Quality Enhancement Plan Impact Report

Section 1. Initial Goals and Intended Outcomes

In fall 2016, Augusta University's (AU) inaugural quality enhancement plan (QEP), *Learning by Doing*, was implemented to enhance student learning through the offering of experiential learning opportunities and a certificate of leadership for undergraduate students. The plan aims to impact student learning through a comprehensive, multipronged effort to develop faculty as innovative teachers, support experiential learning inside and outside of the classroom, and guide leadership development in our students. University administration supported the implementation of *Learning by Doing* in several ways including hiring a QEP Director, partnering with the Office of Faculty Development and Teaching Excellence, and providing staff and resources for technical and administrative support. *Learning by Doing* is a transdisciplinary characteristic of our curriculum and is woven throughout our physical campuses and academic colleges.

The initial three goals of *Learning By Doing* are to 1) Enhance instructional delivery through activity-based and instructional practices; 2) Provide opportunities for students to apply skills and knowledge acquired through activity-based and experiential learning in practical experiences; and 3) Prepare students to be leaders in their future professional, educational, and service endeavors by providing leadership curriculum that can lead to an academic certificate. The QEP goals are transdisciplinary, and were selected because all colleges could participate in, and benefit from the goals as they aligned directly with the Strategic Plan of the University, Beyond Boundaries. For example, *Education Goal 2: Enrich student learning through faculty led enhancement of our curriculum and delivery within and beyond the classroom* has particularly been impacted by the QEP.

Focusing on undergraduate instruction, we proposed that baccalaureate graduates of AU would be able to 1) demonstrate the ability to effectively communicate purpose, knowledge, and objectives to a target or general audience using oral, written, or visual means, 2) acquire, integrate, and apply information from a variety of sources, 3) explain leadership theories or models as related to the student's own experiences, and 4) exhibit behaviors that distinguish competent professionals.

Section 2. Modifications and Justifications

As the QEP evolved, numerous modifications were made with an eye toward improvement of student learning, faculty development, and logistical processes.

2.1 Modifications to Student Learning Outcomes. Over time, and with assessment of the Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs), the QEP Curriculum Assessment and Advisory Committee (QEPCAAC), with input from instructors of experiential learning courses, made several modifications to the SLOs. For example, the committee simplified language to allow for more valid assessments. For example, SLO 1 originally read "Students will demonstrate the ability to effectively communicate purpose, knowledge and objectives, to a target or general audience, using oral, written, or visual means." With time, it became clear that the language required too many varied assessments that were unrealistic to enact simultaneously. SLO 1 was therefore modified to "Students will demonstrate the ability to communicate effectively" thus allowing for direct assessments of communication toward one or another type of audience, and assessments through one or another type of communication (i.e., oral or written), and assessments of purpose, knowledge, or objectives (i.e., not necessarily all three). This communicated to faculty that a given measure could address one or more of the aspects of communication without requiring that all these variables needed to be addressed in each measure. Similar modifications were made to other SLOs as shown in Table 1. Additionally, a new SLO (5) was added to encourage the preparation of our students to engage in the important life skill of collaborative work.

Table 1. Student Learning Outcomes: Modifications and Justification

SLO #	SLO
1	Original: Students will demonstrate the ability to effectively communicate purpose, knowledge, and objectives to a target or general audience using oral, written, or visual means. Current: Students will demonstrate the ability to communicate effectively. Justification: Simplify and broaden the objective to allow for assessment of one or more of the stated variables.
2	Original: Students will acquire, integrate, and apply information from a variety of sources. Students will demonstrate problem-solving skills. Current: Students will demonstrate problem-solving skills. Justification: This SLO was found to be too vague for quality assessment. The focus was modified to problem solving skills, which may incorporate investigation, integration and/or, application of information in order to solve a problem.
3	Original: Students will explain selected leadership theories or models as related to the student's own leadership development/experience. Current: Students will apply leadership theory to their own experiences and observations. Justification: Remove language implying a requirement of learning particular leadership theory. Adding the objective of higher level skill of application.
4	Original: Students will exhibit behaviors that distinguish competent professionals. No modification.
5	Original: None. Current: Students will work effectively in teams. Justification: Decided that teamwork was important enough to recognize and assess as a stand-alone SLO and was an integral part of leadership development.

