

INSTITUTION NAME: Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

TITLE OF QUALITY ENHANCEMENT PLAN: Bridge Experiences

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Virginia Tech is embarking on a bold, campus-wide Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) to embed specific experiential learning, called bridge experiences, into the curricula of 50% of undergraduate academic degrees in the next five years. Bridge experiences are envisioned to integrate academic knowledge with an environment that is related to a student's intended career path and to bridge student development to the next step after graduation. Typical bridge experiences include internships, undergraduate research, and other site-based experiential learning.

Making this vision a reality challenges us to reflect on the ways in which our graduates can be better prepared for a meaningful career and life. Extending students' traditional classroom learning to tackle authentic problems and work in real-world contexts provides students motivation and passion to synthesize theory, concepts, and habits of mind thus maximizing their learning and development at Virginia Tech. If this vision is to become a hallmark of a Virginia Tech undergraduate education, these experiences must be available to all of our undergraduate students.

Implementation of bridge experiences will expand the "hands-on, minds-on" vision of the previous strategic plan to a holistic, experiential education envisioned for every Virginia Tech graduate as articulated in The Virginia Tech Difference: Advancing Beyond Boundaries, the university's strategic plan approved in 2019. With the support of the Board of Visitors, university leadership, faculty, and students, this QEP will stimulate increased participation in site-based experiential learning opportunities, as well as enhance the quality of those opportunities.

The Bridge Experience Program outcomes were informed by exemplary degree programs, institutional data, and educational literature. Successful program implementation will address increasing participation and learning quality for bridge experiences. Participation gaps will be addressed through curricular requirements creating inescapable opportunities. Students completing a bridge experience will be able to

- apply and connect their learning across academic and professional settings;
- demonstrate professional self-awareness by articulating their personal and professional development; and
- demonstrate a dedication to using their knowledge, skills, and talents in service to others, communities, and their field.

The quality of learning will be assessed for each student learning outcome and will be based on best practices established by the National Society for Experiential Education. Students will develop an intentional plan for their experience, reflect on their learning, evaluate their performance, be evaluated by their supervisor, and present a culminating work.

To support implementation, the newly formed Academy for Experiential Learning will guide faculty teams through a structured process for implementing curricular revision. These efforts will be complemented by many existing offices that support experiential learning programs across Virginia Tech. University-wide programs are being developed to help address key concerns related to cost and communication of experiential learning opportunities, including developing an on-campus internship program and investing in infrastructure to centralize communication of opportunities. The Bridge Experience Program is an ambitious undertaking to center experiential learning as a hallmark of a Virginia Tech education. To make these important learning experiences available to and required for all of our undergraduate students will be a true testament to Virginia Tech's dedication to a holistic education.

CONTACT PERSON: Dr. Rachel Holloway,
Vice Provost for Undergraduate Academic Affairs,
rhollowa@vt.edu

Committee Visit Dates: March 15 – 18, 2021