

Experiential Learning Working Group

Final Report

9.1.17

Preface: Hamilton College Mission

Hamilton College prepares students for lives of meaning, purpose, and active citizenship. Guided by the motto “Know Thyself,” the College emphasizes intellectual growth, flexibility, and collaboration in a residential academic community. Hamilton students learn to think independently, embrace difference, write and speak persuasively, and engage issues ethically and creatively. One of America’s first liberal arts colleges, Hamilton enables its students to effect positive change in the world.

Introduction:

Experiential Learning (EL) is an important mode of learning that takes many forms and supports a wide variety of goals directly related to the philosophy and mission of the College. It is an essential element of the engaged and transformative learning that we aspire to make the hallmark of every Hamilton student’s education.

We currently offer our students a variety of EL opportunities on campus, in the local community, nationally and globally, and indeed have an excellent base of practice to build on. However, reflection on our mission, our current practices, and the practices of other elite colleges and universities suggests that we could and should do far more, far more intentionally.

We believe that the College has a strategic imperative to develop and support experiential learning opportunities for our students more systematically and purposefully as an essential means to fulfilling our mission. EL can and should be a signature initiative for the College.

This will require resources aimed at supporting and strengthening existing programs, supporting the ongoing design and execution of new programs and opportunities for our students, and creating a sustainable and vibrant campus culture around EL.

Below we offer specific recommendations both for the types of experiences that we want to reinforce and expand and for the resources needed to do this. We also identify some remaining questions about how to do this successfully. The recommendations include developing a new office or center on campus, with substantial staffing and funding resources, and strengthening and expanding our off campus programs and offerings in specific directions. We also recommend careful reconsideration of the College’s calendar, credit system, teaching load, and advising system.

What is it?

Experiential learning is an alternate learning mode that complements and supplements traditional classroom learning. More specifically, we find the following summary useful: EL is characterized by the process of *Doing* → *Reflecting* → *Applying*

EL can take many forms: Applied Learning, Immersive Off-Campus Study, Immersion in a Language and/or Culture, Service Learning, Work & Career-Related Experiences including Internships, Community Engaged Learning, Technical Training, etc. “Applying” also takes different forms depending on the context: e.g., physical “making,” conceptual integration, cultural engagement, etc.

Further, these experiences can be academic or co-curricular and take place on or off campus, locally or globally. An extensive list of our current offerings is included at the end of the report.

Why do it?

EL achieves a vast array of learning objectives, many of which are a focus of a Hamilton education. For one, hands-on, applied, or immersive learning such as laboratory work, student research, or immersion in a culture or language are essential complements to traditional class work. They also offer an additional learning style for a diverse student body with different backgrounds and skills.

Many forms of EL help students interface with the “real world,” engage in career preparation, build networks, and develop self-confidence and life skills. Additionally, many (including service learning and study away) provide students opportunities for meaningful engagement with local communities and diverse populations, whether in the Mohawk Valley or in global cities such as Paris, Beijing, Geneva, or D.C., and promote our philosophy of global citizenship and positive social change. These programs also provide important opportunities for collaborative learning and for students to work closely and intensively with faculty and staff one-on-one and in small groups, yet another hallmark of the Hamilton experience.

Importantly: Many forms of EL provide students with opportunities to fail, reassess their ideas, and improve their thinking and actions iteratively:



Students need to act, explore, fail, and succeed in order to "*know thyself*s" and develop meaningful and satisfying lives.

Finally, EL is by its very nature, transformative! Whether traveling to Ecuador with a Biology class, engaging in service learning in Utica with Project Shine or as a COOP intern, studying abroad in Hamilton’s program in Madrid, or curating a Wellin photography exhibit in an interdisciplinary History and Art course, students find EL experiences among the most rewarding of their tenures at the College.

