Many students benefit from explicit help connecting the dots between their deep academic learning, co-curricular activities and goals for life and work. Like a pixelated digital image viewed too closely, these rich learning experiences and the skills gained in each can appear to students as discrete, disconnected dots. Their connection to each other and to the future is elusive. When students are encouraged to take a step back and connect those dots, the cohesive whole becomes clearer. As they start to see the bigger picture, students begin to recognize that integrating their learning experiences inside and outside the classroom—their Husky Experience as a whole—is the foundation for meaningful lives and rewarding careers.

Faculty and staff in the programs featured in this report help students see that bigger picture by making explicit the connections between scholarly learning, work experiences, co-curricular activities and professional applications. They help students develop and practice a range of valuable academic, career and life-enhancing skills. How? By asking students to think critically, take on responsibility, engage fully, collaborate productively, step into leadership roles, reflect deeply on experiences and articulate goals. These programs provide students with mentors and a sense of community. They also offer opportunities to link academics with life after graduation and push students to take risks in ways that prepare them for success in a fast-paced, changing world.

**The Husky Experience**

The Husky Experience encompasses the transformative educational moments—inside and outside the classroom—that help our students discover their passions in life and work, become independent thinkers and citizens, and pursue meaningful and rewarding careers.

**Featured Programs**

- Newbook Digital Texts in the Humanities
- Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations
- Community, Environment & Planning
- Built Environments
- Discovery Core
- UW Bothell
- Career Development Organization
- Physics, Astronomy and Math
- Veterans Incubator for Better Entrepreneurship
- UW Tacoma
- Center for 21st Century Liberal Learning
- Arts and Sciences

*Photo by Isaiah Brookshire.*
Students step up to collaborate as a professional research team: Newbook Digital Texts in the Humanities

Under the direction of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations (NELC) faculty, undergraduate and graduate students hone skills in historical research and computer programming as they digitize, transcribe, translate and edit century-old texts from Ottoman Iraq and Egypt. As these students advance the growing field of digital humanities, they also experience how diverse teams work in the professional world. A key example is the independent, web-based publishing house Newbook Digital Texts in the Humanities led by Walter Andrews.

Collaboration is the future of research and of work: The project has drawn together an interdisciplinary team to solve complex research puzzles and give students experience working in diverse professional teams. The team includes:

- Undergraduate and graduate students from an array of UW departments, including Biology, Math, History, Computer Science & Engineering and the Jackson School of International Studies
- UW faculty, including visiting scholar and Egyptologist Sarah Ketchley
- Iraq-based researcher and dialect expert Nowf Allawi, project co-founder

Project leaders and participants see such interdisciplinary, international collaboration and open-access digital publishing as the future of research. “Having digitized primary sources has opened up research in ways that were simply impossible even twenty years ago,” says Kearby Chess ’14, whose master’s thesis relied on Newbook Digital Texts sources. For example, the Svoboda Diaries, a detailed first-person chronicle of trade and travel in one of the world’s last multi-ethnic empires, were scattered among libraries and personal collections. Access to many of the original diaries was lost after the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Thanks to the work of UW students and their collaborators, copies of the diaries are becoming available online both as annotated transcriptions and through the “Svobodapedia” wiki.

History students learn to code; computer science majors learn to work in interdisciplinary teams: Unexpected cross-pollination can happen when students from different disciplines work together towards a shared goal.

- Kelsie Haakenson came to the UW planning to study history with an eye towards preserving historical buildings and artifacts. Last spring, after working with the Svoboda Diaries team for a year and teaching herself the Python programming language, she was accepted to the UW Computer Science & Engineering program. Now she envisions a career in the digital humanities, blending her passions and professional goals. “I want to focus on online publishing of primary sources and user-friendly ways to display information rather than fixing artifacts and leaving them in a museum or an archive somewhere,” Haakenson says. “In digital form, sources are more accessible and hopefully have more longevity.”

Lessons Learned

Creating a workplace-like structure for research groups facilitates scholarly work and provides students with practice in a professional setting. They can learn a range of valuable career skills including project management, communication, leadership and teamwork.

Students work with primary sources, such as photographs and handwritten diaries, to illuminate life in Ottoman Iraq. Above, steamships arriving in Baghdad, captured by Alexander Svoboda, ca. 1900. Image courtesy of the Svoboda Diaries Project and Newbook Digital Texts.
Undergraduate intern Sarah Johnson also developed an interest in programming through the project. “I would never have taken a computer science class, but now that I see the content it's creating and that it's a necessary step in making this historical research available, it's more interesting to me,” she says.