2.2 Modifications to the Certificate of Leadership. After living with the Certificate of Leadership (COL) for several years, areas where improvements could be made became evident. The original Certificate of Leadership required students to complete two experiential learning courses, or one experiential learning course and one leadership experience, thereby allowing some students to receive the COL without any direct leadership experience. We found that the original Capstone options (Study Abroad/Away, Internship and Research) were not equally feasible for all majors or individuals. The leadership experience and reflective capstone seminar replaced this requirement. Retaining a diversity of options for Bridge courses and leadership experiences, we now book-end the program with courses that encourage deep reflection on our SLOs. The revised process now ensures 1) that leadership *theory* is addressed at the Foundation and Capstone levels, 2) that leadership *experience* is attained in the Foundation course and the Experience in Leadership requirement, 3) that SLOs for Communication, Ethics and Professionalism are attained in the first Bridge course and SLOs related to Management, Teamwork and Diversity are attained in the second Bridge course, and 4) that *reflection* on leadership skills of self and other are addressed in the Foundation course, the Leadership Experience, and the Capstone course. In practical terms, we implemented six main strategies to achieve these improvements:

1. Adding a requirement of direct leadership experience for every COL student;
2. Utilizing assessments built within courses that meet SLOs, as opposed to asking faculty and students to generate new assignments for each person and class
3. Partnering with other campus units like Department of Military Science, and the Student Leadership Program to bring cohesiveness to education and experiences around leadership;
4. Replacing experiential learning courses as a requirement with specific courses that meet the SLOs of the COL
5. Generating three new courses LDRS 3000, LDRS 4960, LDRS 4999 that a) allow for more consistent leadership experiences to be included on the transcript and b) be tracked in Banner;
6. Generating new course attributes that easily identify courses that contribute to the COL.

2.3 Modifications to Assessment Strategies

Technology & Access. At the beginning of QEP implementation, student learning outcomes were assessed in the foundational and experiential learning courses that contributed to the Certificate of Leadership. Assessment in the Leadership 2000 courses was fairly easy to acquire and maintain across multiple instructors and most evaluations occurred through a paid subscription to the eportfolio system Chalk & Wire. However, regarding Bridge courses and Capstone experiences we experienced a challenge of faculty and students not knowing (or not understanding) that they were to assess the SLOs and submit these to the QEP director through Chalk & Wire- likley because of the sememster by sememster variation in students, EXL courses, and course instructors. We decided to generate a standard set of 7 assignments students could choose from, to be submitted to the QEP Director with members of the QEPCAAC conducting assessment with one standardized rubric.

To improve the consistency and frequency of our communication with students in 2020 we launched a D2L page for all Certificate students, regardless of their status in program progression. This allowed students 24/7 easy access to assignments, digital submission boxes, advising appointments, group communications, important dates, and so forth. The D2L platform also provided for straightforward online scoring by QEPCAAC members and simple access to aggregated data. These modifications also saved Chalk & Wire costs allowing for significantly more support toward Faculty Development.

Current Status. As explained in section 2.2, experiential learning has been teased apart from the Certificate of Leadership. Assessment of SLOs is currently being carried out within the particular courses that have been approved for contribution to the Certificate of Leadership. Separately, the QEPCAAC is (in AY22) in the process re-evaluating the criteria for a course to be considered "experiential" and is also revising the course assessment process. We have partnered with a librarian to conduct a systematic literature review of experiential learning to inform our process of re-defining Experiential Learning for our campus. Our committee's timeline is structured to establish the revised EXL course criteria by fall 2022.

2.4 Modifications to Organizational and Administrative Structure

University and QEP Administration. Over the last five years, Augusta University has experienced a number of administrative and structural changes that have impacted the QEP directly and indirectly. Between 2016 and 2019, several administrators integral to the QEP retired, namely the executive sponsor (Provost Caughman) and both sponsors (Dr. Rychly and Ms. Brigdon). In 2018 a restructuring took place such that the duties of Academic and Faculty Affairs were split into two positions: Dr. Zach Kelehear was named Vice Provost for Instruction and Innovation and Dr. Browder was named Associate Provost for Faculty Affairs. Soon thereafter in 2019 Ms. Mickey Williford, Director of Accreditation and one of the original QEP Project Co-Leaders, was named the Vice President for Institutional Effectiveness and SACSCOC Liaison. Concurrently with the upper level administrative restructurings, the Office of Faculty Development and Teaching Excellence (OFTDE) and the Office of Experiential Learning (OEL) were eliminated and the Division for Instruction and Innovation (DII) was created. Within the DII, a Center for Instruction and Innovation (CII) was formed to support and advance excellence in instructional design and experiential learning. Efforts associated with faculty instructional development became the purview of the Vice Provost for Instruction and Innovation.

