

# Leading change in public higher education

A provost report series on trends and issues

## Helping UW Students Prepare for Life after Graduation: It Takes All of Us

January 2014

*“Our students face a complex, demanding world when they leave the UW. They need intellectually challenging majors, and they need broad skills to translate that knowledge into the workplace. We need to help them make that vital connection—between their learning here and the demands of careers and the opportunities of life. This is our goal—indeed, as a public university, it is our responsibility.”*

*Ana Mari Cauce, Professor of Psychology and American Ethnic Studies, Provost and Executive Vice President*



How can we help our students create meaningful lives and successful careers, to become leaders? How can we support their intellectual growth while also helping them get a job when they graduate? These questions are a major topic of current discussion at the University of Washington—and across the country. So far at the UW, most of these discussions have been focused within disciplines, departments, schools, and colleges. Now is the time to connect these disparate conversations and start a discussion that involves the entire UW community—one that responds to the national debates and connects the work already taking place to ensure our graduates are ready for a world of fast-paced change.

### The national debate: “Is college worth it?”

There is overwhelming evidence of the value of a college education. Today’s college graduates will earn, on average, two-thirds more than peers with no degree and are more likely to be employed. They are more engaged in civic life, more satisfied with their jobs, and experience better health outcomes. Communities also benefit from a college-educated workforce: the presence of graduates drives growth in average wages for a whole community.<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, the current national conversation on the value of college indicates that we in higher education are not communicating our contributions effectively. Articles, reports, and books with titles such as “Is College a Lousy Investment?”<sup>2</sup> and “Academically Adrift”<sup>3</sup> question the return on investment from a college education, whether graduates will be competitive after college, and whether students really learn anything useful during college.<sup>4-6</sup>

While we can accept or dispute individual claims in this debate—as well as their relevance to the UW—what we can’t ignore is that people who care about and have a stake in the UW are asking similar questions. Students and

## Russian History taught me to think

During a recent focus group, alumni shared the relevance of their Husky Experience to their lives, including how they gained invaluable skills and insights in unexpected contexts. For example, Dan Heu-Weller (History, Economics, B.A. '02; M.B.A., J.D. '08) described how work for a humanities course still benefits him in his role as president of Orca Bay Capital, a private investment company in Seattle. "In a Russian History course I read 10 books from 10 different authors about the same subject matter...and they were completely different," said Hue-Weller, an officer of the UW Alumni Association Board of Trustees. "What I learned was if I could find 10 completely different perspectives on a single period of history, maybe I ought to refresh my own perspective. Maybe I ought to ask somebody else their perspective and hit the same content from a different angle. I thought that was immensely helpful in learning how to think."



At right, Dan Heu-Weller. Photo by Filiz Efe

parents wonder whether graduates will be able to get jobs and pay off loans. Employers question whether colleges are graduating skilled employees ready to succeed and advance in the workplace. Politicians and business leaders are concerned about whether our state, region, or nation will remain competitive in a global economy.

Addressing these questions is, in part, an issue of communicating the value of a UW education to individuals and to the community. The Washington Futures Committee, a group of business and civic leaders, recently found that "Despite the UW's impact, too many stakeholders—such as business leaders, government officials, parents, students and taxpayers—have little awareness of or appreciation for the UW's work and its impact on their lives."<sup>2</sup>

But in a larger sense, addressing these questions means examining the UW Husky Student Experience to ensure our graduates meet the challenges of the 21st century. This requires that we ask ourselves some difficult questions:

- ▶ Are we doing the best we can to prepare UW students for the future?
- ▶ Which content, knowledge, skills, and experiences are most valuable? Should they be included in liberal learning or in the major, in or out of class?
- ▶ How do we best engage all students to integrate their learning in ways that prepare them for life after graduation—a life in which they can participate as informed citizens, contribute to their communities, and pursue professional paths well-suited to their talents?