Students on the technical team have also explored new territory. Intern Tori Wellington, an undergraduate Informatics student, learned to facilitate communication between the programmers and historians on the team. Ketchley notes, “Tori has been able to take the technical jargon and present it to less technical teammates in a palatable way. That's a real skill.” Wellington adds, “It's a challenge, but it's fun to make it less intimidating.”

A student-driven project fosters leadership skills: “Walter has a knack for seeing things in students they don't see in themselves,” says graduate student Rachel Elizabeth Brown. “He spots potential really quickly.” And Brown should know. She grew from an undergraduate intern who doubted her ability to contribute, to the lab's project manager. Faculty leaders envisioned an organizational structure for the project that put students in leadership and management roles, and Brown made it happen. Although Andrews describes her as a “whiz” at project management, Brown recalls she had a lot to learn. “I was convinced he was crazy for accepting me, that I didn't have the skills needed to work on the project,” she says. “Walter is really good at letting students find their niche. It turns out that organizing is my thing. I love helping students figure out what their skills are and find a place in our organization that will make them happy and proud to work with us.”

Through scholarly research, students learn practical problem-solving skills: Student interns and employees on the Newbook Digital Texts team learn to push the boundaries of scholarly research through digital publishing. They also learn how a professional team works to solve complex problems beyond any one person's expertise. As Haakenson discovered, it is often necessary to identify and fill gaps in one's own skills and to reach out to peer experts for help. “I found an online tutorial on starting with Python and worked through the different lessons,” she says. “Whenever I came in contact with a problem I couldn't figure out, I would use the group email list to send out questions for more experienced people to answer. The tech team is really supportive when you're learning new things.”
In 1994 a group of faculty and students in the College of Built Environments used principles of the new community-based planning movement to create their version of the ideal major. Caitlin Dean recalls, “They asked questions like, ‘How can we prepare students for the real world?’ and, ‘What does a holistic education mean?’” Their work resulted in the Community, Environment & Planning (CEP) program. As program manager from 2010 to 2014, Dean worked with Director Christopher Campbell to grow the program while preserving the founders’ mission: helping undergraduates direct their own learning.

**Students approach the interdisciplinary curriculum with a goal and a plan:** To help students structure their education, CEP requires each incoming student to create an Independent Study Plan (ISP). Students make revisions as their interests evolve. Margot Malarkey ’12 began the program focusing on environmental studies, but exposure to graduate-level urban studies classes sparked her interest in the intersection of housing, politics and academics, and she altered her ISP to reflect that. “The cyclical process of planning, acting, reflecting and changing your plan—the iterative cycle of learning—is important not just for academics but also for life,” says Dean. “We hope students will adopt that mode of thinking and take it out into their careers and personal lives.”

Graduate Jen Hamblin has done just that. Remembering her own ISP, she says, “It was the first time in my entire life I was forced to sit down and be intentional about something that hadn’t happened yet. CEP requires you to come up with a strategy—you say you want to get to the moon by Thursday... so, where is your map?” Hamblin now uses these skills regularly in her career as a consultant aiding companies and institutions in diversifying their workforces. “I just developed a growth model for my CEO with a three-year projection and a risk assessment for each phase. Long-term planning is a major, critical skill for the professional world.”

**Independence, but with structure:** “The first generation of the program was seen as an experiment,” says Dean. The program philosophy still emphasizes learning by doing, including the
value of making mistakes. However, the program team has also made changes to the curriculum, such as establishing required classes for students working on capstone projects. “In the past, students were expected to work mostly independently,” says Dean, “but we learned we needed to build in more structure to support all of them, not just the top 25 percent who know how to draw on the resources available to them. The majority of undergraduates still need modeling, coaching and guidance.”

**Shared governance builds student leadership skills:** CEP advertises itself as “built for and by its students,” and this shared governance model permeates the entire program. Students take the lead on the majority of decisions about the major and its curriculum. Final decisions require full consensus of current students, which can be a challenging exercise in patience, negotiation and building buy-in. Campbell says, “In CEP, students are not only responsible for themselves, they are responsible for the whole CEP community. This means they must learn how to make decisions together, resolve disputes and respect individual differences as they work towards common goals. For many students, the skills they learn through governing the major are the skills that prove most important to them in their careers and civic lives.”

**Students gain confidence from the confidence shown in them:** “CEP not only taught me, it also empowered me to contribute to the learning process,” says Dan Fitting ‘14, who returned to college after his military service. “Until I found CEP, I felt like I was only going to school to learn what other people already knew.” Through his capstone project he created new knowledge, helping local residents inventory historically significant architecture in their community and develop a plan for its preservation, refining skills he now uses as Sustainability and Facilities Coordinator for Skagit County.