We have not been surprised to find broad support among both internal and external stakeholders (students, faculty, staff, alumni, parents, etc.) for EL as an integral component of the Hamilton education and experience. There appears to be widespread recognition of the ability of EL to take learning beyond theory, help students internalize, reflect on, and grow from their educational experiences, and accelerate the development of their emotional intelligence, interpersonal and professional maturity, resilience, and autonomy. There is also a sense that EL can and should serve as a catalyst to accelerate learning around core Hamilton educational goals of critical thinking, and oral and written communication, as well as global citizenship and positive social change.

It is worth noting that EL carries at least two other potential benefits to Hamilton students and the Hamilton community. First, given the widespread support for EL among alumni and parents, it provides a key mechanism for increased engagement and involvement of these members of the broader College community with the College. Second, widespread opportunities for faculty and staff led off-campus EL may aid in faculty and staff recruitment and retention.

Catching up and forging ahead -- Opportunity beckons:

Our committee has been genuinely impressed and somewhat surprised to learn about the many excellent home-grown experiential learning experiences that are currently offered to our students. EL exists extensively across the College, and there is a highly enthusiastic set of faculty and staff who have designed and implemented exciting and innovative initiatives. However, EL lacks consistent definition, coordination, leadership and essential support mechanisms at the College, and there is much more that we could and should be doing to offer a richer set of opportunities to our students more effectively and efficiently.

Existing EL efforts at Hamilton tend to be defined and implemented by a lead individual, a department, or campus group and their success too often depends on one or more individuals’ willingness to take on overloads. With no

campus-wide management structure and cross-campus integration, there is no larger sense that the college values such experiences. Additionally, the lack of a College-wide EL structure and cross-College coordination and navigation forces faculty, staff, and students to fend for themselves in creating and taking advantage of EL experiences. This results in huge outlays of energy by faculty, staff, and students, oftentimes to “recreate the wheel,” and activities that cannot be sustained or replicated. The ultimate result is considerable variation in student expectations, experiences, and outcomes.

We believe that Hamilton has an opportunity to develop, brand and own a leadership position in EL. Hamilton currently has a wealth of strong in-market EL models, including our Levitt, COOP, Wellin, LITS, ADK, and NY/DC programs, as well as our Madrid/Beijing/Paris and international partner programs. This and the strong interest and imagination among our faculty, staff and alums, provide us a strong foundation upon which to build. Even with this, Hamilton is playing catch-up to best-in-class examples of EL at both peer institutions and larger universities. Nevertheless, while excelling in an individual EL arena (e.g., global, or local community), these institutions lack the consistent college/university-wide philosophy and branding to mark EL as a broad cornerstone of the college experience.

What we recommend:

- I. **Hamilton Hands-On:** An institutional commitment to build a signature EL program with rich opportunities for all students to have multiple transformative EL experiences across the curriculum and the College, on campus, locally, nationally and globally. This would mean supporting and strengthening our current programs and offerings and substantively expanding our offerings of and funding for both academic and co-curricular EL opportunities, on and off campus, so that we provide a rich web of EL opportunities for all of our students with equal access for all students.

- II. **Office of Engaged Learning:** This is critical to making #1 work.
A singular administrative office responsible for development, implementation and coordination of EL at the College:
 - **Standards:** The office will design and ensure consistent implementation and assessment of EL within Hamilton’s education objectives.
 - **Support:** With multiple EL programs throughout the College, this office will be responsible for outreach, development and all executional support including all primary logistical details (e.g., housing, safety protocols, travel, entertainment, etc.) in order to help the faculty and staff build a rich web of offerings and a culture of EL across the curriculum and across the College.
 - **Synergy:** With multiple EL programs, this office will help identify opportunities for synergistic collaboration and conversation to further the EL experience.
 - **Funding:** The office will administer funding for program development and execution and student access. Access for all students is essential.

The office would report to the DoF. A diagram fleshing out a potential organizational structure is attached below. It is essential that this office function to promote, connect, and support EL initiatives across the College and not become a silo of independent activity.