## An education is a major...and more

Responses both in and out of the academy<sup>8,9</sup> to the national debate and concerns over graduate readiness for the "real world" tend to focus on one of three recommendations: that colleges prioritize job preparation over liberal learning, that we increase the number of majors in fields perceived to have the most direct path to employment, or that we add more testing to ensure outcomes and accountability. An alternative approach is more holistic than any one of these alone and balances current concerns with educational mission and values.

Within the UW community, we are working to craft this more holistic approach, one that prepares graduates for careers, to be sure, but is also about much more than professional success. One UW unit dedicated to this approach is [C21: The Center for 21st Century](#)

[Liberal Learning](#) in the UW Seattle College of Arts and Sciences. In describing the C21 mission, Kevin Mihata, A&S Dean of Education, says, "We need to produce self-directed thinkers who can connect and synthesize what they have learned, communicate those insights with clarity, and connect them intentionally to the world outside the classroom."

To do so involves engaging the whole student in the deep learning within a major—and more, with a thoughtful collection of knowledge and experiences that crosses boundaries and can be applied in many areas of life. Providing students with "more" includes fostering what the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) calls "essential learning outcomes," broad skills and knowledge essential to success in any discipline and in a variety of settings

*"What will determine the long-term success of our students is not their first job; rather, it will be their capacity to adapt to a rapidly and constantly changing economic and social landscape, to learn new skills, to analyze and evaluate information in new ways, and to communicate effectively in a diverse and dynamic society."*

*Bob Stacey, Dean, Professor of History, Arts and Sciences, UW Seattle*

before and after graduation<sup>10</sup>. In a recent AAC&U survey, for example, 93% of employers ranked a job candidate's ability to demonstrate essential skills, such as the ability "to think critically, communicate clearly, and solve complex problems," as of primary importance in their hiring decisions.<sup>11</sup>

The "more" also includes providing students with opportunities for "high-impact experiences," learning experiences woven throughout the curriculum that take place either inside or outside a classroom or major, and have proven benefits. George Kuh, noted scholar of college student engagement and campus cultures, has shown that participation in high-impact experiences helps students find their path, build key peer and mentoring relationships, and results in higher GPAs across the board, with even greater gains seen among members of underrepresented minorities.<sup>12</sup>

A UW education, therefore, should include both deep learning in a field that interests and challenges students, and a broad set of skills, insights, and knowledge gained both in and out of class that will prepare graduates to solve genuine workplace, life, and community problems.

## It takes a whole campus to support student success

So exactly how do we provide an education that includes both deep learning in a discipline and a broad set of essential skills? All of us—faculty, staff, graduate assistants, and students—can, and should, play a crucial role in this process. We can work to ensure UW students get the most out of their education, that they engage and succeed while at the UW—not just in one of our classes, clubs, or programs—but across all learning experiences in ways that prepare them to thrive after graduation. We need to help them grow in confidence, integrate their learning, and refine their life goals and future directions.

Students need to know how to access and engage with the many university opportunities available to learn both in and out of class. The sheer number of choices can both thrill and overwhelm. We can help guide students as they navigate their experience, by helping them discover who they are, build relationships, and make choices about their life trajectory.

We can help students discover first-hand how theory translates into practice and how to apply problem-solving in realistic settings such as building an experimental car or helping a child learn to read. We can work to provide high-impact experiences for more students that are meaningful both personally and academically, like those featured on the next two pages.

*"Good teaching has loft. It extends beyond the classroom or the major. Even an instructor of a deeply theoretical or highly technical course can invite students to see connections between academic and professional work."*

*Beth Kalikoff, Director, Center for Teaching & Learning, UW Seattle; Associate Professor, Interdisciplinary Arts & Sciences, UW Tacoma*

We can also do more to encourage students to reflect on their learning and to practice articulating the value of their education. UW graduates need to know what they know—to have a sense not just of what they've learned in one class, project, or internship, but how these experiences build on and enrich each other.