**Flexibility is challenging but pays off in the long run:** “I would sometimes have an identity crisis,” says Malarkey. “I would look at my friends in business school with a clear path forward and say, ‘What am I doing?!’” Campbell notes, “Being responsible for your education is hard.” He adds, “It can be frustrating at times but when students come back after they graduate, they say, ‘Ah, now I get it.’” Malarkey agrees that work experience helped her gain perspective on the value of her major. As a research associate at an environmental consulting firm she frequently draws on the meeting facilitation, planning, presentation and analytical skills she gained from the program.
Supporting success through an integrated core curriculum: Discovery Core for first-year and pre-major students at UW Bothell

First-year students at UW Bothell are immersed in a curriculum designed both to inspire creativity and to bridge the transition to the rigor of college-level academic work. When the Bothell campus added freshmen and sophomore students in 2006, the campus also created the Center for University Studies and Programs (CUSP) to house support services for first-year and pre-major students. Then CUSP launched the Discovery Core, an innovative core curriculum that welcomes students into small seminars and gets them academically engaged through creative course offerings such as “The Biography of a Commodity,” “Utopias and Dystopias,” “Food and Social Justice” and “Dreaming.”

Bringing resources to students, rather than sending students to resources: While the Discovery Core classes are innovative, so is the curriculum’s approach to bringing student success strategies and support into the classroom. The faculty who teach first-year seminars break the ice between new students and the people dedicated to supporting them by, for example, asking the director of the writing center to spend an hour in their classroom modeling how to do a deep read of a scholarly article. “The literature suggests that this student body doesn’t do ‘optional’ very much,” says CUSP Program Manager Ismaila Maidadi. “They were in second or third grade when ‘No Child Left Behind’ was passed, and they’ve been taught to the test. Because most resources are optional, those things we think are crucial we are moving into the classroom. We want students to be able to easily and quickly access any resources they need.”

A curriculum that engages both students and faculty: The Discovery Core offers new students a way to have fun, make friends and learn how to navigate the challenges of college life while also fulfilling general education requirements. But the program is designed to inspire its instructors, too. “We like to think the Discovery Core seminars are not just a rich opportunity for students, but also for faculty,” says CUSP director Leslie Ashbaugh. In a competitive selection process, faculty from across campus apply to teach in the Discovery Core. Lecturer Kristy Leissle says, “The openness CUSP has had to my proposals for content—which range from chocolate to science fiction—really spurs my pedagogical creativity. In the Discovery Core, I am teaching in an open and welcoming environment where innovation is encouraged.”

High-impact experiences make learning meaningful and memorable: The Discovery Core curriculum deliberately and explicitly incorporates what the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) calls “high-impact practices,” educational experiences with a demonstrated effect on student retention and engagement. Faculty coordinator Jennifer Atkinson, a lecturer in the School of Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences (IAS), sees this as a hallmark of the Discovery Core. “Students aren’t shut away in their classrooms,” she says. “They go out into the community for field trips, service learning, research in the wetlands or North Creek Forest; they interview workers in local industries or activists in the streets; and we regularly host guest speakers from the community in our classes.”

Collaboration is the key: CUSP is a team effort from the location of staff offices to the development of curricula. In order to help students find what they’re looking for and foster collaboration, the Bothell campus brought partners such as CUSP, academic advising, veterans services, study abroad, disability support services and career services into one Student Success Center. The Discovery Core is also a joint effort. When faculty and staff met last summer to revamp the curriculum, they were joined by leaders from the Teaching and Learning Center, the Quantitative Skills Center, Career Services, Institutional Research and several other units. “It’s important to have all the key stakeholders in the room,” says Ashbaugh. As faculty coordinator, Atkinson ensures collaboration...
continues throughout the academic year, and that the Discovery Core faculty meet regularly to discuss teaching best practices.

**Student success in three stages:** The Discovery Core is designed to help students transition from a top-down high school model of learning to a student-centered, inquiry-based model of learning, says Ashbaugh. The curriculum tackles this challenge in three phases:

- **Discovery** (fall): Students learn about campus resources and college-level academic skills, from interpreting written sources to reading a syllabus
- **Research** (winter): Students build on discovery skills while focusing on developing new research skills, such as critical analysis and facility with academic citation standards
- **Reflection** (spring): Students write about their intellectual development, reevaluate which majors best suit their skills and interests, and curate a portfolio of their work to present at a spring showcase

Overall, the Discovery Core sequence is designed to prepare first-year and pre-major students to take full advantage of their college education. “Most students will change their minds about what they want to focus on,” says Ashbaugh. “The whole point is to expose them to a rich environment and a diverse set of ideas and experiences, and hopefully by second year they’re finding a pathway for themselves that includes study abroad, service learning, undergraduate research and other high-impact opportunities we offer on campus.”

