GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY | THE RED HOUSE | Academic Innovation Network

(RE)HUMANIZING THE UNIVERSITY

The Future *of* Experiential Learning Conversation Series

Phase 1: Mapping

October 7th–17th, 2025

feat. 53 faculty, staff, & student participants
from ~25 offices and programs
across the University



About the Series

The experiential learning initiative seeks to place learning through direct engagement with the world at the center of the Georgetown experience.

This is a timely call to understand experiential learning as a holistic, emergent, and relational response to the complexities of our time, from the changing nature of the workplace, the disruptive integration of AI, the deepening of polarization, and the challenges to the cost benefit of higher education. We want to explore the ways that the emerging centrality of experience should support the project of ensuring the (re)humanization of education in the era of accelerating change.

Learn more:

https://redhouse.georgetown.edu/projects/experiential-learning-series/

Our Working Definitions

Experiential learning encompasses internships, research, community-based engagement, cross-cultural learning, and emerging opportunities that connect academic study to real-world contexts. We will seek to expand this range to include place-based and problem-centered credit-bearing experiences that integrate academic and experiential learning in order to deepen student readiness for a volatile world.

By **humanization**, we mean the recognition of the inherent dignity and worth of all individuals, and the recentering of what it means to be distinctively human in an era of increased entanglement with emerging technologies and the global information ecosystem. By using the phrase **(re)humanization** we seek to invoke both the need to restore the centrality of humanistic values at the heart of higher education and to sustain their salience in an era of rapid change, complexities, and uncertainty.



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[Re]humanizing the University through Capacities & Practices

In September, Randy Bass gave an opening provocation emphasizing the centrality of experiential learning for ensuring a human-centered education in an AI-integrated future.

In October, we're revisiting what we mean by (Re)Humanizing the University.

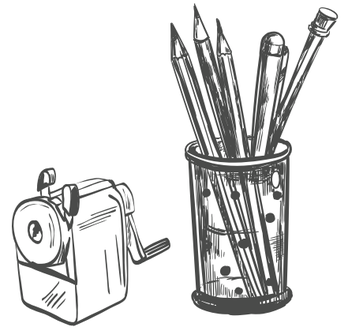


Our framing of this series as "(Re)humanizing the university" signals our collective belief in the university's central project: advancing human flourishing. A Georgetown education, rooted in the Ignatian tradition, has long focused on cultivating the best human capacities. Every element of our educational context takes a stand on the kinds of people we are cultivating. The question is how explicit, transparent, and intentional we are across the university in supporting this cultivation.

We ask these questions when our conception of what it means to be human is in unprecedented flux, as three fundamental dimensions of human relationship are changing: the human relationship to technology (how the Internet, smartphones, and AI are reconfiguring the global information ecosystem), to knowledge (how we access, create, and reproduce knowledge), and to other humans (how we relate to others and the planet). What it means to be human within all this change are fundamentally educational questions. Reimagining higher education to adapt to these changes is what we mean by "(Re)humanizing the university."

Experiential learning is central to these questions, as we inquire into practices and pedagogies that can cultivate the capacities we need to adapt to the flux of these human relationships. Whatever these deeply human capacities are—from attention and presence to empathy and ethical judgment—they cannot be cultivated through traditional didactic teaching and learning alone. They are forged in the friction and messiness of authentic life contexts, in reflexive relationship with deep academic learning.

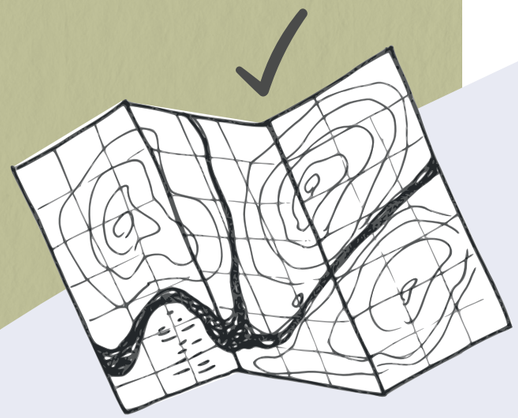
The first "Mapping" phase explored the full range of capacities that arise from experience and which we are well and less well set up to nurture. What we do well points to the power of relationships in experiences and learning. Areas needing strengthening include learning from failure, embracing uncertainty and ambiguity, and cultivating creativity and imagination.
The second "Vision" phase examines ways to renew our educational designs to place these increasingly needed and distinctive human qualities at the center of the curriculum.