III. Expanding and strengthening our on and off campus offerings:

- a. Expanding our on campus offerings.
 - Identify, fund, develop, and promote new meaningful on-campus EL experiences
 - Build and strengthen campus community awareness of on-campus EL opportunities and resources for all stakeholders (e.g., an electronic inventory of campus assets)
 - Consider greater use of ¼ and ½ credit EL courses and modules as well as co-curricular opportunities
- b. Build on our successful local Mohawk Valley programs.
- c. Strengthen and highlight the EL experience of our existing signature Hamilton-owned off campus programs in Paris, Madrid, Beijing, DC, NYC, ADK.

- d. Sustain and add to our high-profile off campus partnership programs: e.g., NECC, Boston; Fitz-Haber Institute, Berlin; Tsing Hua U., Taiwan; U. Oxford; Queensland U.
- e. Develop a rich offering of faculty-led off campus field trips and courses.
- f. Purposeful addition to our signature programs: starting with San Francisco (tech and start-up focused) or Boston (STEM focused).
 - Programs in these cities would be located at the geographic centers of key strategic industries and build on the best-in-class models established in DC, NYC, and ADK, which integrate Hamilton faculty led academic study with internships, culture, and life in these highly strategic domestic locations. As with the existing programs, they would necessarily have their own flavors due to the distinct geographies, industries, and academic resources of the cities and regions and would be rooted firmly in the liberal arts.
 - These programs would focus on key student and academic constituencies, but we recommend that they retain a multidisciplinary character.
 - Future additional programs might be located in London and Shanghai, but would be approached sequentially. Utica also presents an interesting opportunity to build a local community-based program that would draw on the ADK Program model.
 - A larger number of off-campus residential programs could go hand-in hand with, and indeed would at some point require, an expansion of the size of the student body.
- g. Develop a NYC Center that would allow us to take greater advantage of the College's geographic proximity to, and dense alumni network in, this great global city. It would serve as an intellectual hub for Hamilton students, faculty, and alumni by supporting academic and co-curricular activities across the curriculum and the student body. Supported activities could include short faculty-led student trips, academic and career development workshops, high-profile lectures and other prestigious Hamilton events, discussion groups, faculty and student research, and a wide variety of forms of alumni engagement.
 - The Center would also house and support the NYC Program.
 - The Center would provide additional short-term housing in the City to support some of its functions.
 - The College could beta-test running the NYC Program year round (adding a summer session). This could better serve students across the curriculum including its current core student constituency in Economics.
 - The Center and the Program would share additional facilities that the Program is currently lacking (e.g., staff resources, conference room, temporary housing for faculty development pre-semester).
 - The College could also consider a variety of scales and scopes for both the Center and the Program as well as extending either the Center model or the summer Program session to other cities/programs in the future based on the experience in NYC.

IV. **Logistical and policy issues to be solved / questions to be answered:**

- a. Creative use of the calendar and credit system: Can we build a robust EL program that provides transformative opportunities for all students with the current 2 semester calendar? A January, May or summer term could give us flexibility to provide a richer set of curricular and co-curricular opportunities, including more experimental options. It might also provide a cleaner means of assigning credit to students (e.g., a 32-plus model: 32 regular credits plus two May-semester activities) and teaching credit to faculty (e.g., a 2-2-plus teaching load model) for EL activities. Alternatively, it may be possible to work with the current calendar and still provide much of what we are considering above through additional $\frac{1}{4}$, $\frac{1}{2}$ and full credit and co-curricular offerings during regular semesters (including Spring breaks) or out of semester (January, Late Spring, Summer) but tied to regular semester courses. Changes to the weekly calendar could also be considered.
- b. Co-curricular requirement: in the absence of a short-term (e.g., Jan or May term) requirement, we could consider introducing a co-curricular requirement that, even if it was loosely binding for

most students, would signal our commitment to EL as an important component of every Hamilton student's education.