**Wrapping resources into assignments:** The faculty and student services staff who design the Discovery Core curriculum intentionally integrate learning outside of the classroom into class assignments. For example, one early low-stakes writing assignment puts students in touch with a variety of resources while emphasizing the value of drafting and revising. After reviewing first drafts, their instructor uses class time to schedule one-on-one meetings with each student to offer feedback. “Approaching a faculty member can be intimidating,” says Ashbaugh. “This breaks that barrier.” Students are then sent to the writing center, and asked to fill out a form reflecting on their experience—“Not only about using the service, but also imagining how it could be useful to them going forward,” says Ashbaugh. Students then go through a round of peer review before submitting the paper again for a final grade.

**The ePortfolio is a communication tool, workspace and archive:** Throughout the Discovery Core, students build an ePortfolio that is more than an academic archive—it’s designed to become a snapshot of their curricular and co-curricular life throughout four years.

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**The Academic Transition Program (ATP): A model for student success**

Each fall, the Academic Transition Program (ATP) welcomes a select group of first-year students whose applications fell short of UW Bothell admissions standards, but showed academic promise, dedication to learning and tenacity in the face of adversity. Through intensive advising and mandatory courses in learning strategies, ATP launches capable young people into successful college careers.

- For some ATP students, such as Helen Alarcon (left), it was family challenges that knocked their academic dreams off track. But through ATP, Alarcon was able to realize her goal of a UW education. Now a junior, she has been on the dean’s list twice and mentors at-risk youth and Latina middle-schoolers. Reflecting on her admittance to UW Bothell she says, “I’m here. I’m going to stay and I’m going to finish. I’m going to make my parents proud and I want to help my community. I am trying to show my community that it is possible.”
- ATP’s student success curriculum works. Although most ATP students entered UW Bothell with lower grades or test scores than their peers, program staff report that retention rates and GPAs keep pace with those of generally admitted students.
Several years ago, physics and astronomy graduate students co-founded an organization to support students looking for jobs outside of academia. They met a growing need to connect graduating Ph.D. students to employers. “The reality is that most people don’t go into a tenure-track position,” says Andrew Laszlo, who was a 2013-14 coordinator of the Career Development Organization for physicists and astronomers (CDO). “A lot of people are going on to do other things. Our goal is to get people thinking about other options and to see what’s out there.”

Connecting alumni, employers and current students: The CDO’s primary focus is an annual networking event. Student organizers invite local and international employers, many of whom are also alumni. On the first day, employers present to students. On the second day, students present their own work to employers. “The idea is to get people talking,” says Laszlo. The visiting professionals represent the range of opportunities open to graduating scientists. Recent graduate Amit Misra notes, “It was interesting to see their career paths. They’re not your professors; they are people who branched off and did what I’ve been hoping to do—find a career outside of academia.”

Creating well-rounded scientists: CDO aims to help science graduate students become better job candidates. Laszlo summarizes the challenge: “I think employers are happy to hire candidates who are good at working with other people and have skills beyond just being intelligent.” As a result, CDO’s programming highlights the value of ‘soft skills.’ The organization’s mission statement contends: “To remain competitive in the job market, physicists, mathematicians and astronomers need to augment their analytic and problem-solving skills with flexibility, leadership, and cross-disciplinary aptitude.”

Lessons Learned

Tapping recent alumni to participate in professional networking and mentorship opportunities helps students recognize transferable skills and explore a wider range of career options.

Graduate students are most competitive in the job market when they have both deep disciplinary expertise and practice communicating their knowledge and skills to people outside their field.

“There are three things I know I like: research, mentoring people and the Northwest. I’m looking to find a career path that combines those. I think I have plenty of options that will use my skill sets appropriately and they’ll all be good ones.”

ANDREW LASZLO ’14
2013-14 Coordinator, CDO; Ph.D., Physics; Postdoctoral Researcher, UW Nanopore Physics Lab

UW neuroscience graduate student Liza Shoenfeld (next page) mapped out possible alternative career choices (right) and sought out informational interviews to explore those options. She now works for a management consulting firm in New York. Image courtesy of Liza Shoenfeld and branchingpoints.com.
I just got a job at Microsoft as a data scientist. I was asked to give a presentation on my research to start off my interview day, and I was able to re-use a lot of the presentation I gave at the CDO event last year. It was one of the few talks I'd given that was geared towards a technical audience, but one that didn't have much astronomy experience.