Well Equipped

TOP 5 PARTICIPANT RESPONSES

- **Being in Community**
- **Reflecting**
- **Mentoring**
- **Relationships**
- **Communication**



Which experiential learning capacities is Georgetown well equipped for?

The five capacities participants identified most frequently—community (12), mentoring (10), reflection (10), relationships (8), and communication (8)—are representative of several Jesuit values comprising the Spirit of Georgetown, including Community in Diversity, People for Others, and Contemplation in Action. Nearly all of the capacities cited strongly reinforced the University's Jesuit identity (including dialogue, discernment, critical thinking, expanding viewpoints, values, humility, moral grounding, empathy, and complexity).

[But — being well equipped ≠ doing it well.]

Multiple participants noted that the University is well equipped to nurture certain capacities; however, there might be gaps in the execution. Visions for the future of experiential learning at Georgetown will need to consider rethinking how to support and sustain our strengths while identifying the opportunities to improve on the capacities identified as needing improvement.

Wait a minute . . .



Which experiential learning capacities is Georgetown *not* well equipped for?

Four of the five capacities participants most frequently identified in this category—learning from failure (9), embracing ambiguity (8), imagining (8), and playfulness (7)—are certainly complementary to the University's Jesuit values, yet helpfully distinct from those outlined in the Spirit of Georgetown. The fifth capacity, humility (8), unites the other four capacities as an essential trait to make sense of the other four. While failure, ambiguity, imagination, and playfulness might even seem at odds with the notions of academic rigor and academic excellence, these capacities were cited as essential to the core of a humanistic education.

What do we mean by "equipped"?

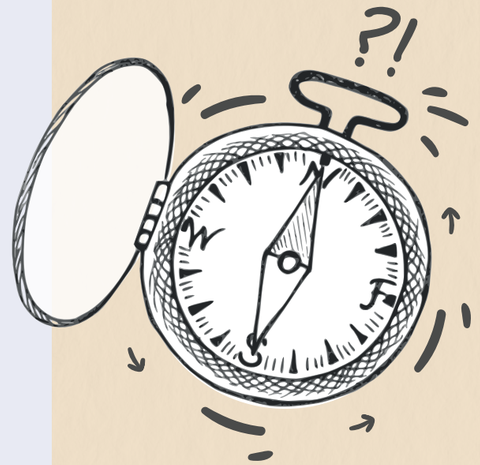
Are we talking about students, or faculty & staff?

Notably, participants identified several capacities (values, humility, and complexity) in roughly equal numbers across both categories—well equipped and not. The seemingly contradictory distribution holds several interpretations, including: the discrepancy between being well equipped yet the execution could be improved; differences across departments, disciplines, degree levels, and individual experiences; or whether participants centered students or faculty/staff in their responses. Taken together, the responses showed the levels at which people were thinking about the University's strengths as well as the design opportunities at hand.

Not Well Equipped

TOP 5 PARTICIPANT RESPONSES

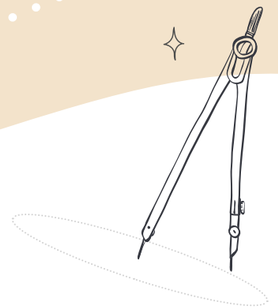
- **Learning from Failure**
- **Embracing Ambiguity**
- **Humility**
- **Imagination**
- **Playfulness**



What practices might help address these shortcomings?

Participants identified a range of practices spanning the relational, structural (both curricular and institutional), and pedagogical.