Many UW units already are working toward these goals, while some are just starting to experiment. We have an opportunity to combine our forces, to broaden and connect campus conversations on these critical issues, to link previously separate initiatives, and to develop a common approach.

### What are "Essential Learning Outcomes"?

*Essential learning outcomes<sup>10</sup> listed by the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) can be summarized as:*

- ▶ *Teamwork*
- ▶ *Communication*
- ▶ *Critical thinking*
- ▶ *Intercultural understanding*
- ▶ *Information literacy*
- ▶ *Lifelong learning*
- ▶ *Civic engagement*
- ▶ *Ethical reasoning*

*This year the UW will develop our own, unique learning outcomes for Husky graduates based on input from faculty, staff, students, alums, and community members. To participate, email [edtrends@uw.edu](mailto:edtrends@uw.edu).*

### What are "High-impact Experiences"?

*High-impact experiences<sup>12</sup> ask students to devote considerable time and effort to purposeful learning tasks. Examples include:*

- ▶ *Collaborative projects*
- ▶ *Undergraduate research*
- ▶ *Service learning*
- ▶ *Critical explorations of intercultural differences*
- ▶ *Internships*
- ▶ *Learning communities*
- ▶ *Bridges in and out of the college experience, such as first-year seminars and senior capstones*



## We're well underway

A great starting place is to learn from what we're already doing to encourage the student behaviors and provide the institutional conditions that promote student engagement. Here are a few examples of initiatives, curricular innovations, faculty-led efforts, and programs working towards those goals. We will feature more in future reports—and there may still be more of which we are not yet aware. Share your examples at [edtrends@uw.edu](mailto:edtrends@uw.edu).

### Initiatives

A number of new initiatives across all three campuses focus on increasing student engagement and providing access to high-impact learning experiences.

- ▶ The [Husky Leadership Initiative](#) at UW Seattle is preparing students to be socially responsible change agents and effective community leaders.
- ▶ The [C21: The Center for 21st Century Liberal Learning](#) effort at UW Seattle's College of Arts & Sciences is rethinking liberal learning to provide students with 21st-century skills.
- ▶ [Institution-to-Institution Internships](#) at UW Tacoma is an innovative program that offers access to paid, relevant workplace learning experiences in key regional agencies and organizations.
- ▶ [Community-Based Learning and Research](#) at UW Bothell engages students and community members in problem-solving for more just, vibrant communities.

### Curricular innovations

Curricular innovations are combining disciplinary learning with a focus on broadly applicable skills, and integrating reflection that provides students with practice in connecting and articulating their learning experiences.

- ▶ [E-portfolios](#) allow students in UW Bothell's Interdisciplinary Arts & Sciences to reflect on and show the value of their learning, in and out of class and across all courses and years.
- ▶ A capstone project in UW Seattle's Geography department is bringing together faculty to align learning goals and outcomes in the major, and to help students understand and articulate their progress as learners. The department also offers tips on [How to Thrive in Geography](#) and [After Graduation](#).
- ▶ The new [diversity requirement](#) focuses on diversity at local, regional, and global scales. It helps students develop an understanding of the complexities of living in increasingly diverse and interconnected societies.
- ▶ All seniors in the Foster School of Business participate in a strategy development competition in a capstone course (MGMT 430), applying problem-solving, teamwork, and communication skills to strategically analyze a current problem for a Puget Sound company. Local companies get solutions to challenging issues and students gain experience applying theory to real-world issues.