AMIT MISRA '14
Ph.D., Astronomy

Partnering with the Career Center: To prepare for its fall employer event, CDO holds two workshops with the Career Center: one on effective résumés and another called Networking for Shy People. Laszlo says CDO members have found these events and the Career Center overall “to be incredibly useful. It's not the norm for physics people to be social, actively engaging with other people and selling themselves,” he says. “That's what you do when you're networking. So it's a bit of social coaching.”

Seminars with guest speakers inform students about career paths: In addition to the annual networking event, CDO organizes a variety of other workshops and seminars, many of which feature guest speakers (often alumni) talking about their fields. Recent presentation topics include working in rocket science and employment opportunities at NASA, and landing a faculty job at a small college. CDO also recently arranged a tour of Boeing linear accelerator labs and a chance to meet the scientists who work there.

For students, by students: For ten years, “the CDO has been passed down grad student to grad student,” says Laszlo, the third generation of coordinators from his research lab. Leading CDO was a core part of his UW experience. “Mentoring other students was an important part of feeling like I belonged in the department and was contributing to the community,” says Laszlo. “And, on my résumé, it demonstrates leadership and organization skills.”

For networking, practice makes perfect: Some CDO participants find jobs directly through the organization, such as Nathan Kurz '10, who was recruited by the electron microscope firm Nion after a senior engineer saw his presentation at the fall employer event. For students who don't get a job offer right away, the event provides “good practice for how to present yourself,” says Laszlo. Misra agrees. "Just interacting with people, seeing what they were doing and how my skills from graduate school could transfer was really helpful," he says, adding, "Learning to talk about my research to a non-astronomy audience was a good experience. At academic conferences you're talking to the 10 or 20 people in your field who already pretty much know what you did anyway."

Student groups complement Graduate School offerings: The Graduate School has a formal program for introducing graduate students to career options. In collaboration with the Career Center and the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs, the Graduate School’s Core Programs offer workshops, seminars and online content geared toward career fulfillment, whether in academia, nonprofits or private industry.

Branching Points: Blogging on alternative careers for scientists

As a UW neuroscience graduate student, Liza Shoenfeld began to explore career options outside the academy. Branching Points, the blog she started to chronicle her informational interviews, shows her development from a perplexed scientist—“I had no clear idea of what I might find, only that there lay a vast, hazy world of jobs out there that did not involve pipettes”—to an expert on the transferable skills graduate students bring to the table. Her takeaways include:

• “For lab scientists it can be difficult to imagine a working life that doesn't involve physically handling things (Just a desk and a computer? But where is your soldering iron?), so even seeing a workplace environment can be informative.”
• “At first I didn't relate to the concept of networking; to me it implied ownership of business cards and power suits. But it turns out I do have networks—everyone does—and they have been very helpful in finding interviews.”
• “Just hearing the story of how one person reached a career can make that path suddenly seem feasible.”
• “This process has helped me believe that while no one might care about how smoothly I can mount brain slices on a glass slide (very smoothly!), I do have skills that will be valuable in the job market.”

LIZA SHOENFELD ‘13
M.S., Neuroscience
Supporting student-veterans working towards a degree and a dream: Veterans Incubator for Better Entrepreneurship (VIBE)

The Veterans Incubator for Better Entrepreneurship (VIBE) recruits University of Washington Tacoma students with military backgrounds into a cohort-based program that provides coaching, mentorship from local business leaders and peer support as they flesh out and implement their ideas for new businesses. On Veterans Day 2013, the Tacoma campus launched the VIBE program, which Alfie Alvarado-Ramos, director of the Washington State Department of Veteran Affairs, celebrated as “the only one of its kind in the nation.” VIBE students benefit from specialized mentoring that integrates their in-class learning and their broader goals. Director Phil Potter says, “This is a learn-by-doing experience. We’re looking to help veterans understand what it takes to plan a business, start a business, launch a business, but do it within the educational context so they’re not alone. We want to make sure these students know what it takes, and put them in positions to succeed.”

Veterans are natural entrepreneurs: Potter believes military veterans naturally have the necessary skills to run a business. “If you take a look at a spec sheet for what we think good entrepreneurs are and what we know veterans are, they match up really well,” he says. “They both understand when to lead and when to follow. Both groups are innovative and push themselves. They have a tendency to complete an outcome or a mission, oftentimes in the absence of ideal resources. And at the end of the day, they just get things done.” VIBE member and U.S. Army veteran Steve Buchanan runs ChooseVets, a task-outsourcing business founded on his confidence in other veterans. He says, “The Army has already background checked them, they’ve been trained and they know how to call you ‘sir’ and ‘ma’am’ and get a job done.”