Some reflect the University's strengths, while others highlight resources central to sustaining exemplary experiences.



Practices for Faculty & Administrators

INNOVATING INCENTIVES

Providing encouragement through positive reinforcement

Responses included:

- *Rewarding creativity*
- *Reward experimentation and failure*
- *More systematic ways to reward risk-taking or rethink of practices that may reward risk aversion*
- *From transactional to transformative*
- *Celebrating failures and uncertainty*

ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENTS

Reconsidering assessment practices to better suit the desired outcomes

Responses included:

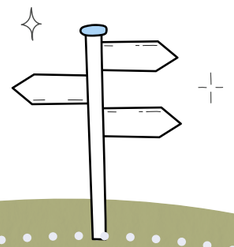
- *Measuring individual growth*
- *Less/different grading*
- *Remove grading curve*
- *Focus on process over product*
- *Courses and course assessments where success is measured by recognition of ambiguities*

PROVIDING TIME

Intentionally allocating and structuring "temporal resources" to ensure depth of engagement, sustained partnership development, and meaningful learning integration

Responses included:

- *Semester-long courses structured to build partnerships*
- *Allowing length of time in community; embedding in it*
- *Dedicated class time*



Practices for Faculty

MENTORSHIP

Guiding students through intellectual and personal growth by fostering vulnerability, resilience, realistic expectation setting, and self-discovery

Responses included:

- *Faculty talking about research 'fails'*
- *Accessible office hours for ambiguous topics*
- *Get people to see who they are after failure or success*
- *Modeling disagreement in dialogue*
- *Set expectations, discuss what to expect on the ground etc.*

CONTINUITY

Emphasizing the seams and connections between disparate learning environments and stages of development to create a cumulative and reinforced learning experience

Responses included:

- *Travel-embedded / course-embedded programs that meet a few times before the program to get to know each other*
- *Curricular threads, intentional scaffolding*

RECIPROCITY

Committing to mutually beneficial, non-transactional partnerships among the institution, its faculty and learners, and its extended community and external partners, where the institution acknowledges and acts upon its civic responsibility to invest resources, share power, and address community-defined needs before, or in parallel with, its own academic goals

Responses included:

- *Investment of the university into the community – 'how are we supporting/ uplifting the DC/DMV area?' beyond the Georgetown/DMV community*
- *Having signed agreements between GU and community orgs*
- *Investing in things that don't inherently benefit GU*
- *Asking community for what they want*

Practices for Students



GENERATIVE TENSION & PLAY

Emphasizing the skills and practice of recognizing uncertainty as a source of creative potential rather than an impediment; and taking risks in situations of potential failure cultivates the cognitive and emotional resilience students need to thrive in ambiguous real-world environments

Responses included:

- *Small, progressive assignments that build up to a final project. Allow revision. Maybe a course = 'fail together!' To build resilience practice by actually failing together.*
- *'Yes and'*
- *Give challenges without a roadmap*
- *Controlled failure—Creating environment that has intentional failure coupled with a reflective trellis*
- *Classroom activities in which students take the lead*
- *Open-ended writing assignments*
- *Appropriate levels of challenge*
- *Capstones, portfolios, futuring pathways*
- *Incorporating more historical context into courses/learning experiences*

INQUIRY

Emphasizing curiosity, research, and experimentation as an essential mindset for students to think critically on complex challenges, with self-awareness, humility, and openness to perspectives

Responses included:

- *Start with genuine questions*
- *Find a question without an answer*
- *A practice for students that helps them to (learn to) find answers to questions without an answer*
- *Process-focused learning*
- *There are a lot more questions in a class than answers*
- *Inquisitive of knowledge*
- *Curiosity*
- *Open attitudes/openness*

REFLECTION

Expanding their student work focus from completing tasks to understanding how and why they are learning effectively, and how their learning relates to the experience of others

Responses included:

- *They can discuss what they're excited about, concerns, etc. and see that they're not alone*
- *Self assessment. 'I failed and here's why...'*
- *Reflective papers*
- *Restorative circles*

