GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY | THE RED HOUSE | Academic Innovation Network

(RE)HUMANIZING THE UNIVERSITY

From Experiential Learning to Experience-Centered Education

A Paradigm Shift



Experiential Learning Series Final Report
Academic Year 2025–26

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/



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(RE)HUMANIZING THE UNIVERSITY

From Experiential Learning to Experience Centered Education

We framed this conversation series as the "Future of Experiential Learning: (Re)humanizing the University" to signal our collective belief in the University's central project: advancing human potential and flourishing. A Georgetown education, rooted in the Ignatian tradition, has long focused on cultivating the best human capacities — on forming people who are not merely skilled, but genuinely wise, reflective, and oriented toward others. Every element of our educational context takes a stand on the kinds of people we are cultivating. The question is how intentional and responsive we are, across the university, in supporting that cultivation.

The premise of this series started with reflecting on how changes affected the conditions for cultivating those capacities. The emergence of generative AI intensified questions already in motion: What is distinctively human and relational about learning? How should we think about the role of human experience in the design and execution of education — not just now, but in ways that fit the decade ahead?

Through our numerous conversations — which were rehumanizing in their own right — we engaged in communal sensemaking to identify our strengths, our gaps, and the areas of work that will have the most impact on future students. We also named what we fear losing: from our students, from our institutions, and from our society. And we found ourselves returning, again and again, to the same pressure point: the phrase "experiential learning" may no longer be sufficient for the work we are trying to do for our students.

A Shifting Paradigm

A year of conversation indicated clearly that Georgetown is at an inflection point with the language and practices of "experiential learning." While the term moved from margin to mainstream, paradoxically, it also narrowed. Experiential learning often means a type of activity — an internship, a service-learning placement, a simulation — inserted into an otherwise conventional curriculum. It names a component, not a principle.

Our conversations pointed toward something more fundamental: a shift from experiential learning to *experience-centered education*.

Experiential learning treats experience as a vehicle for acquiring competencies. You do something in order to learn something. The experience is instrumental; the learning is the end. Experience-centered education inverts this relationship:

Experience is not the path to learning. Experience is the educational substance itself.

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Experience is the educational substance itself.

This is not a refinement of the existing model. It is a reorganization of the whole. You cannot do experience-centered education in a single course. It reshapes advising, assessment, the meaning of the credit hour, the relationship between in- and out-of-classroom, and the role of reflection — not as a concluding step, but as a continuous, constitutive practice woven through everything.

Experience-centered education recovers the broader meaning: intellectual encounter, the experience of sensemaking and reflection, of ambiguity, community engagement, spiritual formation, the experience of failure and resilience. This is precisely why the shift resonates with Ignatian pedagogy. Jesuit education was never fundamentally about "learning by doing" in the skills sense. It is about the formation of the whole person through the attended, contemplative experience of living — *cura personalis* not as a value statement, but as an architectural principle.

Experiential learning typically operates in the frame of application, theory learned in one place gets applied in another. Experience-centered education rests on the recognition that certain kinds of knowledge — moral knowledge, relational wisdom, knowledge of one's own capacities and limits, judgment, practical wisdom - are only available through lived, attended, reflected-upon experience. We want to cultivate these capacities through situations that require you to act under uncertainty, through risk-taking and experimentation, forged through mentored action and reflection over time. These cannot be delivered in a traditional curriculum.

What would this look like at Georgetown? It would mean a student's experience of struggling with a genuinely difficult problem — in a community, a lab, a design studio, a field placement — is not supplementary to their education. It is, in the deepest sense, what their education is. The curriculum exists to frame, deepen, and integrate that experience, not to deliver knowledge that experience then applies.

The conclusion of this series is also an invitation. The conversations we have had represent not a refinement of our experiential learning programs, but the early architecture of something larger: an educational infrastructure capable of carrying Georgetown's mission into the next decade — one organized, from the ground up, around human experience, human formation, and the cultivation of distinctively human capacities in a world that increasingly needs them.

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Emerging Work at Georgetown

Experiential Education Framework

In the shift from experiential learning to experience-centered education, we wish to emphasize the role of intellectual and personal formation, reflection, and the importance of connecting academic study to authentic contexts — in whatever form or modality it is offered. These three elements—**intellectual formation, relevance, and reflection**—should form the core of any experience across the undergraduate and graduate trajectory. At Georgetown, we also see tremendous value in problem-centered, credit-bearing experiences that allow students to integrate dispositions, skills, and knowledge in order to deepen their ability to enter a volatile world.

In order to meet this world, we surfaced a list of capacities through the EL Series that we see as essential to empowering our students to think, work, and live beyond Georgetown.

