

Experiential Learning at Athens State University Experience | Success Initiative Comprehensive Internal QEP Report

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Introduction and Purpose

At Athens State University, Experiential Learning is defined as a process through which students develop knowledge, skills, and values by applying theory and academic content to real-world experiences within the classroom, community, or workplace. Experiential Learning encompasses workplace learning, undergraduate research, hands-on learning, community-based learning, and learning through expeditions.

This focus was formalized through the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), Experience | Success initiative. The Experience | Success initiative was designed to strengthen student learning, engagement, and career readiness by embedding experiential learning opportunities across academic programs and co-curricular activities.

This internal report consolidates original QEP design, multi-year assessment results (FA21–FA25), faculty direct assessment, student qualitative evidence, institutional implementation, and faculty lived experiences into a single, detailed, cohesive document intended for institutional learning, continuous improvement, and to determine the future of Experiential Learning at Athens State University.

QEP Director: Activities, Leadership, and Institutional Impact (2021–Present)

Since 2021, the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) Director has provided sustained leadership in the development, implementation, assessment, and continuous improvement of experiential learning at Athens State University. This work has advanced institutional understanding of experiential learning, strengthened faculty and staff capacity, enhanced assessment practices, and positioned the university as an engaged contributor to national experiential education initiatives.

A foundational element of this leadership has been the establishment of experiential learning as a shared institutional practice with consistent language, expectations, and outcomes across academic and co-curricular contexts. Through campus-wide conversations and collaboration with academic and administrative stakeholders, experiential learning has been intentionally aligned with institutional priorities and accreditation expectations. In support of this work, the QEP Director proposed and manages the QEP program budget, ensuring responsible stewardship of resources while strategically investing in faculty development, student opportunities, and program sustainability. The Director along with an institutional implementation leadership team, also led Quality Enhancement Plan-related reaffirmation efforts with SACSCOC, supporting institutional compliance and demonstrating the maturity and impact envisioned by the Experience | Success initiative.

Faculty engagement and capacity building have remained central to implementation. The QEP Director established and led the Athens State University Faculty Fellowship Program in experiential learning, organized a first-year “Share and Plan” Experiential Learning Series, and coordinated faculty participation in national and regional professional development opportunities. Athens State faculty and staff participated annually in the Experiential Learning Leadership Institute between 2022 and 2025 with engagement increasing over time to include multiple faculty presenters and, most recently, a student presenter, reflecting the growing visibility and

integration of experiential learning across the institution. In addition, the Director coordinated faculty attendance at the Society for Experiential Education Annual Conference from 2021 through 2024 and encouraged participation in the Experiential Education Academy, resulting in nine academy graduates and more than twenty faculty and staff completing academy workshops. Both virtual and on-campus academy workshops were hosted at Athens State to broaden access and build institutional expertise.

Assessment, data collection, and continuous improvement have been integral to the Experience | Success initiative. The QEP Director and Institutional Research developed and implemented systems to track faculty participation in experiential learning activities and created an institutional experiential learning student survey used across classroom-based and co-curricular experiences. These systems support data-informed decision making and provide a foundation for analysis of student learning outcomes. To further strengthen evaluation and accountability, the Provost and QEP Director established an Experiential Learning Task Force to review internal grant applications and developed institutional experiential learning grants beginning in Fall 2024 to support faculty-led experiential learning activities aligned with QEP goals.

Student engagement has expanded through both curricular and co-curricular experiential opportunities. Notably, the QEP supported a student expedition experience in partnership with the Bahamas Agriculture and Marine Science Institute (BAMSI). This initiative represented a strategic expansion of experiential learning beyond the classroom and integrates global engagement, applied learning, and structured reflection. The initiative for global expansion was designed with the guidance of Dr. Pittman who has been leading student expeditions state side through Biology courses that visit the Smoky Mountains and Dauphin Island Sea Labs. The Director also supported experiential learning recognition through the establishment of graduation cords for experiential learning participants, Bonner Leaders, and Honors students, reinforcing the institutional value placed on engaged learning.