## High-impact experience: Agriculture and social justice in Costa Rica

UW Tacoma is creating more equal access to high-impact experiences, such as studying abroad, through programs such as [Expedition Fellows](#), which provides scholarships for international and intercultural study. John "Buck" Banks, Professor of Environmental Science, Interdisciplinary Arts & Sciences, UW Tacoma, accompanied the first cohort of Fellows to Costa Rica during the 2013 spring break. "The students had a chance to talk with coffee and cacao farmers, scramble around plantations, and explore the sustainability efforts undertaken by local coffee roasters. Upon returning to the Pacific Northwest, students spent several days learning about the other end of the supply chain, meeting with local importers, and discussing sustainability issues with Northwest farmers," said Banks. "This kind of first-hand exposure to global and local environmental issues encourages students at an early stage of their careers to think broadly not only about their choice of major but also the interdisciplinary approaches they might employ to tackle complex real-world problems."



Above, John "Buck" Banks.  
Photo by Lisa Hannon.



Above, students at a coffee plantation.  
Photo by Buck Banks.



*“I ask students engaged in service learning in SOC 270 to identify a significant moment in the field for them that was sort of an ‘aha’ moment. Was it something that really fit and reinforced a theoretical concept or something that we’ve studied in class? The moment could have had a personal impact on their lives, or on what they want to be or do in their lives.”*

Alexis Harris, Associate Professor, Sociology, UW Seattle

### Faculty-led efforts

Faculty are working with students to connect course content with life outside the classroom.

- ▶ Alexis Harris, Associate Professor in Sociology, includes a service learning option in her large, 200-level, “Social Problems” course and has students reflect on their experience.
- ▶ Jim Pfaendtner, Assistant Professor in Chemical Engineering, provides juniors and seniors in his chemical engineering courses with opportunities to practice career and job-hunting skills.



*“I spend a lot of time talking to students about being successful, about interviews, things like salary negotiations—I try to plant a lot of seeds very early, because our students are doing, for the first time, things that many of them are not comfortable doing.... It’s amazing how little prepared they are to go to a career fair, enthusiastically approach a recruiter, and make an impact.”*

Jim Pfaendtner, Assistant Professor, Chemical Engineering, UW Seattle

### Resources for students

UW Seattle’s [Career Center](#), UW Tacoma’s [Career Development & Education](#) team, and UW Bothell’s [Career Center](#) offer valuable information and learning opportunities for students planning their educational and professional paths.

- ▶ Workshops and one-on-one career counseling, many that focus on identifying dependable strengths
- ▶ Hundreds of jobs and internships listed at [Husky-Jobs](#)
- ▶ A self-guided [Career Success Certificate](#) and a three-credit course [Navigating Career Options](#) (GEN ST 350D, offered at UW Seattle)
- ▶ Websites offering tips on [successful interviews](#), [making the most of your major](#), [applying to graduate school](#), and [using LinkedIn effectively](#)

### There’s more to be done

Despite all of the work underway, there’s more to be done to integrate and increase efforts that prepare students for their futures—and more to understand about the changing landscape for our graduates before we do it.

## High-impact experience: Tutoring in local schools

Thousands of UW students have learned about their strengths and refined their academic and career plans while serving the community through the [Pipeline Project](#), an outreach program to K-12 schools in Washington State housed in UW Seattle’s Center for Experiential Learning and Diversity. Students serve by tutoring in Seattle schools, as well as through the [Alternative Spring Break](#) program that sends teams to spend a week at rural and tribal schools throughout Washington State. In seminars offered by the Pipeline Project, tutors meet regularly to discuss required reading, their own experiences, and the nuts-and-bolts issues of working with children. This training and support helps Pipeline volunteers maximize their own learning, and their ability to help the young students they serve.

At right, UW student Tanner Smith reads with a student at Concord Elementary in Seattle during the 2012-2013 academic year. Photo by Marcus Ramirez





*“Our students really do need our help. A strong major is fundamental and critical, but it’s not enough. Our students need to be able to articulate what they know and what they can do in the workplace. That’s what employers demand. This isn’t about turning UW into a job mill; instead, it’s about reinforcing the value of a college education and helping our students articulate the value of their UW education.”*

*Jerry Baldasty, Senior Vice Provost for Academic and Student Affairs; Professor, Department of Communication*

As part of a new effort centered on improving the Husky Student Experience, led by Senior Vice Provost for Academic and Student Affairs Jerry Baldasty, we will listen and learn to understand exactly what’s needed. We will talk with graduates; mine survey data for insights; and engage faculty, staff, graduate assistants, students, and alumni in the conversation.