In order to cultivate these capacities, participants imagined experiences where the following principles emerged as core themes across all of the imagined experiences. These principles contribute to the experiential educational infrastructure capable of carrying Georgetown's mission into the next decade.

Surfaced Capacities

- **Imagination**
- **Navigating Uncertainty**
- **Creativity**
- **Embracing Ambiguity**
- **Risk-taking**
- **Learning from Failure**
- **Humility**



Emerging Principles

Building Student Agency

Navigating uncertainty, learning from failure and conflict, and solving problems creatively contributing to growing student agency, confidence, and identity awareness

Integrating Perspectives

Incorporating multiple perspectives in solving relevant problems with skills, knowledge, and traits

Fostering Community Inside and Outside Georgetown

Relationship-building through dialogue, shared experiences, and meaningful feedback among faculty, staff, external partners, and students

Reflecting Critically & Imaginatively

Iterative, integrated opportunities to connect learning to next steps and individual growth

Making it Relevant

Planning for application and transfer of (inter)disciplinary outcomes to complex settings

Work In Progress

Experiential Education Infrastructure

In order to develop and foster these principles and capacities at Georgetown, it is essential to create the infrastructure to support transformational growth throughout the institution. In addition to sustaining the experiential work at the Capitol Applied Learning Labs (CALL), the Experiential Learning Hub at the Capitol Campus will be an integrated educational ecosystem of shared services that centers experience-centered education.

Challenge-based Learning Labs

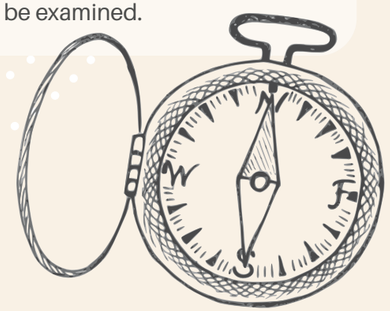
Challenge-based learning (CBL) labs is a signature pedagogy that sits at the nexus of intrinsic human capacities and pragmatic skill-building. Challenge labs are experimental learning containers that let universities trial new educational models without dismantling current systems. They put experience at the center, and integrate academic learning as it supports the practice. Challenge labs emphasize judgment in conditions of uncertainty and ambiguity over finished outcomes and products.

4th Year Transitions

For many students in their final year of college, their discernment journey begins through bridging the culmination of their studies to their next steps in life. Reframing the 4th year as a high-impact transitional, immersive space for academic and professional exploration is essential for our students to take ownership over their trajectory.

Degree Redesign

How are we integrating academic depth with practical experience to prepare students for meaning and purpose? How can we maximize value by offering alternative pathways to reduce time and cost of attaining a degree? In the next year, partners across the university will explore and pilot pathways that shift pace and structure while increasing options for students will be examined.



The Year in Conversation



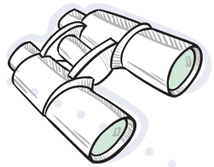






Fall Conversations

What does it mean to learn from experience?





SEPTEMBER

Exploring the Boundaries of Experiential Learning

In the first conversation of the series, participants surfaced a wide range of diverse experiential learning activities and the capacities such activities cultivate. Common threads included a holistic view of experiential learning as active, affective, and reflective; communicating the purpose and value of experiential learning (to both faculty/administrators as well as students); the integration of "academic" and experiential approaches; and the importance of support & incentives to promote experiential learning and ensure successful outcomes.

What would our university look like if it prioritized specific capacities that are best cultivated through experience?

OCTOBER

Mapping Experiential Learning Capacities at Georgetown

Participants identified which capacities the University is well equipped to foster, and which it is not. They then prioritized "enabling" practices for faculty and administrators (mentorship, continuity, reciprocity, innovating incentives, alternative assessments, time) as well as for students (inquiry, generative tension and play; reflection; storytelling). Signs that an experience was done well ranged from increased curiosity and confidence to lasting changes in perspective and behavior.

