

Greeting from Dr. Kurt Hollender, Assistant Director of Experiential Learning at Xavier University



The common thread that runs through Xavier University's intellectual underpinnings as a Jesuit liberal arts institution, its small, focused classes that center on real-world issues, and its student body's extensive engagement in modes of outside-the-classroom learning is what education researchers call "experiential learning." Knowledge in action, learning by doing, hands-on learning, or career-relevant experiences are terms that each capture aspects of experiential learning. Concrete examples are: internships, study abroad, research projects, and service learning. At Xavier, we prize experiential learning along with book, lecture, lab, and studio learning because the results are 98% of our

graduates employed, in further study, or in long-term volunteer positions six months after graduation.ⁱ

Xavier University's highly-trained faculty and administration members organize and promote both the cutting-edge content for Xavier classes as well as the relevant international, research, service, and work-learning opportunities that comprise experiential learning on our campus and beyond. As the Assistant Director of Experiential Learning at Xavier University, it is my goal to link every Xavier student to at least one high-impact experiential learning opportunity before graduation. My role applies to our campus the newest, most relevant research and praxis of experiential learning drawn from memberships in the Society for Experiential Learning Campus Leadership Council, the National Association of Colleges and Employers, as well as the Association of Jesuit Colleges & Universities Community-Engaged Learning Professionals Network. Delivering high-quality experiential learning that is open to all Xavier students is the work of countless campus stakeholders, and I thank the faculty, administrators, and students who build, support, and excel in these exciting opportunities. From innovative pre-med student study abroad programming to London, to student-run businesses, to higher-than-our-peers levels of service, Xavier students benefit from a broad array of carefully-planned, intentional, and authentic experiences.

Although experiential learning is an important factor in preparing students for postgraduate successes, the field of research on the topic is relatively new. To better promote Xavier experiential learning, this welcome letter next answers a series of rhetorical questions.

- A. What is the research on the benefits of adding experiential learning to book, lecture, lab, and studio learning?
- B. How is experiential learning uniquely tied to the Jesuit educational approach?
- C. Why is there student and employer demand for such "real-world" or "hands-on" learning along with rigorous academic study?

A. What is the research on the benefits of adding experiential learning to book, lecture, lab, and studio learning?

Xavier faculty and administrators all know anecdotes of the impact of experiential learning on students: the paid internship that leads to a fulfilling career, the service project that changes a student's calling, or the study-abroad experience that leads to more intrepid international opportunities. Promoting learning by doing has long had a place in the philosophy of education. Even Aristotle noted in the Book II of the *Nicomachean Ethics* that "We learn an art or craft by doing the things that we shall have to do when we have learnt it: for instance, men become builders by building houses, harpers by playing on the harp. Similarly, we become just by doing just acts [...]" (72).ⁱⁱ Service learning, study abroad, interning, and

researching have been enriching campuses for longer than the research has demonstrated their unique learning benefits. In the 1970s, David A. Kolb and Ronald Fry began to seriously study experiential learning in a cycle of experiencing, reflecting, thinking, and acting.ⁱⁱⁱ In 1998, the Society for Experiential Education published its *Eight Principles of Good Practice for All Experiential Learning Activities* to guide the praxis of these activities.^{iv} By 2006 and thereafter, George Kuh's ground-breaking research on the National Survey of Student Engagement termed many experiential learning opportunities as "high-impact practices" and they continue to be associated in his research with academic achievement, satisfaction, persistence, and preparing students for an economically self-sufficient, civically responsible, as well as rewarding life (Kuh, O'Donnell, and Schneider, 9).^v Widespread application of experiential learning practices have occurred across North American campuses since Kuh's results were published and championed by the American Association of Colleges and Universities, aiming to expand ever more experiential learning opportunities to ever more students.

B. How is experiential learning uniquely tied to the Jesuit educational approach?

Jesuit education begins in Messina, Sicily in 1548 with the first Jesuit school and has continued its vibrancy until today. It finds its most recent codification in the 1993 publication of *Ignatian Pedagogy: A Practical Approach*.^{vi} The "Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm" therein concerns the principles of context, experience, reflection, action, and evaluation. Jesuit pedagogy takes "vicarious activities" such as reading and listening to a lecture and mixes them with "direct activities" such as laboratory investigations, field trips, and service projects to create learning that involves "cognitive" as well as "affective" responses (16).

C. Why is there student and employer demand for such "real-world" or "hands-on" learning along with rigorous academic study?

From our National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) results, we know that around 80% of Xavier first-year students plan on interning or participating in a field experience.^{vii} The National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) reports that employers cite the best return on investment for recruiting new college-educated talent is through internships.^{viii} Furthermore, NACE demonstrates that the advantages for Gen Z early career professionals with experiential learning experiences is faster career progression, higher career satisfaction, and an average of \$15,000 more in annual earnings.^{ix} For all these reasons, students and employers value experiential learning.

Xavier University is committed to ever expanding experiential learning options along with book, lecture, lab, and studio learning. Just as Xavier creates new courses and tracks of study, we also develop new experiential learning options.

Always feel free to reach out about the amazing workplace learning, global learning, service learning, and research taking place here at Xavier University!

Sincerely,



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ⁱ See Xavier's Employment and Graduate School Survey results [here](#).

ⁱⁱ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Harris Rackham (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1926).

ⁱⁱⁱ David A. Kolb and Ronald Fry, "Toward an Applied Theory of Experiential Learning," *Theories of Group Process* (London: John Wiley, 1975) 33-56.

^{iv} "Eight Principles of Good Practice for All Experiential Learning Activities," Annual Meeting of the National Society for Experiential Education, 1998, Norfolk, VA.

^v George Kuh, Ken O'Donnell, and Carol Geary Schneider, "HIPs at Ten," *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, 49.5 (2017) 8-16. See also: George Kuh, *High-Impact Educational Practices: What They Are, Who Has Access To Them, and Why They Matter* (Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2008).

^{vi} *Ignatian Pedagogy: A Practical Approach* (Rome: International Center for Jesuit Education, 1993).

^{vii} George Kuh, *Et al.*, *National Survey of Student Engagement* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research and Planning, 2023).

^{viii} Kevin Gray, "Employers Cite Internships as Recruiting Strategy with Highest ROI," *National Association of Colleges and Employers* (Jan. 9, 2023) online, Internet, 2 June 2025. Available: <https://www.nacweb.org/talent-acquisition/trends-and-predictions/employers-cite-internships-as-recruiting-strategy-with-highest-roi-strongly-prefer-in-person-career-fairs>.

^{ix} Joshua Kahn and Sasha Patil, "Impacts of Experiential Learning on The Gen Z Early Career Experience," *National Association of Colleges and Employers* (April 18, 2025) online, Internet, 2 June 2025. Available: <https://www.nacweb.org/talent-acquisition/trends-and-predictions/impacts-of-experiential-learning-on-the-gen-z-early-career-experience>.