

Preparing Students to Launch

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Life after graduation can seem like the endless void of space; luckily, experiential learning can help students chart a path through the stars!

BUILDING YOUR ROCKET

CONSIDER FOR A MOMENT the metaphor of a launching rocket. Before the astronauts arrive in space, there are key preparations that must always happen: ensuring there is enough fuel to escape Earth's gravity, boarding the shuttle, and taking off and piloting through the launch. Helping students find careers they love is like the fueling, boarding, and launching of a rocket. Students must prepare fuel for their rockets, or engage in their classroom studies, to help them get off the ground. Then as the pilots they arrive at the launchpad and must enter the shuttles, or experiential learning opportunities, they want to take flight in. Once they are boarded, they enter their flight coordinates, and with the 3, 2, 1 countdown their experiential learning opportunities take off and they begin to soar into their chosen careers.

Rockets and spaceships require careful preparation and the right amount of fuel to get off the ground. Similarly, students need excellent preparation and skills to successfully launch when they graduate. To address that need, the College of Humanities integrates core competencies into the student journey: communication, information literacy, and cultural navigation. The communication competency involves being able to write critically, put together narratives, and speak coherently. Information literacy includes the ability to gather good information, conduct research, and assess and interpret the ideas of others. Cultural navigation links cultural literacy and language proficiency to connecting with and understanding the human experience.

College faculty reinforce these competencies in student instruction and experiences, both in and out of the classroom, to help students prepare for both a professional career and a life of learning and enjoying the humanities. Students gain these skills outside of the classroom by participating in internships, study abroad programs, and mentored research—all forms of experiential learning that combine classroom study with real-world scenarios.

Ben Drewry, the College's manager of Experiential Learning and Professional Development, says, "When we speak of experiential learning opportunities in the College of Humanities, we are looking beyond participation as an outcome. We aim to have our students walk away with the confidence and understanding needed to advocate for their professional aspirations."

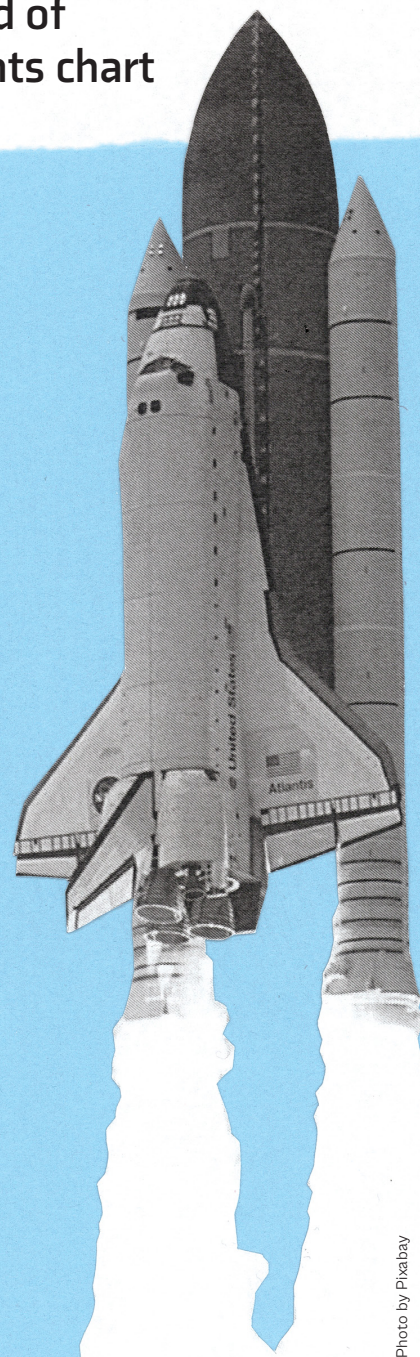


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PREPARING THE FUEL (LEARNING THE CORE COMPETENCIES)

Often, students struggle to recognize their success in developing the core competencies. The College created Humanities+ to assist students in dissecting their experiences, recognizing where these competencies emerge, and communicating them to employers.

Over the past few years, faculty have been receiving training on how to help students follow that path and more intentionally develop the core competencies. Faculty incorporate the competencies in familiar ways, such as classroom discussions, research papers, group projects, and hands-on activities.

