**Experiential Learning Task Force**

**Report**

**October 2014**

**[DRAFT]**

The Experiential Learning Task Force convened in the fall of 2013 and was charged by the Provost with the following four tasks:

1. Define “experiential learning” for Ramapo College.
2. Refine the institutional learning goals and outcomes for experiential learning.
3. Identify types of existing or new activities and experiences that could meet these outcomes.
4. Develop a plan that would enable 90% of undergraduate programs to require an extended experiential learning activity. Considerations include, but are not limited to, resources, curricular revision, transcription of non-credit experiences (if applicable), timelines, and so forth.

The members of the Task Force were as follows:

Desislava Budeva, Assistant Professor of Marketing

Anne DeGroot, Associate Professor of Teacher Education

Michael Fluhr, Associate Professor of Political Science

Beth Ricca, Director, Cahill Center for Career Services

Stephen Rice, Dean, Salameno School of Humanities and Global Studies (chair)

Rowlett Neel Scott, Assistant Professor of Communication Arts

Loraine Tan, Assistant Professor of Chemistry

To begin, we considered the College’s current mission statement and vision statement, and the relevant portions of the newly-approved strategic plan.

Ramapo College Mission Statement

Ramapo College is New Jersey’s Public Liberal Arts College, dedicated to providing students a strong foundation for a lifetime of achievement. The College is committed to academic excellence through interdisciplinary and experiential learning, and international and intercultural understanding. Ramapo College emphasizes teaching and individual attention to all students. We promote diversity, inclusiveness, sustainability, student engagement, and community involvement.

Ramapo College Vision Statement

As the region’s premier public liberal arts college, Ramapo College of New Jersey prepares students to be successful leaders for a changing world through its distinctive commitments to hands-on learning and faculty-student mentoring.

Ramapo College Strategic Plan

Goal 1: Advance Academic Excellence and Engagement

Ramapo College advances academic excellence and student engagement in the undergraduate experience through its General Education Program and major and minor programs; continued focus on interdisciplinary and experiential learning, and international and intercultural understanding; and increased integration of the Course Enrichment Component (CEC). In addition, the College offers a small number of graduate programs in areas of existing undergraduate expertise and anticipated high demand. To these ends, the College supports a highly qualified, engaged and accessible faculty.

The College seeks to better serve students from underrepresented groups, transfer students, international students, graduate students, and adult learners through programs and services that address the distinctive needs of these growing populations. The integration of technology in support of all these endeavors will be emphasized. The College continuously develops, assesses, and refreshes curricula and improves services.

Objective 1.1: The College will offer rigorous curricula and experiential activities that prepare all students for a lifetime of achievement.

Achievement Target 1.1.2: 90% of all undergraduate major programs will require students to successfully engage, by the time of graduation, in an extended experiential activity (study abroad, co-op, internship, training, clinical, service learning, and student/faculty research); and 50% of undergraduate major programs will require successful engagement by graduation in a meaningful international experience (study abroad, service learning abroad, international internship/co-op, foreign language study, intensive specialized international course).

We then reviewed the final reports of two past groups that convened over the last decade to consider experiential learning at Ramapo. These were the March 28, 2007 report of the Task Force on Experiential Learning chaired by Cherrie Kassem[[1]](#footnote-1), and the June 2, 2003 report of the Experiential Learning Task Force co-chaired by Ellen Kaiden and Carol Morrison. We also examined models of Experiential Learning at other colleges and universities, and we reviewed current scholarship on Experiential Learning in higher education. After some discussion, and with a focus on our specific charge, we came to the following revised definition of experiential learning:

**At Ramapo College, experiential learning is a purposeful process of engaged, active learning and reflection guided by faculty and staff in which the student develops knowledge, skills, and/or values, from direct experiences in hands-on settings. In all cases experiential learning should be extended, formalized, and include an application of theory to practice.**

In considering the question of how to define “extended,” we agreed that this particular requirement may be satisfied if a learning experience is either extended over a relatively long period of time, or immersive for a shorter period of time.

For the work of refining the institutional goals and outcomes for experiential learning, we consulted the “Curriculum and Assessment” page of the Provost’s website and the glossary of the current strategic plan. We also consulted the June 2013 Experiential Learning Assessment Report of the General Education Curriculum Committee (GECCo), which lists four “components of the Experiential Learning Student Outcomes,” as follows:

1. Construct and enhance practical skill sets by applying theoretical knowledge and conceptual understanding in authentic environments.

2. Identify how prior knowledge, skills, and conceptual understanding have been applied to their experiences and how their experiences will enhance future academic study and personal, professional, and civic development.

3. Reflect on their experiences individually and collectively by contextualizing assumptions and hypotheses about their knowledge, outcomes of their decisions, and actions they have taken, and by sharing their insights.

4. Understand and articulate the structure, relationships between, and impacts of the multiple communities and organizations with which they interact.

Given the elements of our new definition of experiential learning, we concluded that the college should proceed with three outcomes in mind, not four. Thus, through their experiential learning activities, students will be able to:

1. Identify how academic content and concepts apply to their experiential activities and how these activities will further their academic study and personal, professional, and civic development.
2. Critically reflect on their experiential activities in a formal way—either orally or in writing—in order to assess their assumptions, identify the outcomes of their decisions, consider alternative courses of action, share their insights, and demonstrate the integration of theory and practice.
3. Where relevant, demonstrate and articulate an understanding of the structure, relationships among, and impacts of the communities and organizations with which they interact.

In addressing the third part of our charge, and based in part on the previous studies of experiential learning at the college, we agreed that the following learning activities could meet the goals and outcomes of experiential learning:

Co-ops Alternative spring break

Internships Study abroad

Externships Domestic field study

Service learning Domestic exchange study

Fieldwork courses Clinicals

Upper-level laboratory courses Training

Studio courses Student/faculty research

Independent study courses

Any plan that would enable 90% of undergraduate programs to require an extended experiential learning activity by 2018 would need to address three main areas of concern.

First, it would have to establish a process for identifying and ratifying which current learning activities at the college meet the definition and learning outcomes indicated above. It would also have to ensure that future learning activities (including, for example, new courses) could be similarly evaluated.

Second, it would have to devote the appropriate resources to the administrative and instructional costs associated with an increase in experiential learning activities, which would include the costs of vetting potential co-op and internship placements, faculty instruction and supervision, and transportation to and from sites. These costs might also include the need to hire additional personnel.

Third, it would have to provide for a common means for recording any experiential learning activity undertaken by a student to meet the program requirement. It might also be desirable to record any additional experiential learning activities pursued beyond the program requirement.

Before this new initiative in experiential learning at Ramapo is launched, we recommend that clear plans and policies are in place for ensuring the proper administrative and curricular oversight of all experiential learning activities, and for recording those activities. These plans and policies should also make clear the lines of authority and responsibility for meeting the college’s strategic goal. Finally, we recommend that issues concerning the availability and cost of transportation are thought through and addressed to the extent possible.

1. [Appendix 2B from “General Education 2006-9”](http://www.ramapo.edu/provost/files/2013/04/GenEd-History-2006-9.doc) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)