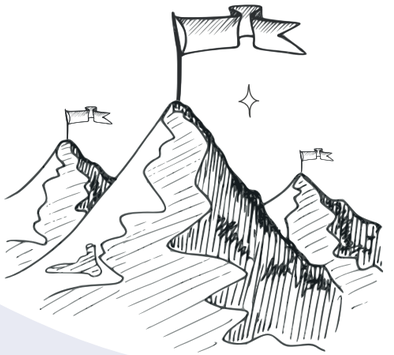
STORYTELLING

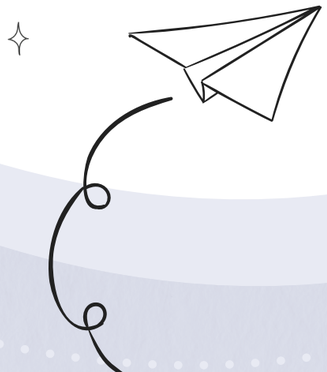
Emphasizing the skills and practice of communicating meaning through stories, expanding students' capacity to become active, articulate producers of knowledge that connects the academic to the real world

Responses included:

- *Presenting back to community*
- *Public screenings [of student work] at the end of class*
- *Capstones, portfolios, futuring pathways*

Experiential Learning is Active, Affective, & Reflective.















What are signs that a learning experience was done well?

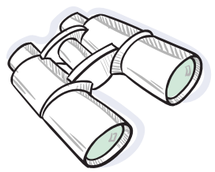
The practices described in the previous pages represent participants' ideas about what goes in to a learning experience that is "done well," but what outcomes might indicate success?

Broadly speaking, participants identified outcomes related to engagement, integration, change (in perspective and action), and broader social impacts.

POSITIVE FEELINGS were frequently identified, though as one participant noted, "Be prepared for longer time horizons, not all good feedback is immediate." Another participant pointed to the value of negative feelings as well, citing the example of a "bad" internship helpfully steering a student's future career path in a more personally rewarding direction. Someone even specifically highlighted student/participant discomfort as a positive sign.

While one participant wrote that "[experiential learning] doesn't have to result in change, but it can," participants as a whole identified **CHANGE OF PERSPECTIVE** more frequently than almost any other outcome.

Participants also called attention to other forms of change, including **CHANGE OF BEHAVIOR** and **DEVELOPMENTAL CHANGE**.



"Spark!"

"Excitement"

"Growth"

"New perspectives"

"Confidence"





"Students can teach"

Dispositional outcomes identified include **INCREASED CURIOSITY**, **CONFIDENCE**, and **OPENNESS TO TRYING (AND FAILING)**.

Outcomes focused on **INTERNALIZATION**, **INTEGRATION**, and **ARTICULATION OF LEARNING** point to the depth of learning that a successful experience affords.

LONGEVITY or **DURABILITY** suggests that successful experiences have a lasting impact on the students involved.

"Richer discussions"

"Becomes a practice"

"80% is in the doing"

"Can name the tension"

"Exposure to conflict"



"Real-world impact"



The impacts of experiential learning are not limited to students, however. Participants also identified **BROADER SOCIAL IMPACTS**, **DEEPENING PARTNERSHIPS** and **SOCIAL OR STRUCTURAL CHANGE**.

A few participants raised questions regarding the **ASSESSMENT** of learning outcomes, while others focused on the inherent benefits of **EXPOSURE** and **"JUST DOING IT."**

When do we see the full value of learning from experience?

Gallery of Participant Responses

Collected at the Sessions

Which experiential learning capacities is the University well-equipped to do?

Which are we *not* well-equipped for?

What practices might help address these shortcomings?

How do you know when experiential learning is done well?

INDIVIDUAL PARTICIPANT RESPONSES

What capacities do you think the University is equipped to do well now?

Participants were provided with a list of capacities generated at the launch event.

