coordinate efforts across the campus

Funding will be required to ensure that this effort has a "home" and a team to coordinate efforts, manage the badging program for experiential education, provide resources to campus partners seeking to integrate "unpacking" activities into their experiences, track student participation, manage associated technology, and implement a fund to support student experiential education for the university. This team will also use the high-impact practices definition and 21st Century core skills and competencies (outlined by the Student Success committee) to work with campus partners to transform experiences into high-impact ones that will count toward the verified experiential education goal. The team will work to expand the current OWN program within CES to impact all FWS students, implement an advisory board comprised of various experiential education providers to coordinate efforts, unify experiential efforts, and develop a broad list of options for students to pursue.

Additionally, there is a shared interest in increasing facilitated undergraduate research opportunities identified within the Academic Master Plan. The Aresty Research Center is a central unit that supports undergraduate research at Rutgers University. Aresty undergraduates can explore the research process and connect students with faculty mentors and projects that aid in defining their research goals. Aresty provides a platform for students to support their research through funding and present their findings university-wide during their annual symposium. This program has enough student interest to expand; however, it does not have the necessary capacity. With additional staff support, an increase in student participation will serve as an early and easy win toward enhancing opportunities for students.

UPCOMING WORKING GROUP TASKS:

Task I: Work with the Undergraduate Education Ed. Tech. Working Group to identify vendor platforms.

Both working groups view technology as a potential solution to many challenges at Rutgers. In an ideal world, a Request for Proposals (RFP) would result in a singular platform that meets the requirements of the two working groups. However, if one does not exist, this group will ensure that the systems communicate with each other to share data.

Task II: Continue researching how to integrate experiential education into the core curriculum more fully.

Following the lead of other institutions such as Florida State University, Kent State University, and others, Rutgers-New Brunswick can truly set itself apart from our peers by promising that every student will have an opportunity to improve

their post-graduation competitiveness through experiential education that is integrated into the core curriculum. The committee recommends changing the university mindset to “how can we make this happen” versus “should we make this happen” to make these high-impact experiences more accessible to students who can’t participate due to work obligations or academic workload. We should follow up with previously benchmarked universities that have an established requirement to explore concerns expressed by some related to accessibility and alternative assignments. And we should explore how existing Rutgers schools and departments have overcome barriers and integrated experiential education into the curriculum.