Helping student-veterans translate their skills to the civilian context: Potter considers “incredible veteran talent” one of the South Puget Sound’s best “natural resources.” However, many of VIBE’s student-veterans report struggling to find an outlet for their skills after returning to civilian life. Shem Zakem, a former Army signal support systems specialist who recently graduated from UW Tacoma, remembers, “I thought that the training and skills I had from communications would have a good translation to the civilian sector, but I came to find out that...not so much.” VIBE seeks to “unleash that talent for great things,” says Potter.

The cohort model facilitates creative collaboration and peer-mentoring: VIBE students come to the UW with different military training and enroll in a variety of degree programs. As a result, they often find that one of their best assets is each other. Zakem describes his symbiotic friendship and professional relationship with attorney and business school graduate Buchanan, commenting, “Steve can say, ‘I’m having trouble with my software, what should I do?’ I can go to Steve and have him explain what an LLC is,” referring to a limited liability company. Now as alumni of VIBE, Zakem and Buchanan are focused on growing the businesses they nurtured during their time at the UW. Both are receiving widespread attention for their work: Zakem’s company, Bettery, was identified by the Washington Department of Veterans Affairs as one of the top new veteran-led startups in the state, and Buchanan was invited to attend the State of the Union address with the Washington state delegation as an innovative business leader seeking to benefit veterans.

Lessons Learned

Students thrive when they can tie academic coursework to prior experience and concrete goals. This is especially true for non-traditional students such as veterans.

When subject-matter experts from the community are invited to be mentors for student projects, they become a resource for one-on-one coaching and practical career advice.

"This program launched just over a year ago and we already have three or four viable companies that are attracting investors. People from all over the country have called me to ask what our students are doing. VIBE is a start-up itself, but this really can be a national model.”

PHIL POTTER
Director, VIBE, UW Tacoma

"Often one of the biggest challenges working with young entrepreneurs is their lack of practical experience, but this is not a problem with our military veterans. They know how to run meetings, delegate tasks, set goals and get things done.”

JOHN B. DIMMER
VIBE mentor; co-founder of the Tacoma Angel Network
There are a lot of programs out there to help veterans from the ‘handout’ mindset rather than the ‘hand up’ mindset. I’d rather have someone help me in a way that will help me move up the ladder rather than just help me in the short term."

**SHEM ZAKEM ’14**
VIBE member; U.S. Army veteran; B.S., Computer Science and Systems, UW Tacoma

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**Cohort now, professional network later:** In the challenging, risky world of entrepreneurship, a supportive community can make a big difference. VIBE provides a space for UW Tacoma students who are veterans and aspiring entrepreneurs to come together as professional collaborators. "We’re not just in VIBE together, we’re friends, too," says Buchanan. Zakem adds, "It’s not a competition, it’s a team effort. Everyone has contributed to everyone else’s company in one way or another, whether it’s advice or a sympathetic ear. So we’re all invested in each others’ successes." Most VIBE students are also committed to the Puget Sound region for the long term, notes Potter. As a result, VIBE relationships can grow into a professional network with a lasting impact on the community.

**UW faculty are a key resource:** As entrepreneurs and students, VIBE members can draw on courses and faculty across the University to help further their business goals. When Zakem realized his background in computer science didn’t prepare him to run the financial side of his company, he signed up for a class at the Milgard School of Business. "I could have banged my head against the wall teaching myself, but I took a class and learned it in three months," he says. Zakem also sought out advice from faculty members such as Andrew Fry, assistant director of Industry Partnerships and lecturer at the UW Tacoma Institute of Technology, who is also an experienced entrepreneur.

**A curriculum driven by student needs:** VIBE is mostly a mentor-led model, says Potter. Local companies and business leaders run small seminars for VIBE students that are tailored to their current needs and interests. Because it is a small group—the first cohort was 15 students—mentors can meet them where they are. Potter says, "They come in at different stages—not just different stages in their business development but also their academic career. This requires a flexible curriculum."

**The university as convener:** Comparing VIBE members to entrepreneurs going it alone, Zakem says, "Being associated with the University of Washington lends us instant credibility." A number of business incubators exist across the country, but VIBE benefits from three key attributes that are rarely found together: one of the largest veteran populations in the country, the Puget Sound’s thriving entrepreneurial ecosystem and the faculty and expertise of a world-class public research university. The University brings these elements together and connects veterans with the people who want them to succeed, such as vocal VIBE supporters U.S. Senator Patty Murray and Joint Base Lewis-McChord Commander Colonel Charles Hodges, along with the local business community.

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The cohort model is a key part of VIBE’s success. Student-veterans draw on each others’ diverse expertise, in fields from computer science to environmental science, and benefit from the mentorship of peers further along in their academic careers or business development processes.