Self-awareness

WELL-EQUIPPED

- Agency
- Caring about student well-being
- Confidence (x2)
- Getting out of your comfort zone (x3)
- Humility (x3)
- Intentional time
- Moral grounding (x6)
- Not always expert (x3)
- See yourself in a new context / in new roles
- Self awareness (x2)
- Self-advocacy
- Storytelling
- Values (x6)

AREAS TO IMPROVE

- Adulting 101 (x3)
- Agency
- Big picture perspective
- Confidence
- Getting out of comfort zone (x4)
- Humility (x6)
- Not always the expert (x2)
- Patience
- Self advocacy
- Self awareness (x3)
- Values (x2)

Perspective-taking

WELL-EQUIPPED

- Empathy (x5)
- Expanding viewpoints (x6)
- Intercultural understanding
- Perspective taking (x6)



AREAS TO IMPROVE

- Create space for different reflections/ discussion with reflection of context
- Empathy (x3)
- Expanding viewpoints (x2)
- Exploring
- Making values explicit — build a moral discourse
- Perspective taking (x4)

Which capacity do you think we could improve on?

Communication

WELL-EQUIPPED

- Collaboration
- Communication (x6)
- Dialogue (x7)
- Listening skills (x3)
- Speaking
- Team work

AREAS TO IMPROVE

- Communication
- Listening skills
- Ppl have a hard time learning by trying new ideas/new things. Hard to argue position you don't agree with b/c it's scary
- Writing for an audience (2)

How to be in community

WELL-EQUIPPED

- Accountability (x3)
- Community/relationship building (x2)
- How to be in community (x10)
  - Getting students *out* into the *community*
- Inclusion in pockets (hidden)
- Mentorships (x9)
- Peer-to-peer orientation + mentoring
- Radical hospitality
- Relationships (x6)
- Sense of belonging (x4)
- Shared experience (x2)
- Support network (x2)

AREAS TO IMPROVE

- Accountability (x2)
- Building relationships [need time, consistency]
- Conflict transformation (x2)
- Engaging in hidden curriculum
- How to be in community
- Mentorships (x2)
- Relationship / community
- Shared experience
- Support network



[continued]

What capacities do you think the University is equipped to do well now? Which capacity do you think we could improve on? Participants were provided with a list of capacities generated at the launch event.

Working through complex challenges

WELL-EQUIPPED

- Complexity of the world (x7)
- Critical thinking (x6)
- Pioneering
- Threshold concepts

AREAS TO IMPROVE

- Alignment (Values --> actions funding priorities)
- Balancing quantitative & qualitative evaluation
- Challenge/tension as a generative force (x2)
- Complexity of the world (x3)
- Critical thinking skills
- Embrace the unknown (x6)
- Embracing ambiguity (x8)
- Navigating uncertainty (x5)
- Pioneering
- Pushing through discomfort
- Working through complex challenges (2)

Imagining

WELL-EQUIPPED

- Creativity (x2)
- Imagining (x2)

AREAS TO IMPROVE

- Creativity
- Hope (x2)
- Imagining (x5)
- Imagining future outcomes, change, questions (x3)
- Risk-taking
- Playfulness (x7)



Deep learning

WELL-EQUIPPED

- Bringing together individual capacities
- Communication/ articulation of learning (x2)
- Conceptual Thinking
- Discernment (x6)
- Failure
- Informed decision making (x3)
- Reflection (10)
- Resilience (x2)
- Wisdom

AREAS TO IMPROVE

- Commit to sensory forms of knowing
- Communicating/articulation of learning
- Deep learning
- Discernment
- Learning from failure (x9)
  - Letting students fail, learning to fail
- Reflection (x3)
- Resilience (x5)
- Wisdom



What practices would you recommend to support the development of these capacities?