In 2018, Dr. Kimberly Gray resigned as the QEP Director to take a different position on campus. While searching for a new Director, the Vice Provost for Instruction was acting QEP Director, and in late 2019 Dr. Quentin Davis, Director of the Center for Undergraduate Research and Scholarship was also named QEP Director. With the closing of the OFTDE and OEL several administrative shifts took place such that the QEP currently shares administrative and budgetary assistance with the CII. The Vice Provost of Instruction oversees the implementation of the all three QEP Goals. These administrative changes have created challenges to the

continuity of QEP implementation and simultaneously have created new opportunities for growth and expansion of experiential learning and student leadership development.

Section 3. Impact on Student Learning and the Student Learning Environment

3.1 Student learning. Assessment of student learning objectives took place in the Experiential Learning (EXL) courses that also contributed to a given student's Certificate of Leadership. We utilized a variety of measures to assess leadership skills and mastery of the SLOs.

3.1a Self Perceptions of Learning. A sample of 196 students in Experiential ("EXL"; n=117) and Non-experiential ("Non-EXL"; n=79) matched courses completed a survey about active learning in their courses. Sampled courses were matched by level (e.g., both 2000 level), discipline and delivery method (web or in-person lecture). Response rates were low; 10% for EXL classes and 7% for non EXL classes. Students were given examples of experiential learning strategies and asked to answer about the sampled course only. We acknowledge that a larger sample needs to be acquired and thus results should be interpreted with caution.

More of the non-EXL students versus the EXL students (83% v 58%) reported that their professors utilized active learning strategies. When asked to rate their perceived level of learning in the course on a 5 point scale (where 5 = 'learning the content extremely well'), 25% of the EXL students gave a rating of 5, 42% gave a rating of 4, 8% gave a rating of 3 or 1, and 0 gave a rating of 2. Of the Non-EXL students 100% rated their learning with a 5. A vast majority of students in the Non-EXL classes (83%) said they were learning better in this course than in their other courses, compared to 25% of students in the EXL classes said they were learning better in this course than in their other courses. Few EXL (33%) and zero Non-EXL students thought their learning was worse than in other classes; those who thought their learning was 'about the same' as in other classes was 42% of EXL and 17% of Non-EXL students.

