

Engaged and Experiential Strategy Working Team Update to the Board of Trustees

July 14th, 2023

C.W. Webb, Executive Vice President of Academic Affairs and Chief Academic Officer, and Dean of Palmer College of Professional Studies

Board Charge

I am pleased to provide this memo as an overview of the efforts of the Engaged and Experiential Strategy working team and discuss this in greater detail during the Board of Trustees meeting on Thursday, July 20.

The Board of Trustees charge included the formation of a working team to establish an immersive learning and co-curricular experience as part of the efforts to transform the institution. The charge expressed the following expectation, which has guided our work thus far:

Establish an immersive learning and co-curricular experience that provides intentional elements of life design and career readiness while fostering well-being, purpose, connections, and belonging that prepares our students to be inclusive leaders who change the world. This highly engaged and experiential approach to learning will provide a supportive scaffolding engineered to progress students through an experience that begins residually and eventually leads beyond the walls of our campus where upper-level students are immersed in semester-long significant career opportunities through internships and cooperative learning. These transformative study-away experiences will continue to build life skills both necessary at work and in life. Students will find placements for experiential learning and continue to be part of an intentional Mary Baldwin community that grows with them as they reach their first destination and mature into young professionals.

Team Membership

The team consists of a group of Board of Trustee members, members of the Executive Staff, and other key administrators, and has produced a considerable amount of work in a short period of time preparing for the July report. I would like to introduce and thank each of them:

- Wendy Foster, Board of Trustees Member
- Peter Gwaltney, Board of Trustees Member
- Andrea Cornett-Scott, Chief Diversity Officer
- Ernest Jeffries, Vice President of Student Engagement
- Terry Djuric, Commandant of Cadets/Special Advisor to the President
- Sarah Cochran, Assistant Vice President of Learning Experience
- Thy Nguyen, Executive Director of the McCree Center for Life Success

The Process

The work began at the start of July with a research exercise and four workshop meetings over the last two weeks. The team conducted research around the best practices as well as new approaches/trends surrounding educational experiences in the higher education space. This work ensured the team had a consistent background, common language, and shared understanding while also establishing a set of our own fundamental elements as we began to develop the strategy.

This memo regarding the core student experience consists of a MBU Journey map and a scaffolding of engaged and experiential learning at MBU. A third area of focus briefly mentioned at the end of the memo, an inventory of institutional services, was created and will be utilized to kick off the next stage of work. The question animating this work remains, what is the best engaged and experiential learning framework to ensure students succeed (are retained and graduate), put classroom knowledge into practice in real world experiences, develop power skills, and forge pathways to careers?

Our Guiding Principles/Key Values and Questions for the Board of Trustees

Our team along with the Academic Portfolio Creative Team have adopted a shared set of key values that will permeate through a brand new Mary Baldwin University.

Our key values are as follows:

- Community
- Collaboration
- Creativity
- Leadership
- Social Mobility

As a method to translate our key values into meaningful action, we suggest the following guiding principles:

- We must adopt a **learner-centered approach using high-impact practices** that place the student at the center of the learning process. This principle recognizes that students have diverse backgrounds, interests, and learning styles, and aims to engage and support them in meaningful ways.
- We must cultivate a **supportive learning environment**, it must be inclusive, respectful, and supportive, valuing diversity while promoting equity. This principle recognizes that **fostering positive relationships** among students and between students and staff and faculty ensures students' academic, personal, and emotional needs are met.

- We must adopt a mindset of **lifelong learning** that emphasizes the transferability of **competencies** that extend beyond disciplinary knowledge. In this principle, we encourage critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, adaptability, and other **power skills** that prepare students for future success.
- We must embrace **collaboration** and hone our communication abilities. In this principle, we encourage students to engage in productive dialogue, share perspectives, and learn from one another.
- We must embrace a model of true continuous improvement by seeking **feedback from students, colleagues, and external experts** (industry, government, non-profits, and the academy) while thoughtfully using **data and research** to inform our instructional practices, curriculum design, and institutional policies.

As we move forward with our work, these key values and guiding principles reinforce our commitment to our students and serve as a north star that can guide us in our work.

In forging ahead, this report reflects our initial efforts, while providing recommendations on the core experience as well as a guiding framework to bolster learning at the institution. While reading the sections below, please keep in mind the questions that Dr. Stein shared in his own summary memo, these strategic questions for the Board will help our team in our efforts in the coming months and will elevate our work.

1. How would we better or differently frame our work?
2. What big ideas are we missing to support student success and distinguish MBU?
3. How can you help us to support, consider, fund, advance, connect this work?
4. What would you want to make sure we know or do before finalizing the academic portfolio or student experience?
5. How does this essential work, focused on our undergraduate residential students, connect, and positively impact our two other major initiatives: online and health sciences?