Practices for Administrators or Faculty

INNOVATING INCENTIVES

- Encourage (and funding) for study abroad experiences
- Reward experimentation and failure
- Rethink practices that may reward risk aversion
- More systematic ways to reward risk-taking
- De-emphasize grades as sorting mechanism
- Incentivize mentorship (spiritual and academic)
- Less/different grading
- Rewarding creativity
- Enfranchise adjuncts, NTLS, Staff (Valuing people and their knowledge regardless of station/ contract type)

PROVIDING TIME

- Make time (time in courses; block off parts of days)
- Dedicated class time
- Allowing length of time in community; embedding in it
- Accessible office hours for ambiguous topics
- Semester-long courses structured to build partnerships

ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENTS

- Less grading
- Alternative forms of grading
- Contract grading
- Measuring individual growth
- Remove grading curve
- Less/different grading
- Rewarding creativity
- Self assessment. "I failed and here's why..."
- Open-ended writing assignments
- Courses and course assessments where success is measured by recognition of ambiguities
- Capstones, portfolios.
- Student stories of feeling inspired, changed, evolved by programs



Practices for Faculty

MENTORSHIP

- Microinternships: 60 hours or less with mentoring
- VIEW program at Crawley
- Peer mentoring
- Incentivize mentorship (spiritual and academic)
- Faculty and staff networks
- Faculty sharing a CV of failures
- Faculty talking about research “fails”

CONTINUITY

- Travel-embedded / course-embedded programs that meet a few times before the program to get to know each other
- Set expectations, discuss what to expect on the ground etc.
- Curricular threads, intentional scaffolding

RECIPROCITY

- Asking community for what they want (e.g., ECo-Greece example)
- Interviews
- Presenting back to community
- Georgetown being able to host
- Investing in things that don’t inherently benefit GU
- Student networks (clubs, groups, athletic teams)
- Dorm rooms w/other international students
- Affinity houses
- Third spaces
- Dialogue-based community among learners
- Dialogue programs (LEAD, Difficult Dialogues)
- In Your Shoes
- Smaller, discussion-based courses



[continued]

What practices would you recommend to support the development of these capacities?

Practices for Students

GENERATIVE TENSION & PLAY

- Play with different options/approaches to writing and research
- Struggle against gamifying
- Conflict transformation lab
- Modeling disagreement in dialogue; pushing people out of comfort zone
- Classroom activities in which students take the lead
- Active learning + non-traditional classrooms, projects, finals
- “Fun” project-based learning
- “Yes and”
- Field trips
- Program-wide social engagements
- Student-centered spaces (physical)
- Incorporating more historical context into courses/learning experiences

INQUIRY

- Start with genuine questions
- Find a question without an answer
- Helps students to (learn to) find answers to questions without an answer
- Process-focused learning
- Independent designed projects
- Project based learning
- Senior theses
- Capstone v thesis
- Global business experiences
- Immersion experiences (CSJ)
- Site visits as academic excursions (MedHum)
- Courses that don't begin with or teach an answer
- More student agency/optionality in assignments
- "No right answer" courses
- Inquisitive of knowledge

REFLECTION

- Encourage pause reflection
- Get students off campus
- UX courses (currently practices of reflection)
- Wellness classes > new spaces (Mediation, yoga, artistic projects)
- Engelhard
- Restorative circles
- Reflective papers
- Authentic reflection of thoughts, feelings and relationships (over social media-worthy experience)
- Encourage reflection (person centered counseling/active listening)
- Reflective responses
- Producing reflection that is disciplined

STORYTELLING

- SJ documentary – public screenings at the end of class
- They can discuss what they're excited about, concerns, etc. and see that they're not alone
- Student stories of their learning experiences as an act of meaning-making, knowledge sharing, and community building





How do you know when experiential learning is done well?