There may be several explanations for these results of perceived learning; the data also should be considered tentatively given the sample size. It may be that the students found the NON-EXL classes easier and therefore perceived greater learning. An additional question about the amount of writing in the course may also shed light on the students' responses; 67% of EXL students reported that they do more writing this in this course than in their other courses, whereas 0% of the Non-EXL students reported writing more in the sampled course than their other courses. Intensive or frequent writing assignments may skew the perceptions of learning to be more difficult, making students feel like they were learning less.
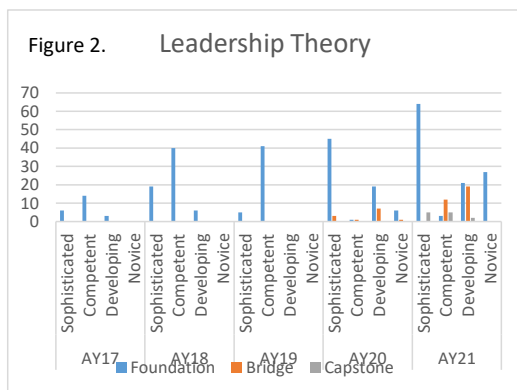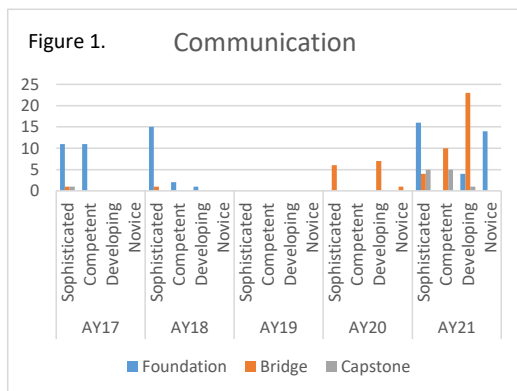
Another potential explanation is that discrimination between the two groups was not valid, especially given that 83% of the Non-EXL students reported that their professor used experiential learning strategies. Based on the narrative descriptions students gave as examples of learning strategies, this seems to be the case. For example, one Non-EXL students wrote *"Dr. Professor does a wonderful job making different lessons into activity-based learning activities or real-life situations."* This was further supported by the fact that 50% of the faculty respondents said that they used experiential learning strategies in their courses, though the course was not
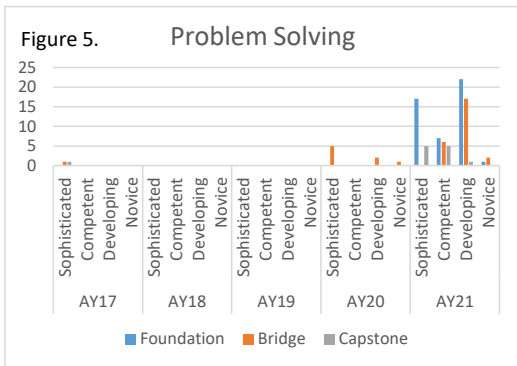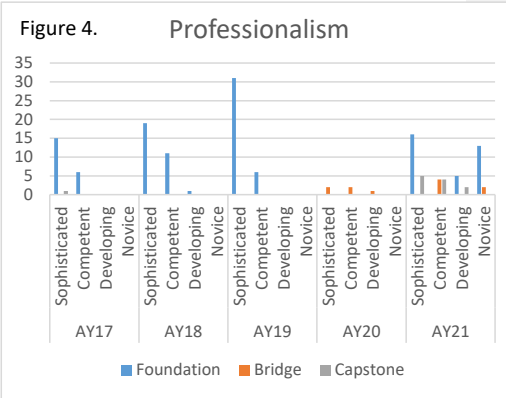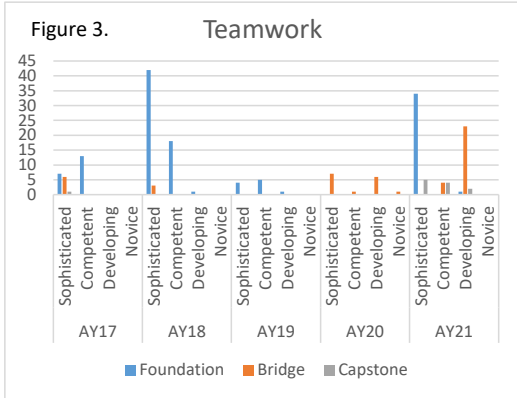
given the EXL attribute in our registration system, therefore reducing the validity of these data. We have no reason to believe that schedulers mistakenly gave the EXL attribute; more likely some schedulers neglected to assign the attributes out of a lack of knowledge or attention to other priorities. The clear silver lining is that more of our faculty are engaging in experiential learning strategies than is documented.

3.1b Objective Measures of Student Learning. AU students are learning skills pertaining to team work, professionalism, and communication though specific content embedded in courses across the disciplines. They are literally *learning by doing* in courses that use active learning approaches such as Reacting to the Past curriculum (History), undergraduate research (Psychology Capstone), ethical investigation scenarios (Organizational Behavior), team based solutions to real life Problem Based Learning activities (Management); coding development (Database Systems); video interviewing (Advanced Media Writing), and development and filming of Public Service Announcements for the Cancer Center (Advance Media Production).

The number of students enrolled in the Certificate of Leadership has grown from 8 in our first spring (2017) to 59 in AY22 with 68 students having graduated with the Certificate thus far. In

Figure 1. Communication

the instructor and QEPCAAC's assessments of the specific SLOs we see that students are evaluated more favorably in the lower-level courses than in the upper-level courses. For example, note that the blue bars in Figures 1-5, representing scores from early foundation courses more frequently indicate a Sophisticated proficiency than the orange or gray bars for Bridge and Capstone scores indicating that more improvement is needed as students progress. There are several plausible explanations for this trend. Namely, students may be evaluated in the lower level courses more favorably since they are younger and the expectations are not as high as they are for the upper level courses in senior projects. Another potential explanation is that students are indeed loosing skills and reducing the mastery of these skills as they matriculate. Finally, there is also the explanation that there is a degree of grade inflation

Figure 2. Leadership Theory

Figure 3.

Teamwork

Figure 4.

Professionalism

Figure 5.

Problem Solving

(subconscious or inadvertent we hope) at the lower level courses. The converse is not hypothesized since there is little room for advancement in so many "sophisticated" evaluations at the lower level.