We are eager to learn about, highlight, and celebrate what individuals and groups across all three campuses are already doing, as well as to learn from the literature and the creative minds of experts further afield. Based on what we find, the Husky Student Experience effort will gather best practices, develop resources for faculty and students, pilot classroom innovations, and help connect those who are already working on these issues. We will share with you what we learn, as we did last year in our reports on teaching with technology, including [Putting Learning First: How Students Learn and How Technology Can Help](#). Then together we can help our students learn how to get the most out of their UW education and how their degree will prepare them for an exciting future.

## Opportunities to join the conversation

Many University of Washington faculty and staff members have been thinking creatively about this subject, working on innovative practices in the classroom and beyond, and engaging students in integrating and articulating what they’ve learned. Our goal this year is to broaden and connect these conversations on our three campuses, and to provide common reference points to inform our plans for the future. We welcome your participation, feedback, and suggestions.

Ways to get involved:

- ▶ Email [edtrends@uw.edu](mailto:edtrends@uw.edu).
- ▶ Attend an in-person teaching-focused discussion:
  - [Teaching Forums at UW Tacoma on first Thursdays](#): “Service Learning,” February 6; past forums include “Helping Students Prepare for Life after Graduation.” To join the conversation, post comments on the Forum [blog](#).
  - Roundtable at UW Bothell: “[Transformative Learning: A Roundtable on High-Impact Practices at UW Bothell](#),” February 20, 10:30 a.m. to 12 p.m.
  - Round Table over Lunch at UW Seattle: “[Helping Students Prepare for Life After Graduation](#),” February 26, 12:30 – 1:30 p.m. Please [register](#).
  - [Meet, Greet, Teach](#) events on interdisciplinary teaching at UW Seattle College of the Environment: Winter quarter event on essential learning outcomes soon to be scheduled.
- ▶ Consult with staff at the career centers on all three campuses (UW Seattle’s [Career Center](#), UW Tacoma’s [Career Development & Education](#), and UW Bothell’s [Career Center](#)) on ways to help students explore essential learning outcomes or transferable strengths in class.
- ▶ Join a [Faculty and Professional Learning Community](#) through the Center for Teaching and Learning at UW Seattle, which also hosts resources on topics such as [Engaging Students in Learning](#).



*Above, students at the Foster School of Business gain experience not only working in teams, but also in understanding how to construct a successful team dynamic. Above, Evening MBA students outside UW Seattle’s Dempsey Hall. Photo by Paul Gibson*

