Conception of High Impact Engaged Learning and its Importance
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This document draws from the Synthesis Report of the Provost Task Teams on Engaged Learning and Digital Instruction.

It has evolved with input from a number of faculty, staff and students at the U-M.

Higher education had been broadly conceived in the 20th century to provide students with the ability to write, to think critically, and to reason quantitatively, with these skills contextualized within a body of disciplinary knowledge. However, for students graduating into the 21st century a number of the U-M’s internal and external stakeholders have defined equally important capabilities or educational outcomes for students’ intellectual, professional, and personal development, including:

1. Creativity – students must develop an understanding of creative processes and understand their own capacity to create new works and ideas. They must understand that creativity is not a rare gift to the few, but a fundamental human trait that can be developed and expanded.
2. Intercultural intelligence – our learners must understand the role of values and culture in driving decisions, and they must develop flexibility in working with others having different values.
3. Social/civic responsibility and ethical reasoning – students should develop an understanding of the human, social and environmental impacts of actions, and develop the ethical reasoning tools to make sustainable and responsible decisions and they must develop their ability to hold and reason across the perspectives of multiple stakeholders.
4. Communication, collaboration and teamwork – students must have the ability to communicate with many audiences and to utilize varied formats and styles that will most effectively convey their messages. They must appreciate and leverage diverse contributions to a task, and know how to cooperate with others towards common purposes.
5. Self-agency, the ability to innovate and to understand and manage risks – students must know how to observe the opportunities and capacities of human communities, understand where new or existing ideas or systems could bring value within those communities, and be able to act effectively in order to drive sustained and positive change to provide that value. This is sometimes called the entrepreneurial mindset.

A key characteristic of these capabilities is that they must be practiced to truly develop. Engaged learning at the U-M is conceived as a set of educational practices that provide students with these opportunities for practice by addressing unexpected, unscripted challenges in imperfect, authentic settings where stakeholders (including the students themselves) are significantly invested in the outcome.

There are many examples of such experiences at the U-M, along a spectrum of engagement ranging from direct hands-on use of our museum collections in the teaching of the ancient world, to undergraduate research, to education abroad experiences, to community-based service learning programs. These High Impact Engaged Learning experiences allow
students to engage with external communities and stakeholders whose interest in the work gives it deep meaning to the students. Such experiences include:

- **Discovery based research experiences**, including both UROP, SURE, and other experiences that engage students in the authentic process of discovery both with teams of researchers and in more solitary work. This work is creative, promotes critique and communication, and requires risk-taking and resilience.

- **Global experiences** place students in an unfamiliar environment, outside their comfort zone. These experiences challenge unexamined cultural assumptions, cultivate a new understanding of a participant’s own culture from a different perspective, widen the participant’s world-view to help them see new opportunities for action, and challenge and test their resilience and ability to communicate. These experiences could be for credit or co-curricular, and include summer experiences abroad as well as academic year engagements.

- **Civic Engagement** opportunities put students in an unfamiliar environment, outside their comfort zone, challenge their unexamined cultural assumptions and social norms, and challenge and test students’ resilience and communication abilities. These experiences are driven by accountability to and respect for an external stakeholder, and require that students act to create change. Examples include Semester in Detroit and Project Community.

- **Client driven projects** are fundamentally opportunities to develop creative process. Such projects are driven by the demands of an external stakeholder and require action and concrete output from the student to address the needs of that stakeholder. Examples of these include multidisciplinary design projects, supervised internships, and entrepreneurial activity such as Tech Arb start ups.

- **Entrepreneurship** is founded on understanding the needs of a group of “customers” or stakeholders. Successful entrepreneurship requires understanding that community of stakeholders, their values and their opportunities.

- **Creative Work and Performance** requires students to develop and implement an idea, and present it for the judgment of a critical audience. These experiences can develop creativity and self-agency, obviously, but also develop others of the learning objectives above. For example, they can require students to take an intercultural perspective to understand the reactions of different audiences.

Effectively, students need to understand the context of an increasingly diverse global society and their roles within it. However, while these learning goals are laudable, we recognize that they are difficult to assess (especially quantitatively), and that the capabilities they create within students must sometimes gestate for considerable periods of time until other life experiences allow the benefit to accrue. Given these factors, it is also useful to define engaged learning in terms of pedagogical characteristics that are known (or believed) to help students develop these capabilities.

*This leads to a definition of engaged learning based on a set of pedagogical characteristics both within and outside the classroom:*

- Engaged learning makes teaching a shared, social experience through exchanges within learning communities involving students, faculty, staff, and external constituents - all in the roles of both teacher and learner.*
• Engaged learning is understood as cumulative, iterative, integrative and often retrospective.
• Engaged learning connects critical thinking to authentic interactions. Engaged learning tasks are challenging, complex and require students to stretch their research, social, and thinking skills to address them. Student learning tasks are often closely and clearly related to the problems and challenges of the global society in which the students currently live and will experience in the future.
• Teachers play the role of facilitator, fostering student learning by assigning authentic tasks, challenging assumptions, providing critical feedback and encouraging independent inquiry. Students act as motivated explorers and are expected to discover new knowledge, concepts, and connections. They take risks to move toward deeper understanding and resolution of challenges and they are expected to observe and refine their own understanding and actions based on the feedback they receive.
• Students are engaged in constructing their own knowledge and assume considerable responsibility for their own learning. They are active participants in the creation of the learning experiences and in their own assessment.
• Students have agency and choice in their learning experiences and select them based on a long-term conception of their own goals for intellectual, professional and personal growth. This selection includes intentionality in both their curricular and co-curricular elections, based on a framework of learning and developmental goals (such as the learning outcomes articulated above).
• Groups and teams are used as appropriate, including participants with a range of disciplines and skill sets, as well as external stakeholders who are invested in the output of the group.

This kind of engaged learning is important to allow students to dive deeper and to create more permanent learning of effective habits of thought and action, as opposed to passively receiving content to be repeated later.

Engaged learning aligns strongly with our students’ reasonable interest in their own future success. We should embrace our students’ desire to have a fulfilling future that supports both personal success and positive social impact.