We see improvement over time in students' understanding and application of leadership theory, especially in the foundational leadership course (Fig. 2) insinuating that we have improved instruction around this objective. Many students are still developing in Teamwork (Fig. 3). Problem Solving (Fig. 5) was added as a SLO at the Bridge level in AY20 and Foundation and Capstone level in AY21, thus learning trends are not yet apparent. We can assume that based on the AY21 data, Foundation and Bridge students still need instruction an experience in problem solving. Our faculty would benefit from workshops on the teaching of problem solving within discipline specific content. In the new senior Capstone in Leadership seminar (LDRS 4999), we address the SLOs with a focus on the application of theory to actual lived experiences. It will take several years of teaching the Capstone course to see the degree of impact of this reflective seminar.

3.2 Student Learning Environment. There are two principal components to the learning environment; 1) the physical environment including the setting and materials available for course engagement and 2) the instructor who establishes the attitude, expectations, and culture of a course. As a university we have provided support to enhance both of these components of the learning environment. A short video on Experiential Learning at AU exemplifies the environmental settings and instructors who are teaching these courses. The impact on the learning environment can also be measured in the number of Experiential

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Learning classes, reports from EIF Grant awardees, and the numbers of students, classes, and faculty affected.

Academic Year	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
Table 2. Experiential Learning (EXL) course offerings over time	EXL Classes offered	37	161	363	271	292
	% Change		335	125	-25	8

The number of Experiential Learning course offerings (Table 2) and diversity of these courses have significantly increased since we initiated the *Learning by Doing* QEP; the jump from 37 to 161 in AY19 shows the initial impact of the QEP. There was also significant increase in AY20 due primarily to more students taking advantage of undergraduate research (4990), internship (4960) and practicum (3330) courses. These course offerings began to decline with the onset of the COVID pandemic, but we are slowly increasing those opportunities again as student and community safety increases.

More importantly, student enrollment in these courses shows a steady upward trend; Figure 5 includes Study Abroad/Away, Internships, and Undergraduate Research, and all courses given the EXL attribute. It is clear upon closer look that the "All Experiential" data are underrepresented since in some cases the number of Undergraduate research, Study Abroad/Away and Internship courses is larger than the total number of EXL enrollment. The reason for this apparent discrepancy is that some of the courses must not have been given the EXL attribute. Again, this calls for more consistency in the coding of our courses. With that caveat in mind, comparatively, enrollment in Internships has remained strong and steady with a slight increase; Undergraduate Research enrollment shows a slight decrease. This is primary due to a slight spike in AY18 where there was an unusually larger number of students engaging in Biological and Chemistry research in AY17 and AY18. In AY19 the number of students able to be physically on campus and in laboratories was heavily impacted by COVID restrictions.

Figure 5.   Experiential Learning Student Enrollment
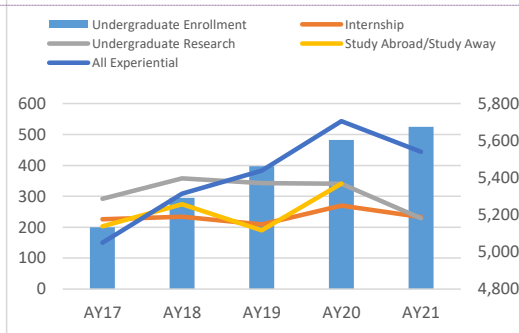
Figure 6.   Impact on Student Learning Environment