Overview of Engaged and Experiential Learning

We recommend an approach of engaged and experiential learning to drive the next generation of our curriculum and our co-curricular experiences. Below is an overview that reflects our suggested approach for Mary Baldwin while also highlighting the elements that we believe resonate best with our students.

Engaged and experiential learning are approaches known as high-impact practices (HIPs). The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), describes these approaches as

educational activities or experiences — in the classroom, outside the classroom, and connected to the classroom — that have a significant positive effect on students' learning, personal developments, and career preparation. They are proven approaches that help students engage deeply with their education and grow both academically and personally. We have identified this as a guiding framework for learning that we believe will both significantly improve the learning experience at Mary Baldwin while also aligning well to our goal of ensuring students are prepared for their years ahead in the workforce.

To explain high-impact practices in simple terms, let's break it down:

These practices are carefully constructed educational activities or experiences — in other words not your everyday faculty lecture. HIPs are designed to be more engaging, interactive, and hands-on, resulting in greater learning. High impact practices:

- Achieve significant outcomes and greatly benefit students and their learning outcomes. Research has found that HIPs can increase all students' outcomes and often help those who have the least prepare action for the traditional classroom setting.
- Help students learn and grow. HIPs are focused on enhancing students' overall development. They go beyond just acquiring knowledge and aim to develop critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and personal growth.
- Provide critical opportunities for reflection. HIPs engage students in a continuous cycle of preparation, action, and reflection that enables students to take charge of their own learning while at the same time creating deeper a connection to the learning.
- Build community and encourage peer engagement. HIPs often develop strong peer mentoring and learning that foster greater enthusiasm and desire to engage and practice, often seeing greater and more thoughtful time-on-task from participants.

The [AAC&U website](#) provides more details and examples of these practices. You can explore the link to learn about specific examples such as internships, living learning communities, service, leadership, e-portfolios, study abroad and work away, and undergraduate research programs. **These experiences give students a chance to apply what they learn, gain real-world skills, and broaden their perspectives.**

George Kuh, one of the most prolific scholars of engaged learning provides an excellent short summary of high-impact practices and their outcomes. I encourage everyone to view this short video [found here](#).

Simply put by participating in high-impact practices, students can have a richer and more meaningful educational experience. **These practices have been proven to improve student engagement, retention rates, and learning outcomes while better preparing students for life after college.** And ultimately, they help students become better prepared for their future careers and lives. We believe this approach paired with the other proposed enhancements will ensure each student has a transformational experience while at Mary Baldwin.

The Core Experience and Engaged Learning

The core experience at MBU must have clear connections between academics, support networks, skill development, study, and work on and off campus, and the overall student experience. The core experience must then ensure students put classroom knowledge into practice through a range of carefully constructed co-curricular experiences. Emphasizing and growing necessary life skills in and outside of the classroom, will ensure students are prepared for their first destination and beyond. The charge from the Board of Trustees established the following outcomes for the core experience divided into two prongs.

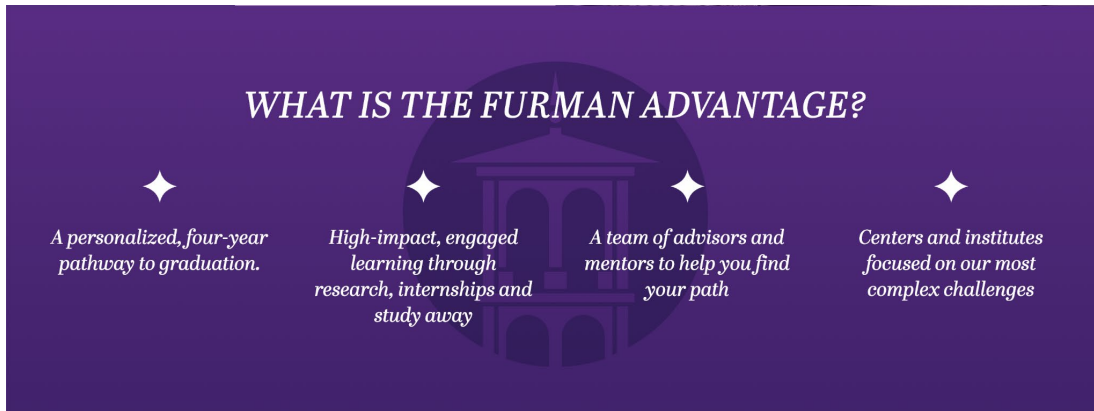
The MBU Journey

- Develop the life design journey for students that includes development of next generation skills needed for the future, including critical thinking, adaptability, communication, cultural understanding, decision making based on data, and collaboration.
- Imagine a McCree Center for Life Success that intentionally connects faculty and workforce in systematic ways that supports the student journey and participation in experiential opportunities.