Image courtesy of Cody Char.
‘Productive disruption’ teaches students to be intentional learners: Center for 21st Century Liberal Learning (C21)

The Center for 21st Century Liberal Learning (C21) is a recent initiative of the College of Arts and Sciences exploring how to best prepare undergraduates to thrive at the UW and beyond. The Center’s core programming revolves around the C21 Fellows, a group of students who experience a unique curriculum tailored to their needs, and who also contribute to shaping the future of C21 itself. Undergraduate students apply to participate in the program. The most recent cohort started in summer 2014, building skills and relationships even before their first quarter at the UW. C21 is collaborating closely with Undergraduate Academic Affairs, First-Year Programs, and the Career Center in this effort to re-think what a college education should offer.

Putting students in the driver’s seat: In order to get the most out of college, students need to learn to be strategic early on, say C21 staff. “At a big research university like this, if students are not intentional about their own learning, they will miss a lot of great opportunities,” says Director Kevin Mihata. Through experiential learning, facilitated discussions and structured reflection, C21 staff guide Fellows as they learn to be proactive about their educations rather than simply ticking off requirements. “It seems clear that they can’t learn this just by us telling them,” says Mihata. Four years of practice as C21 Fellows helps students develop key skills, attitudes and habits they can draw on to shape their futures.

Learning is less about finding the right answers than asking the right questions: C21 leaders find that incoming students often need to unlearn some attitudes and practices in order to get the most out of their UW education. Intensive, early fall experiences are designed to jump-start this new way of thinking before first-year students ever arrive on campus. In 2014, this consisted of a short study abroad experience in León, Spain. “They have done everything right to get here, but they haven’t had a lot of experience operating in ambiguity,” says Gretchen Ludwig, C21’s curriculum coordinator, of students transitioning from high school. “In León, they came to us for feedback but were really fishing for what we wanted, for the answer. After we didn’t tell them, they began to reflect that maybe there isn’t just one answer.” C21 Fellow Alvaro Contreras says the León trip was “preparing us for what college is going to be like. In high school we’re so used to having a rubric of what we have to do. Here they just told us, ‘Go out, explore, and then give us a presentation.’”

Lessons Learned

Students may be uncomfortable with open-ended or self-directed assignments, but the right balance between structure and ambiguity can activate creativity and foster independent thinking.

To become intentional learners, first-year students need supportive mentors who push them to challenge their assumptions, reflect on their goals and plan ahead.

“Productive disruption” teaches students to be intentional learners: Center for 21st Century Liberal Learning (C21)

The Center for 21st Century Liberal Learning (C21) is a recent initiative of the College of Arts and Sciences exploring how to best prepare undergraduates to thrive at the UW and beyond. The Center’s core programming revolves around the C21 Fellows, a group of students who experience a unique curriculum tailored to their needs, and who also contribute to shaping the future of C21 itself. Undergraduate students apply to participate in the program. The most recent cohort started in summer 2014, building skills and relationships even before their first quarter at the UW. C21 is collaborating closely with Undergraduate Academic Affairs, First-Year Programs, and the Career Center in this effort to re-think what a college education should offer.

Putting students in the driver’s seat: In order to get the most out of college, students need to learn to be strategic early on, say C21 staff. “At a big research university like this, if students are not intentional about their own learning, they will miss a lot of great opportunities,” says Director Kevin Mihata. Through experiential learning, facilitated discussions and structured reflection, C21 staff guide Fellows as they learn to be proactive about their educations rather than simply ticking off requirements. “It seems clear that they can’t learn this just by us telling them,” says Mihata. Four years of practice as C21 Fellows helps students develop key skills, attitudes and habits they can draw on to shape their futures.

Learning is less about finding the right answers than asking the right questions: C21 leaders find that incoming students often need to unlearn some attitudes and practices in order to get the most out of their UW education. Intensive, early fall experiences are designed to jump-start this new way of thinking before first-year students ever arrive on campus. In 2014, this consisted of a short study abroad experience in León, Spain. “They have done everything right to get here, but they haven’t had a lot of experience operating in ambiguity,” says Gretchen Ludwig, C21’s curriculum coordinator, of students transitioning from high school. “In León, they came to us for feedback but were really fishing for what we wanted, for the answer. After we didn’t tell them, they began to reflect that maybe there isn’t just one answer.” C21 Fellow Alvaro Contreras says the León trip was “preparing us for what college is going to be like. In high school we’re so used to having a rubric of what we have to do. Here they just told us, ‘Go out, explore, and then give us a presentation.’”