INTEREST & POSITIVE FEELINGS

- Excitement in the air
- People learn more, enjoy it more and bring it into their daily life more often
- Lessened seriousness —> more humor or joy
- Increased discussion (esp about complex issues)
- Student enthusiasm/energy
- Level of engaged/time in classroom discussion
- Students spark!
- Fosters student friendship
- Feeling of wellbeing + inclusion
- Stories —> Excitement to talk about it
- The desire to inspire others

PERSONALIZATION

- Richer discussions
- Internalized, Investment, 'I' statements
- Produces reflection that is disciplined
- Reflective integration/self-awareness
- Students are able to use experience to decide how they want to shape personal, professional future
- Student can reflect on their learning, connect dots, imagine future applications

ARTICULATION

- Students can teach
- Students can name the tension + reflect on the experience with honesty
- Can articulate other side's view
- Able to answer questions/ problems that weren't answered/solved
- Clear expression of HOW success/failure came about
- Student can communicate their learning on a deeper level
- Portfolios
- Concept maps!

CURIOSITY

- There are a lot more questions in a class than answers
- Inquisitive of knowledge
- Open attitudes/openness

CONTINUITY

- It becomes a practice
- "Stickiness'" — students' continued reflection
- Life-long learning – alumni of program continue to note impacts
- Continued conversation beyond experience
- How is the student's next decision impacted?
- The relationship between student + site continues after they return
- Sustained relationships

JUST DOING IT

- When is done?
- Performed/participated in
- 80% is in the doing
- Student can reflect – sometimes learning happens during reflection
- Expand idea of what end should be: both good and bad experiences are valuable
- There is a balance of learning concepts + theories then seeing how it happens in real world ; example: ENPH core class: humanities in the world.

EXPOSURE / DISCOMFORT

- Study abroad
- Exposure to conflict
- Challenging/situations discussions
- Students are pushed from comfort zones
- When students/participants report being "uncomfortable" during it

CHANGE (PERSPECTIVE, BEHAVIOR, DEVELOPMENT)

- It doesn't have to result in a change, but it can
- Changing expectations of abilities outside the university
- Student is inspired, changed, evolved
- Doing/thinking/being
- Move forward in development
- Something changes in how the student sees the world
- Shifts perspective on self and knowledge
- Growth, digression, regression. All are meaningful.
- Transformation — students' takeaways being not what they learned but how their thinking perspective changed
- Student is inspired/changed/ evolved/ in outlook/behavior
- Transformation/Growth
- Hearing new patterns of problem solving
- If students learn to listen (and hear) and if they begin to decenter their own perspectives
- Action – new ways of knowing and being in the world
- When information is translated to wisdom by making its way from the head to the heart to the hands
- Orthodoxy (right knowledge), Orthopraxis (right practice), Orthokardia (right posture)
- When learning moves from transactional (extrinsically motivated) to transformational (intrinsically motivated)
- Students come back with new perspectives + awareness
- Greater skill sets – comms, cultural competency
- Humility
- When students discover something about themselves and the world
- When knowledge becomes wisdom and compassion
- Dialogue; Both people walk away feeling like they didn't "win" but learned
- New skills + perspectives
- Understanding different values, even within own community
- Awareness of complexity; situational dependence; ambiguity of answers/ evidence

CONFIDENCE / WILLINGNESS TO TRY HARD THINGS

- Increased risk taking intentionally
- Willingness to be pushed
- "That was hard. I'd do it again"
- Students are willing to engage with the tension w/o prompt
- Embracing ambiguity
- Confidence
- Students learn from failure
- Taking a "next step" with what they learned (try again, make connections, take a bigger challenge)
- Getting "unstuck"
- Challenges but resilient

BROADER IMPACT

- Structural change
- Community changes/ celebrating the highs and lows —> innovation
- Enfranchise adjuncts, NTLS, staff
- Classroom/community boundary dissipates
- Curriculum + current events merge
- Real-world impact
- Global learning outcomes

GOOD RELATIONS

- Improved relationships
- If students and community members collaborate creatively in meaningful ways
- If community partners feel consulted and heard
- Our partners want to keep working with us
- Greater acceptance of people/ ideas like you and "your own"
- All the things that we are no longer
- Students learn and respect other views
- Encourages human interaction
- Community forms

ASSESSMENT

- When deep learning has occurred – but how do we measure that? Every one starts from a different place
- Changing the score card
- How do we measure outcomes
- What we measure for outcomes

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