Engaged and Experiential Learning Scaffolding

- Design a for-credit model for service/civic engagement, leadership, internships, and cooperative experiences.
- Grow both the capacity and capabilities of online experiential learning at MBU.
- Propose an integrative continuum of progressively complex experiential learning opportunities that begins with service/civic engagement in the first year and progresses to micro-internships designed to model the real world, culminating in one or more meaningful internships or cooperative learning experiences.

A good example of scaffolding experiential learning is the [Furman Advantage](#), which begs the question, after the creative teams complete their work, “How will we describe the Mary Baldwin Advantage?” Below are the four pillars of the Furman Advantage.



Furman University provides an excellent, short introductory video of the Furman Advantage [found here](#). I encourage everyone to take a look and imagine how we might tell our own story.

Furman University Advantage – a brief case study

As a case study, the Furman University Advantage provides a compelling educational experience that is worth understanding in greater detail as we begin to design our version of the Mary Baldwin Advantage. Furman University is a private liberal arts college located in Greenville, South Carolina. In their own words, “the university takes pride in providing students with a holistic and transformative education that prepares them for success in their personal and professional lives.”

The Furman Advantage can be understood through five aspects:

Rigorous Liberal Arts Education: A comprehensive liberal arts curriculum, exposing students to a broad range of disciplines (across humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, and more) and encouraging critical thinking, intellectual curiosity, and interdisciplinary learning, equipping students with a well-rounded education.

Engaged Learning: Active and engaged learning experiences both inside and outside the classroom, providing students opportunities to participate in research projects, internships, community service, study abroad programs, and other hands-on experiences, which enable students to apply their knowledge, gain real-world skills, and make a positive impact in their communities.

Small Class Sizes and Personal Attention: This intimate learning environment fosters close relationships, mentorship, and personalized attention, providing students opportunities to work closely with faculty members, receive individualized guidance, and engage in collaborative learning experiences.

Campus Community and Student Life: Known for its vibrant campus community, the university offers a wide range of extracurricular activities, clubs, and organizations that cater to diverse interests and passions and provide leadership opportunities, arts and cultural events, and

athletic competition in a close-knit community that fosters personal growth and social connections.

Career Development and Alumni Network: Robust career development support to help students explore career paths, develop professional skills, and connect with potential employers. The university has a strong alumni network that offers valuable networking opportunities, mentorship, and job placement assistance.

Finally, the Furman Advantage is built around what they call four bold ideas.

TO REFLECT ON OUR CALLING TO CULTIVATE WORLD CITIZENSHIP RESILIENT AND ADAPTABLE ASPIRATIONS AND RESULTS

To Reflect on Our Calling

Intentional acts of self-discovery punctuate our students' four years and lead them to reflect deeply on their strengths and interests. It's this kind of work that makes them comfortable with who they are and how they aspire to improve the world. And it is that emphasis on reflection that powers The Furman Advantage and drives the change, growth and understanding that our students experience in their four years at Furman.



TO REFLECT ON OUR CALLING TO CULTIVATE WORLD CITIZENSHIP RESILIENT AND ADAPTABLE ASPIRATIONS AND RESULTS

To cultivate world citizenship


Furman students' engaged learning experiences translates powerfully into the skills they will need in graduate school of the workforce. That means they graduate ready to navigate a multicultural, ever-changing community and career landscape, where critical thinking, collaboration and the embrace of differences are valued.



TO REFLECT ON OUR CALLING TO CULTIVATE WORLD CITIZENSHIP RESILIENT AND ADAPTABLE ASPIRATIONS AND RESULTS

Resilient and Adaptable

Comfortable outside their comfort zone, and thoughtful adapters to change. Furman students love a good challenge. But even better, they welcome a good failure. Their ability to bounce back stronger and wiser from a mistake is part of what makes them so successful in their careers and respected in their communities.



Aspirations and Results

The Furman Advantage: We know it works. This ground-breaking, measurable approach to teaching, learning and living combines classroom instruction with real-world experiences and self-discovery, to offer every student an unparalleled, individualized education. Employers recognize its value and benefit from our approach, because they know our students go beyond a college experience to engage in a personalized, integrated four-year pathway that prepares them for lives of purpose and impact.

Overall, the Furman University Advantage combines rigorous academics, engaged learning experiences, personal attention, a vibrant campus community, and strong career support. This unique combination is designed to empower students with the knowledge, skills, and experiences they need to excel in their chosen paths and lead meaningful lives.