CURRENT STRENGTHS

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



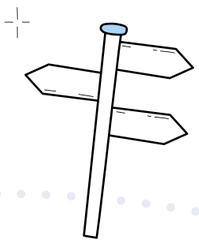
NOVEMBER

Envisioning an Experiential Curriculum for 2035

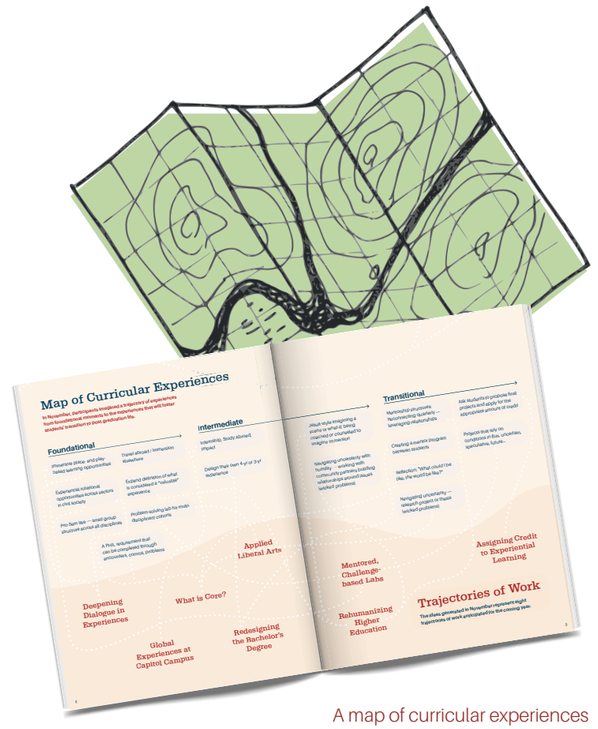
Imagining the world of 2035, participants revealed their concerns about intensifying isolation, economic disparity, and upheaval (technological, climatic, political); impediments to ascertaining what is real; and deteriorating mental health. However, with cautious optimism, they reframed these challenges as opportunities to build new, more equitable systems. They dreamed of curricula that emphasize learning to navigate complexity, uncertainty, and ambiguity as communities.

WHAT WE NEED TO DESIGN FOR

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



What would a 'curriculum of experiences' look like for our students in 2035?



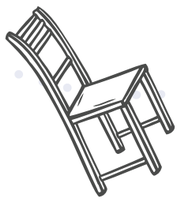
A map of curricular experiences from the final report of the fall semester

Spring Conversations

What if... Georgetown took the assessment of experiential learning as seriously as traditional assessment?



How can we expand credits to indicate more than just seat time?



How do we communicate the value of dialogue to our students from the start?



What if... the university didn't stop at the classroom door?



JANUARY

Delivering on the Promise of Transformative, High-Impact Experiential Learning: Assessment Practices

with Jillian Kinzie

Dr. Jillian Kinzie, Associate Director of the National Survey for Student Engagement Institute at Indiana University, sparked a rich conversation about the role of meaningful assessment in experiential learning, Traditional assessments do not capture the capacities we seek for our students. Experiential learning and high-impact practices (HIPs) offer a powerful counternarrative, showing the relevance of authentic learning and human flourishing on our campus. "Assessment *as* learning as opposed to *of* learning: what can the student do with what they know? This really resonates with you at Georgetown as you embark on an enriched experiential learning opportunity, to really think about assessment as learning."

APRIL

Creating Credit-Rich Environments for Experiential Education

This conversation among faculty and staff centered on brainstorming ways to apply appropriate credit to recognize the value of experiential learning (EL) while building the appropriate infrastructure to credit it. Questions centered on the traditional credit-hour model that is tied to classroom seat time and its failure to reflect the complexity of experiential learning and the quality of effort. Participants workshopped three possible models for credit-rich learning environments: field credits to capture independent learning in the field; competency-based credits; and immersive modules within a semester. Proposed solutions included: recognizing faculty workload in mentorship structures, acknowledging credit for effortful experiences outside of the classroom, and implementing field credits during the summer term.

APRIL

Essentially Experiential: What Makes for Good Dialogue

Participants "dialogued" about dialogue as a core skill that is distinct from discussion and debate. Dialogue is a transformative, fully-present encounter that goes beyond mere exchange to foster genuine connection, deep listening, and the possibility of change. Effective dialogue requires trust, presence, active listening, and openness to change. Spanning freshman seminars to senior mentorship opportunities, faculty, staff, and students discussed how incorporating dialogue as an essential capacity for students broadens perspectives, builds empathy, and allows everyone in the room to pursue differences with authentic emotion.

MAY

Transdisciplinary Degree Redesign

with Bem Le Hunte

Visiting scholar, Professor Bem Le Hunte (Director for Teaching and Learning, University Technology Sydney, Australia) met with over 40 colleagues on May 4 to discuss the creation and growth of an inventive bachelor's degree program called the Bachelor of Creative Intelligence and Innovation (BCII). Students in this degree major in a core subject alongside required, work-integrated opportunities with external industry partners each semester. In this transdisciplinary degree, students work on authentic projects from their very first term to their last in ways that shift the learning paradigm to focus on creative problem-solving.

The Future of Experience-Centered Education

Rehumanization as...

When we named (Re)humanizing the University as the framing theme of this series, we knew that it would carry different meanings for different members of the Georgetown community. We identified three additional layers of meaning to what we mean by rehumanization based on our work over the course of the series.

