

Goal Two

Advance Experiential Learning

Introduction

The primary focus of this goal is to ensure that every student participates in a significant experiential learning activity in order to complete the requirements for their major. Following is a definition of experiential learning developed by the Experiential Learning Planning Committee in 2004:

Experiential learning, at its core is operationalized by engaging students in learning through sequential exposure to challenging, compelling, and enriching activities conducted in appropriate settings. It integrates development of knowledge, skills, and dispositions, and fosters application of methods of critical inquiry. It engages students in personal reflection in order to organize, interpret, and bring meaning and coherence to their learning experience.

Implementation teams associated with this initiative are focused on creating new or improving current structures, programs, or activities that support faculty, staff, and student efforts to provide experiential learning activities. Academic programs and administrative units that provide experiential learning opportunities to our students will continue to have responsibility for determining the types of experiential learning activities that are appropriate for their students.

Initiatives

Goal two includes three initiatives. The first initiative, Infuse Experiential Learning as a Core Component of All Academic Programs, includes several components or sub-initiatives. The other two initiatives, apply the science of learning to the learning of science and coordinate and elevate leadership activities, are focused on much more specific activities. The following section provides an update of the actions of each of the initiative teams.

Initiative 1 – Infuse Experiential Learning as a Core Component of All Academic Programs – Co-Chairs: Harriet Hudson, Associate Dean, College of Arts and Sciences and Chris Olsen, Chair, Department of History

This Initiative Team is currently working on the following five action items:

Identifying best practices for experiential learning, especially study abroad, undergraduate research, internships, and learning communities.

Promoting undergraduate research through a variety of programs and incentives that include providing undergraduate student fellowships, organizing campus-wide showcases and/or conferences, providing funding for student travel, equipment, and other related expenses, and creating an on-line, peer-reviewed journal of student research. In addition, the team has recommended providing travel funds for faculty to develop relationships and coordinate student research and providing additional funds for the library to support student research.

Increase student participation in travel abroad. Recommendations to increase study abroad include providing financial assistance to students studying abroad and providing incentives for faculty to incorporate international and domestic travel into courses.

Enhance experiential learning in learning communities by increasing the number of learning communities and providing support for course development.

Initiative 2 – Applying the Science of Learning to the Learning of Science, Chair: Jim Speer, Department of Environmental and Earth Sciences

This initiative is associated with the national SENCER project. SENCER, Science Education for New Civic Engagements and Responsibilities, is a National Science Foundation funded project that aims to improve undergraduate STEM education by linking learning to critical civic questions.

The ISU SENCER team started their work during the summer 2009 term when they attended the SENCER Summer Institute to learn more about the project. Since that time, the SENCER team has held several faculty workshops and sponsored a public talk on the SENCER teaching model that was presented by Marian Fass from Beloit College. The SENCER team has secured an implementation award from SENCER that has provided some funding for implementing the SENCER model in several pilot courses. The SENCER model also will be included in at least two new foundational studies courses. Another group of faculty will attend the 2010 SENCER Summer Institute in Asheville, NC this year.

Initiative 3 – Coordinate and Elevate Leadership Studies –Chair, Denise Collins, Department of Educational Leadership, Administration, and Foundations

An inventory of current leadership activities has been completed by this initiative team. Information gleaned from the inventory will be included in a unified web site that provides a place for students to acquire information about all of the current and future leadership studies opportunities at ISU. The team also is drafting a leadership statement for ISU during this semester. The statement will be presented to the campus for review and comment.

Over the next year, a Leadership Consortium will be developed to coordinate and guide leadership studies related activities on the campus. In preparation for development of the consortium, the team is planning site visits to exemplar programs at other universities. The day to day work of developing the leadership consortium will be directed by a proposed faculty fellow. The team will develop a position description for an Assistant Director of the Center for Public Service and Community Engagement to provide long-term, part-time staffing for the Leadership Consortium. Oversight of the Leadership Consortium will be provided in the long-term by an Advisory Group to be established by the end of the Spring 2011 semester.

Other activities of this team include conducting a survey of prospective students, current students, and alumni to determine the important elements of leadership development and investigating the place of leadership development on the potential co-curricular transcript.