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KEVIN MIHATA
C21 Director and Associate Dean for Educational Programs, College of Arts and Sciences

C21 Fellows (left to right) Alvaro Contreras, Ednauh Kamlondy, Louie Vital and Tiffanie Matthews reflected on their UW experiences in a C21 video. Contreras remarks, “We don’t have anyone saying, ‘Do this, do this this way.’ It’s all the way we interpret it.” Kamlondy notes, “Here they say, ‘This is the prompt, what can you do with it?’” Images courtesy of Isaiah Brookshire.
A ‘home base’ as students adjust to college life: Like the communities many undergraduates find in the Greek system or student organizations, the C21 Fellows program offers students a tight-knit campus ‘home’ with small cohorts and dedicated campus mentors. For example, Bob Stacey, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, advised the Fellows in Spain during their summer study abroad experience. C21 staff see such support as critical to student success. The first quarter of college is “not a comfortable place to be,” says Ludwig. “They really need a community to support them as they try to make sense of their college experience.” C21 Fellows have three overlapping communities: their own cohort, a “learning lab” that mixes together about 15 C21 Fellows at different points in their academic careers, and all 72 C21 students. Fellow Louie Vital notes, “It gives us a way to not be stuck within our own discipline, but to really learn from each other, and what other majors and students have to offer.”

Out-of-the-box assignments: C21 coursework reflects the program’s focus on ‘productive disruption’—getting students to take on challenges that may be uncomfortable but activate creativity. The C21 curriculum is made up of one-credit seminars that meet for 90 minutes each week. Assignments are often open-ended. One recent activity asked Fellows to film a video reflection about their UW highs and lows so far. Responses ranged from tears to laughter, from quiet reflection to dancing—sometimes all in the same video. These displays of vulnerability and resilience sparked a lively class discussion about the unexpected stresses of college, and how to pull through them. Through assignments like this, mentors believe C21 students have an opportunity to learn to take risks safely—what Assistant Director Cynthia Caci jokingly calls “supervised floundering.”

Students co-create the curriculum: C21 coursework is already student-driven, but juniors and seniors are also asked to submit proposals about next steps for C21 as a whole. For example, juniors recently designed and proposed a C21 major. Mihata says, “We are in year three, and this is an iterative process. We are co-creating the model with the students.”

A UW education is more than the diploma: As C21 Fellow Ednauh Kamlondy reflects, “University is not just a place to focus on your major, but a place to learn as much as possible.” One thing C21 staff want students to learn is that they don’t have to find every answer on their own. “They are so used to the individualized testing culture,” says Ludwig. “That’s how they’ve been judged. But knowledge is distributed. What we are helping them learn is how to ask for help, navigate networks and use those networks to solve problems.”

Making better majors: C21 leaders have a series of goals in mind. “The first quarter is just about building a support system,” Mihata says. “The first year is about helping students develop an intentional self-story of their own intellectual aspirations. There’s also an institutional goal here: to get students into their majors earlier, and into the right majors for the right reasons.”

Bob Stacey (above right), dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, accompanied the newest cohort of C21 Fellows to León, Spain in the summer of 2014. Fellow Tiffanie Matthews (previous page) says, “Dean Stacey talked about doing something you love. I wanted to double-major in marketing and international business.” His remarks made her think again. “I love French, and that could be a huge asset to me with international business,” she says. Images courtesy of Isaiah Brookshire.
Continuing the conversation

Students benefit from help seeing the very real connections between scholarly learning, high-impact experiences outside of the classroom, their goals for life and work, and careers. Some will connect the dots on their own, but most will need the support of faculty, staff and peers to do so, as seen in the examples featured in this report. The next report in this series will highlight UW departments helping students connect the dots. The goal of the Provost’s Leading Change in Public Higher Education series is to broaden and connect conversations on our three campuses, share best practices and provide common reference points to inform our plans for the future. We welcome your participation, feedback and suggestions at edtrends@uw.edu.

UW resources

Faculty and staff
- The Career Center’s faculty resource page offers examples and recommendations for helping students link academics and careers.
- The Undergraduate Research Program helps faculty post opportunities, award credit, seek funding and refine mentoring skills.

Students
- Campus career centers (the Career Center, UW Tacoma’s Career Development, and UW Bothell’s Career Services) offer information on internships, job opportunities, skill-building workshops, advising, courses, job fairs and more.
- The Undergraduate Research Program helps students find projects, get credit, seek funding, attend conferences and get published.
- The Graduate School’s Core Programs offer online resources, career workshops, networking receptions with alumni and career symposia with employers.

Departments
- Departments on all three campuses can invite career centers (the Career Center, UW Tacoma’s Career Development, and UW Bothell’s Career Services) to facilitate tailored workshops for students on career skills and discipline-specific job searches.

Further reading


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