1. Renewal

Strengthening the transformative aims of education

Rehumanization is a means of restoring the transformative learning that is rooted both in the liberal arts and Jesuit traditions: the student as someone who needs not just to know things and do things, but to become someone more — a person with judgment, imagination, humility, the capacity to navigate uncertainty, and a sense of how they want to participate in the world.

Yet, this is not about a nostalgic return to some ideal in the past, or recovering a lost purity of purpose. We see this act of renewal as Georgetown's forward-thinking, integrative response to the current pull across higher education toward narrow measurable outcomes, granular skill-mapping, and transactional career preparation.

Renewal and restoration of transformative education requires a reinterpretation of learning and development, one that integrates pragmatic skills, knowledge, mindsets, and values together in a new holistic vision. This is rehumanization that creates a "relentless welcome" for all students, taking into account what they know, who they are, and how they see themselves participating in the world all as inseparable.

2. Reclamation

Asserting what is distinctively human in the age of AI

Reclamation starts from what AI is now threatening to further erode in the nature of human work and learning. If AI can perform an expanding range of cognitive tasks — summarizing, synthesizing, drafting, coding, even reasoning through problems — then what remains distinctively human? What capacities does a university education need to cultivate that cannot be outsourced or automated?

The experiential learning series explicitly surfaced these capacities, spotlighting such capabilities as learning from failure and experimentation, navigating ambiguity and uncertainty, imagination, creativity and playfulness, humility, and judgment. These capacities function as a taxonomy of what rehumanization means in this register. These aren't soft add-ons to a rigorous curriculum; they are the outcomes that a curriculum focused on a human future requires.

Reclamation connects powerfully to experiential education, by placing knowledge in real-world contexts, sharpening these capacities. It also implies that in an AI-integrated world the "friction" of learning can emerge from experience and judgment that emerges from grappling with authentic problems in open-ended contexts.

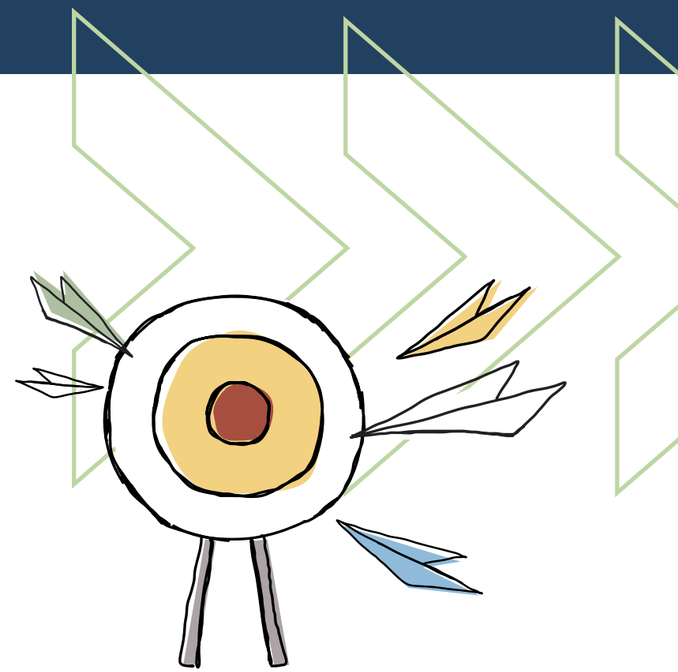
3. Redesign

Restructuring the educational experience

Rehumanization is not just a philosophical reorientation — it requires a fundamental structural and institutional redesign of a degree: how learning is structured, what faculty do, and how time and credit are organized. The current architecture of higher education — courses as discrete containers, credit hours as the unit of value, assessment as individual performance measurement, faculty load as content delivery — was built for an earlier paradigm. It was never designed to put full human formation and experience at the center.

Rehumanization as redesign means seeing the curriculum as a trajectory of experiences, not merely a collection of courses. Academic and curricular practices need to be rebuilt around the human experience they are trying to cultivate — not just rhetorically committed to it.

What does it actually *take* to rehumanize the university? Redesign asks us to rethink current existing mechanisms we know need the most attention: the role of faculty and the relationship of faculty load to student time-on-task; policies that inhibit the expansion of the credit-bearing experience; redesign assessments as learning; and reimagine a comprehensive 'learning record' for students to use. Without redesign of these elements, rehumanization risks being a values statement without structural consequence.



The Ongoing Work of Rehumanizing the University

The year of conversation in the Experiential Learning Series made clear that all three layers must be in continuous ongoing dialogue in order to do the work of rehumanizing the university. We need a renewed sense of the values and aims of education to inform how we understand the unique human capacities for an AI-integrated world. And we need to continue to explore how curricular structures and practices can put the cultivation of those capacities at the center in ways that align with the needs and realities of the world's emerging contexts.

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