In many ways, introducing the competencies is simply identifying and putting a new emphasis on things that students have been doing for generations. For example, research papers and classroom discussions both have elements that build and utilize the core competencies. Research papers instill information literacy and communication as students research and analyze the ideas of others before synthesizing their knowledge into clear and cohesive papers and presentations. Depending on the topic, a research paper may also help students think in new ways about a people or a topic and learn to navigate cultures better. Discussion in the classroom uses the competencies by giving students the chance to practice orally conveying their own ideas while listening to, considering, and responding to others' ideas. Intentionally emphasizing these skills within the classroom—be it in foreign language classes, art history seminars, or classical literature courses—reinforces the competencies, preparing students to apply them outside the classroom.

INITIATING TAKEOFF SEQUENCE (EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING)

In-class learning teaches students skills and competencies, but out-of-class experiences put them into practice. Among the many interesting and diverse experiences provided by the College—funded in part by alumni donations—students have explored cultural dances in Brazil, taught high school English classes, and engaged in local city planning through the programs available both locally and abroad. Though their experiences differ, each prepares students with the core competencies they need to succeed in their careers.

The Digital Media and Communications (DMAc) team, under the direction of the dean's office, operates as an experiential learning unit that functions essentially as a mini publishing firm, giving students experience in content development, graphic design, publishing, website development, UX design, public relations,

social media campaigns, project management, and more. Currently, DMAc provides these experiences to 14 students. Brynli Myers (English Teaching '23) has been working as the production assistant since 2021. Myers keeps the team organized and assists the managers in endless ways, all while working on her English teaching degree. She took the job because she loves to organize. What she did not expect was how well this experience would prepare her for her future career teaching secondary English. For example, both jobs require her to be flexible. "I love that my job changes daily," Myers says. "I never have two days that look alike because I take on so many different tasks. As a teacher, I know every hour will be changing."

Further, she has honed project management and team collaboration skills, as well as effective communication—both essential for running a classroom. She says, "One of the greatest things I've learned in this job is the ability to communicate, specifically through technological means.

The majority of my communication with parents, as a teacher, will be through email or messages, and the true meaning or tone of a message can be easily misunderstood without face-to-face interaction. This job has taught me how to convey information effectively and control my tone when communicating online."

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MENTORED RESEARCH

For those who need a little help achieving these experiences, the College offers assistance with funding, including two specific grants that are available for mentored experiences and research. The Humanities Undergraduate Mentoring Grants (HUM Grants) offer resources for student-initiated, faculty-mentored research projects outside the regular classroom experience. Students can apply for up to \$1,200 in scholarship funding. The College awards approximately 20 of these grants each semester. The College also offers Humanities Mentored Experience Grants (H-MEGs) to support faculty-proposed, student-centered research projects. Faculty mentors receive up to \$10,000 for year-long grants and \$5,000 for short-term grants. The College awards approximately five year-long and five short-term grants each year, which may involve 30–40 students.

Associate Dean Grant Lundberg (Slavic Linguistics) says, "The College of Humanities is committed to supporting experiential learning with a strong emphasis on mentoring. The mentoring experience helps students see the portable and durable value of their training, especially in reference to the Humanities Competencies, including communication, information literacy, and cultural navigation."

One HUM Grant recipient, Kye Davis (Microbiology, Portuguese Studies '23), received a grant to learn cultural dances from Southern Brazil and analyze their historical, social, and genealogical heritage with renowned cultural dance group CTG (Center of Gaúcho Traditions) Barbicacho Colorado. Recounting the experience, Davis says, "Good ideas should be explored. The idea for the project began in March 2021, when I saw a video of *Chula*, a type of Brazilian footwork dance." Davis thought learning the dances and analyzing their heritage would be a valuable learning experience for everyone involved. He says, "It was just an idea, but I wanted it to be more than a dream—I wanted it to happen." Not only did the grant make the dream a reality, but Davis also used the experience to develop all three competencies by learning to conduct his own research, developing respect for a new culture, and communicating that research in the news, on social media, with performances, and through presentations. Davis says, "I hope that more students can listen to this story, dream big, and develop their research ideas into enriching realities."