- c. Faculty and staff resources: We see clear ways to improve efficiency, but also recognize that to do what we propose above will take additional faculty and staff time. We will need to add bodies, but also set priorities in order to free up time and energy. For faculty, this might take the form of a restructured teaching and advising load, e.g., a 2-2-plus type model as noted above. Additionally, for faculty, institutional and departmental expectations and promotion and tenure guidelines would need to be aligned so that all faculty, including untenured junior faculty, understand the institution's commitment to EL and the role of participation in EL in promotion and tenure.
- d. Size of student body: see IIIf above.
- e. Hamilton Pathways: EL can't be successful at Hamilton without:
 - a robust set of navigational tools and advising resources to help each student create a unique, personalized pathway through her Hamilton Education. The advising piece should be built into an integrated model of advising at Hamilton.
 - effective means of supporting purposeful reflection and integration of experience and classroom learning by students as they build this path through their 4 years, including pre- and post-experience reflection. This could include an e-Portfolio with key prompts, writing assignment prior to graduation, advising prompts & advising notes, conversation groups led by peer advisors, staff or faculty, integration of experience into classroom assignments.
 - clear promotion to the outside world of EL as an integral part of the Hamilton experience

Engaged Learning At Hamilton

Campus	Local	National	Global	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Peer Tutors Lab Employment DHI Fellows LITS Instructional Design Wellin Museum Internships Mentored Research (e.g. Emerson, Taylor, Kirkland, Levitt, etc.) Other Qualified Campus Employment (Writers for C&D, EMT, etc.) Letterpress Schambach and Bristol Scholars Orientation Leaders In-course EL (Lit 154, Hist/Art 370) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Psychology Department Supervised Practicum Education Practicum COOP Project SHINE Levitt Refugee Project Outdoor Action Guides Career Center Internships Local Spanish Teaching Program Mentored Research (e.g. Emerson, Taylor, Kirkland, Levitt, etc.) Course Related Field Trips Tax Program Levitt Center (.25 credit) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NECC Boston DC Program NY Program ADK Program Living Learning Community R-U Research Labs Career Center Internships Archaeology Field School – Louisiana Course Related Field Trips DHI National Projects DHI CLASS Fellows Levitt Center Projects Econ Fed Challenge (Monetary Policy Course) Mentored Research (e.g. Emerson, Taylor, Kirkland, Levitt, etc.) Outdoor Leadership (Spring Break) (Winter Break) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hamilton in France Hamilton in Spain Hamilton in China Hamilton Approved Study Abroad Programs National Tsing Hua University (Taiwan) Nano Technology Research Fitz-Haber Institute Physics Research Kenya Turkana Basin Research – Geoscience Geoscience Field Study Program Slocum Narrows Archaeology Field School – British Columbia DHI International Projects Critical Language Scholars Course Related Field Trips 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Levitt Center International internships Career Center International Internships Emerson International Research Kirkland Funded Projects Library Nevis Archive Project Outdoor Leadership Spring Break (occasional) Faculty Led Course-Related Experience (non-credit, e.g., History of Mountaineering Nepal) Bristol Fellows (Post Bac) Fulbright (Post Bac) Social Innovation Fellows (Levitt – Post Bac) Watson (Post Bac)
<p><i>POSSIBLE NEW PROGRAMS</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lab School on Campus 	<p><i>POSSIBLE NEW PROGRAMS</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Utica Residential 	<p><i>POSSIBLE NEW PROGRAMS</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> New York Center Boston Program Silicon Valley Program Faculty Led Experiences ADK Research and Summer Opportunities 	<p><i>POSSIBLE NEW PROGRAMS</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Risk Managed international Internships Faculty-Led Intensive Courses Abroad: Criminal Justice (Sweden) (pilot) May-June Culture & Identity (Japan) (pilot) Spring Break Global University Partnered Research Projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> University of Glasgow Summer Research Program (tuition) Royal Holloway College of Veterinary Medicine Summer Research Program (Tuition) Global Exchanges/Research & Teaching Partnerships (NY, DC, ADK) Oxford Program

Office of Engaged Learning Organizational Chart