From the highest level, our working group envisions a Mary Baldwin experience that nurtures student skill development through experiences while fostering a sense of belonging and inclusivity. At the terminus of our workshops, the team identified the following pillars of our own MBU Journey:

- A personalized journey to graduation and beyond.
- A series of connected student experiences in and outside of the classroom, as well as on and off campus.
- A constellation of staff, faculty, and students, who are prepared to support students throughout their journey.
- A scaffolded learning experience focused on career preparation.

The MBU Journey

The MBU Journey will be a comprehensive university experience designed to provide students with a transformative and holistic education. It aims to cultivate leaders who are actively engaged in their communities and equipped with power skills for their future careers.

Constellation of Mentors

The MBU Journey employs a unique approach by offering a constellation of mentors to each student. Each student is matched with a team of mentors from diverse backgrounds and fields of expertise. These mentors serve as guides, advisors, and role models, offering personalized support and guidance throughout the student's academic journey. For Mary Baldwin today, this builds on the work we started last year with the first-year advisors and introduces career design advisors for students starting Fall 2023, but in the future will include an even larger constellation.

Cohorts & LLCs

Students will be organized into small cohorts or living learning communities. These cohorts

foster a sense of belonging and community among students with shared interests and goals. Students within each cohort take several courses together, allowing for meaningful peer interactions, collaborative learning, and mutual support. **Additional information about living learning communities can be [found here](#), I will talk more about these during the presentation next week as we see this as a critical way to quickly create belonging and peer mentoring in our community and establishes a sense of place.**

Leadership

Leadership development is a central component of the MBU Journey. Students participate in various leadership workshops, seminars, and experiential activities aimed at honing their leadership skills. They learn about effective communication, decision-making, problem-solving, and ethical leadership. Additionally, they have opportunities to practice these skills by holding leadership positions within student organizations and actively contributing to campus initiatives.

Civic Engagement

The MBU Journey emphasizes the importance of civic engagement and community involvement. Students are encouraged to actively participate in volunteer work, community service projects, and social advocacy initiatives. Through these experiences, they will gain a deeper understanding of societal issues, develop empathy, and learn how to make positive contributions to their communities.

Student Employment

The MBU Journey leverages student employment as a valuable learning experience. With national models, such as Iowa GROW as our guide, we will offer a range of on-campus employment opportunities that align with students' interests and career goals and be overseen by trained supervisors. These jobs provide practical skills, professional development, and financial support, enabling students to apply their classroom learning in real-world contexts.

Study/Work Away

Each student will engage in study or work away experiences. Students will have the opportunity to participate in semester-long work projects or research opportunities in different locations, broadening their perspectives and enhancing their cultural competence. Additionally, can pursue exchanges with partner institutions or engage in immersive study abroad programs.

Internships

Internships play a vital role in the MBU Journey, providing students with practical, hands-on experiences in their respective fields. The University maintains partnerships with local, regional, and national businesses, organizations, and government agencies, facilitating internship placements that align with students' career aspirations. Through internships, students apply their knowledge, gain industry-specific skills, and build professional networks. Most organizations use internships to find future employees, thus internships provide students on-ramps to jobs after college.

Overall, the MBU Journey combines mentorship, cohorts, leadership development, civic engagement, student employment, study/work away experiences, and internships into a series of high-impact practices that ensures a highly engaged and experiential journey for each student at Mary Baldwin. By integrating and scaffolding these elements, the new approach aims to empower students to become effective leaders, socially responsible citizens, and successful professionals in their chosen fields.

As a student progresses through their journey, alumni and industry partners will play a role as mentors who provide wrap-around support for all students on and off campus. Opportunities will be offered virtually as well as in person and can take students to new places beyond our campus.

Core Skills and Competencies

The MBU Journey supports students to develop both technical skills needed for a specific job, as well as outfit students with the equally important power skills that are needed in all facets of life from the workforce, to civic and community to engagement, and to social settings.

Briefly, power skills, also known as soft skills or transferable skills, are a set of essential abilities that go beyond technical or subject-specific knowledge. They are valued in various professional and personal contexts and are often sought after by employers. Power skills are typically related to interpersonal communication, problem-solving, adaptability, and self-management. Here is a description of a set of power skills that are guiding our work on the MBU Journey:

1. Communication Skills
2. Critical Thinking
3. Collaboration and Teamwork
4. Adaptability and Flexibility
5. Time Management and Organization
6. Emotional Intelligence
7. Leadership and Influence
8. Cultural Awareness
9. Intercultural Communication
10. Global Perspective
11. Respect for Diversity
12. Ethical Decision-Making
13. Empathy and Cultural Sensitivity
14. Inclusion and Equity

These power skills are highly valuable in various settings, including the workplace, education, and personal relationships. Demonstrating that MBU students develop these skills will improve their career prospects and contribute to their success in different areas of life.