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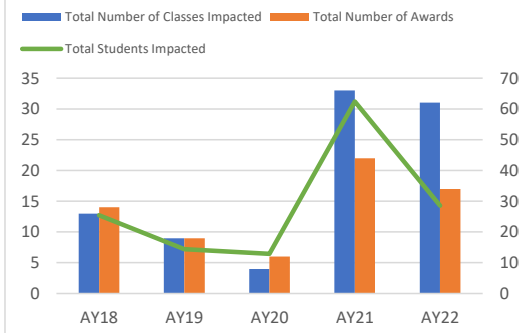
A modest accounting of impact of student learning can also be seen through financial support of this goal and numbers of people impacted. With the discontinuation of the subscription to Chalk & Wire (replacing with the already purchased D2L), we were able to reassign some resources toward faculty grants supporting development of more innovative instruction through the Educational Innovation Fund (EIF) grants. These grants have grown in popularity and inspired many innovating teaching strategies; the number of students impacted has increased from 8 awards impacting 145 students in our first spring (2017) to 17 awards in AY21 impacting 624 students (Fig. 6). With this program faculty are given the opportunity for competitive funding to support a particular course (or set of courses) through materials, supplies, technological access, or training. The impact of funds used for 3 courses that touched large groups of Freshmen and Sophomores (INQR 1000and BIOL 2111/2) resulted in a large spike in AY20. Table 3 provides an overview of the institution's financial support of *Learning by Doing* and the impact on the learning environment. The first row of data in Table 3 shows that monies supporting faculty via EIF Grants has effectively tripled over the life of the QEP. The second row of data shows support for various faculty development opportunities to attend teaching conferences such as the well-known Lilly Conference and to receive memberships to the National Society for Experiential Education. Although we have documented much of the faculty development and efforts to increase experiential pedagogies, it is likely that our data does not capture all that has occurred in this vein over the course of 5 years, thus we suspect that this is a conservative accounting of actual numbers of faculty, students, and programs impacted. The large drop in operating costs is primarily the result of our administrative transitions and lack of a full time QEP director or staff.

Table 3. Support of the Experiential Learning Environment

Funding	AY17	AY18	AY19	AY20	AY21	Total
EIF Grants	$9,353	$18,744	$7,984	$10,650	$23,721	$93,563
Faculty Development	$4069	$7671	$1,277	$1592	$4,405	$19,015
Operating	$191,904	$173,960	$48,821	$22,502	$3,849	$441,037
Total	$205,327	$200,374	$58,082	$34,745	$31,975	$530,503

Section 4. Reflection on the QEP Experience and Lessons Learned by AU

Engaging in the Quality Enhancement Plan process has involved many faculty, committees, evaluators, students, administrators, courses, assessments, and programs. As a whole, it has been a remarkable endeavor with many successes, challenges, and in the end provides for more opportunity than was even perhaps initially anticipated. Our reflections are organized into two main areas: 1) selection of a QEP topic and 2) the QEP implementation process.

4.1 QEP Selection and Design. After the reality of implementing our QEP for some time, it became clear that we had combined two very strong ideas, experiential learning and

leadership, but that the areas of overlap and non-overlap of the two unintentionally resulted in a lack of focus on each. The combination of the two resulted in confusion and difficulty in implementing as robust a program in each as could have been done. Thus, in year 3 as described in Section 2, we teased apart the two endeavors to let experiential leadership fall more naturally where it occurs, let experiential learning (sans leadership) and leadership (sans experiential learning) fall naturally where they occur in our curriculum. Allowing room for some overlap, but not necessarily 100% overlap improved the quality and validity of the Certificate of Leadership in particular. In hindsight, it may be more efficient and more successful to focus on one idea as the 'QEP' and pursue other strong ideas outside of the QEP process.

4.2 QEP Implementation Process. With regard to the process of implementing a QEP, it is clear that dedicated time and resources are integral for steady growth and success. During our structural and administrative adjustments we lost a fair amount of QEP momentum. Our data show this in the reduction of students applying for the Certificate of Leadership, and the reduction of knowledge and interest in experiential learning courses by faculty which, compounded by COVID, resulted in a fairly drastic reduction of Experiential Learning courses offered. With administrative turnover, the new director has been able to guide the program, albeit with limited time and resources given another full time university position. Our stability with a new Provost in place and the decline of COVID appear to be making a positive influence on our ability to return to a robust program emphasizing experiential learning and separately the Certificate of Leadership.

We are still in the early phase of a cultural shift toward embedding experiential learning and high impact practices into our instruction and course registration system at a university wide scale. Further progress in this area will grow faculty buy-in and allow us to track patterns of change across time more accurately. This is a strong point of interest for our Vice Provost for Instruction; as we are designing our new Strategic Plan, experiential learning and other high impact practices are incorporated as integral for student learning and discovery. With support and partnership of Institutional Effectiveness and the Office of the Registrar we anticipate continuing to be able to identify pockets where these courses are flourishing and pockets of opportunity for introducing or expanding experiential learning.

4.3 Summary. Experiential learning advantages our students, faculty, institution, and community. The QEP has allowed dedicated resources to support experiential learning and the development of many young leaders. The continuation of successful learning through experiential practices needs to be sustained through committed funding, leadership, and strategic organization. AU is well poised for further growth as we continue to strive toward excellence in higher education.