STUDYABROAD PROGRAMS

Developing ideas into realities and eventually careers is a key aspect of experiential learning. Students are encouraged to support their studies with experiences that will help them apply their learning and translate the value of their degree. Traveling on a study abroad is a popular choice for a course of experience. Lauren Walker (Communications: Public Relations '25) participated in an international study program to the BYU London Centre, studying literature and the humanities with Associate Professor Leslee Thorne-Murphy (British Literature).

Prior to Walker's study abroad experience, she had only taken a few humanities courses. Walker says, "Studying in London brought my learning to life. I was finally standing face-to-face with art, literature, music, and cultures that I had only ever studied in a textbook before." Seeing the art reinforced her affinity for religious art, symbolism, and architecture, which led her to give a presentation on Westminster Abbey to the class. "It was so rewarding to teach my peers about the importance of the building and to see their moments of awe and clarity when we visited it in person," Walker says.

Walker describes how her study abroad helped her focus her college experience to better prepare her for a career. "Coming back from my study abroad, I decided to pair my public relations major with an interdisciplinary humanities minor. Doing so helped me get my current job on campus and will serve me well when I seek employment after graduation because in PR, we interact with many international cultures on a daily basis. Interdisciplinary humanities classes help me to better understand the world and its rich cultures." Walker's study abroad illustrates how learning cultural navigation through experiential learning opportunities can help students discover how they want to apply their learning after they graduate.

INTERNSHIPS

The third major area of experiential learning is internships. These work-based opportunities provide all the insight that a few months of working in any given field would, without the long-term commitment. As just one example, Professor Tony Brown (Russian Language and Culture) serves as faculty advisor for six different Eastern European international internships and study abroad programs. When he first became a faculty advisor, he started by created just one study abroad, but



Left to right: Kye Davis, Lauren Walker, Brynli Myers

as he recognized different student needs, he created several internship opportunities and study abroad programs. When students come to him with internship queries, Brown first asks them about their interests and area of study so he can help them find their ideal experience. If that experience does not yet exist, Brown creates a new opportunity tailored to that student's needs. He says, "They bring new interests; we find new providers to create internships for them." Today, students can travel to just about any country and spend their time learning and interning in what interests them.

Internships do not have to take place on another continent to be impactful, according to Associate Professor Jamin Rowan (English, American Studies).

There are many internships offered locally around Provo. Rowan serves as the faculty advisor for the Provo City Lab, an internship he created where students collaborate with the Provo city planners to work on a city project. Rowan says, "I had been serving as a city planning commissioner in Provo at the time, and I felt like, 'Hey, my skillset as an English professor

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is coming in really handy here.' I wanted to help students have similar experiences where they could see that the competencies they were developing as students would help them serve their communities."

In the Provo City Lab, students work together to determine how to best implement city projects. They then present their projects to the Transportation Mobility and Advisory Committee, the Planning Commission, the City Council, and the mayor. Approved projects are then actually implemented by the city, and students learn how their skills with the core competencies can be used outside of the classroom.

Brown also shared that he works to create applicable internships for students because "they are vital to students transitioning from college to jobs." Internships can confirm and refine students' directions in life or contribute to course correction if students realize they do not love what they are doing.

Internship experiences help students evaluate career paths they enjoy and sometimes make course corrections. For example, Natalie Lyman (Asian Studies: China Studies '23) experienced firsthand how vital an internship was to figuring out her future career. She participated in a local internship working with high school students creating and teaching foreign language curriculum. Lyman says, "I chose this experiential learning opportunity because it was in a career path I wanted to explore." She had the opportunity to design a course and adapt it to specific student needs. She also found that interacting with more experienced coworkers helped her learn how to work well with students.

Perhaps more importantly, Lyman's internship helped her realize she does not want to be a teacher. Now she can try new experiences to find what she wants to pursue. Internships, study abroad programs, and mentored research projects may seem like single stars that students pass by, but in conjunction with the core competencies, they act as constellations that guide students on their journeys.

YOUR STAR MAP

The galaxy contains infinite destinations, but no matter where students choose to go after takeoff, they cannot get there without the experiences that help propel them toward their goals. Navigating life after college requires the competencies students develop as they participate in internships, study abroad programs, and mentored research. Each experience acts as a star that makes the night sky a little brighter and easier to navigate. Students' past experiences give them direction and help them arrive at a new planet where they can thrive. ■