## References

1. Baum, Sandy, Charles Kurose, and Jennifer Ma. *How College Shapes Lives: Understanding the Issues*. Trends in Higher Education Series. New York, New York: The College Board, October 2013. <http://trends.collegeboard.org/sites/default/files/education-pays-2013-how-college-shapes-lives-report.pdf>.
2. McArdle, Megan. "Megan McArdle on the Coming Burst of the College Bubble," *Newsweek*, 9 September 2012. <http://mag.newsweek.com/2012/09/09/megan-mcardle-on-the-coming-burst-of-the-college-bubble.html>.
3. Arum, Richard and Josipa Roksa. *Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011.
4. Williams, Alex. "Saying No to College," *New York Times*, 30 November 2012. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/02/fashion/saying-no-to-college.html>.
5. Owen, Stephanie, and Isabel Sawhill. *Should Everyone Go To College?* (CCF Brief #50). Washington, DC: Center on Children and Families at Brookings, Brookings Institution, May 2013. <http://www.brookings.edu/research/papers/2013/05/08-should-everyone-go-to-college-owen-sawhill>.
6. *Economist*. "Youth Unemployment: Generation Jobless," 27 April 2013. <http://www.economist.com/news/international/21576657-around-world-almost-300m-15-24-year-olds-are-not-working-what-has-caused>.
7. Washington Futures Committee. *Washington Futures: A 21st century model for our state's future prosperity. 2013 Report*, August 2013. <http://www.washington.edu/president/futures/>.
8. Jaschik, Scott. "Jobs Mismatch," *Inside Higher Education*, 19 July 2013. <http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2013/07/19/do-faculty-members-share-students-and-parents-focus-jobs>.
9. U.S. Department of Commerce in consultation with the National Economic Council. *The Competitiveness and Innovative Capacity of the United States*, January 2012. [http://www.commerce.gov/sites/default/files/documents/2012/january/competes\\_010511\\_0.pdf](http://www.commerce.gov/sites/default/files/documents/2012/january/competes_010511_0.pdf).
10. Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP). "Essential Learning Outcomes." Washington, DC: American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), accessed 6 January, 2014. <http://www.aacu.org/leap/vision.cfm>.
11. Hart Research Associates. *It Takes More than a Major: Employer Priorities for College Learning and Student Success. An Online Survey Among Employers Conducted on Behalf of the Association of American Colleges and Universities*. Washington, DC: American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), 10 April 2013. [http://www.aacu.org/leap/documents/2013\\_EmployerSurvey.pdf](http://www.aacu.org/leap/documents/2013_EmployerSurvey.pdf).
12. Kuh, George D. *High-Impact Educational Practices: What They Are, Who Has Access to Them, and Why They Matter*. Washington, DC: American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), 2008. [http://www.neasc.org/downloads/aacu\\_high\\_impact\\_2008\\_final.pdf](http://www.neasc.org/downloads/aacu_high_impact_2008_final.pdf).

## Acknowledgements

Many thanks to the UW faculty, students, and staff who contributed their stories, and to the UW subject matter experts who lent their advice to this report series, including Ed Mirecki, John Burkhardt, and Lisa Hoffman of UW Tacoma; and Bruce Burgett, Emily Christian, and Paul Markham of UW Bothell. Contributors and advisors from UW Seattle include Kevin Mihata and Candice Douglass of the College of Arts and Sciences; Beth Kalikoff of the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL); Elizabeth Lowry and Katy DeRosier of the Graduate School; Susan Terry, Briana Randall, Glenna Chang, Amanda Lobsinger, and Leigh Tucker of Student Life; Michaelann Jundt, Rachel Vaughn, Janice DeCosmo, Jennifer Harris, Francesca Lo, Grant Kollet, Christine Stickler, Anne Browning, and Kirsten Atik of Undergraduate Academic Affairs (UAA); Val Espania, Gabriel Gallardo, Kristian Wiles, and Erin Rowley of the Office of Minority Affairs and Diversity (OMA&D); Tomitha Blake and Alicia Palacio, Academic & Student Affairs; and Paul Rucker and colleagues of the UW Alumni Association.

### Series Editors

Gerald J. Baldasty, Senior Vice Provost for Academic and Student Affairs, Office of the Provost; Professor, Department of Communication

Marisa Nickle, Project Manager, Office of the Provost

### Research, Writing, and Editing

Elizabeth Barrett, Research Assistant, Office of the Provost

Kris Freeman, Public Information Specialist, Office of the Provost

Brigid Nulty, Project Operations Specialist, Office of the Provost

### Design

Filiz Efe, Multimedia Producer, Office of the Provost

Kris Freeman, Public Information Specialist, Office of the Provost

### Photography

Foster School of Business

Interdisciplinary Arts & Sciences, UW Tacoma

Office of Ceremonies

Office of Minority Affairs and Diversity

University Marketing

Office of the Provost

Pipeline Project, Center for Experiential Learning and Diversity