Experiential learning has also been intentionally integrated into institutional outreach, recruitment, and communication efforts. The QEP Director along with key faculty and staff members have represented experiential learning at major university events such as Transfer Day, Preview Day, and Counselor/Advisor Breakfasts, and supported recruitment and interview processes for the Bonner Leader Program, including assistance with program establishment. In collaboration with Marketing, the Director oversaw the development of experiential learning branding and communication, including design of the QEP website (www.athens.edu/qep), creation of a university-wide experiential learning logo, and development of associated marketing materials. Digital badges for faculty, staff, and students are managed through this work, providing formal recognition of engagement and leadership in experiential learning initiatives.

Beyond campus-based efforts, the QEP Director represents Athens State University in national experiential learning networks and leadership roles. This includes participation in the Society for Experiential Education (SEE) Campus Leaders Network, service on the SEE Research and Scholarship Committee, and co-chairing the SEE Professional Development Committee beginning in 2024. The Director's contributions to the field have been recognized through selection as a 2022–2024 SEE Faculty Fellow and receipt of the Society for Experiential

Education Rising Leader Award. Scholarly and professional contributions disseminated from faculty and staff collaborations include publications in *Experiential Learning in Teaching in Higher Education* and *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, as well as presentations at the 2023 and 2024 SEE Annual Conferences and multiple regional conferences highlighting experiential learning initiatives at Athens State University.

Collectively, these efforts have resulted in the integration of experiential learning as a core and sustained component of the Athens State University educational experience. Institutional capacity has been strengthened through intentional planning, faculty development, and assessment infrastructure, enabling expanded access to high-impact experiential learning opportunities for students. As a result, experiential learning is now embedded across academic and co-curricular contexts and supported by systems that promote quality, accountability, and continuous improvement. Together, these outcomes position Athens State University as an active and credible contributor within the broader experiential education community and provide a foundation for the evidence and analysis presented in the sections that follow.

Original QEP Outcomes and Assessment Framework

The Experience | Success initiative established five core outcomes guiding implementation and assessment:

Outcome 1: Establish institutional infrastructure to connect faculty with experiential opportunities.

Outcome 2: Ensure at least 90% of bachelor's programs include experiential learning.

Outcome 3: Connect experiential activities to course learning objectives.

Outcome 4: Demonstrate student competencies through direct assessment.

Outcome 5: Strengthen student identity, engagement, and lifelong learning.

Based on these five outcomes, the results of the QEP initiatives are summarized below in accordance to each of the five outcomes.

Outcome 1: The infrastructure that had been set up consisted of the Office of Experiential Learning and Special Projects that reported to the Provost. A Coordinator for Experiential Learning was hired to work with the QEP Director. Unfortunately, due to unforeseen circumstances, the Coordinator left and during the time Athens State was on a hiring freeze. Tasks continued to be completed, and the position was not re-advertised. After some physical office re-assignments and with the departure of the coordinator, the office no longer had a physical space and eventually was removed from the directory. A new infrastructure to re-establish a centralized Experiential Learning Hub is discussed later in this document.

Outcome 2: The 90% goal has been focused on undergraduate programs, however Experiential Learning is not solely associated to undergraduate programs as it expands to graduate courses and extracurricular activities. From this outcome it has been established that the College of Education and the College of Business both provide at minimum one experiential learning opportunity within the curriculum. Every student in the College of Education for state certification purposes is

required to complete Field Experience and Internships which both fall under our workplace learning EL category. The College of Business has a core set of courses for all of their programs that include Project Management. In this class students work with simulation programs to practice the skills associated to being in the workplace. Therefore, the Experiential Learning activity is offered to all the students through the requirement of having to take this course. The College of Arts and Sciences is where tracking is important as the programs range from Religion to Music Industry Studies. While there is not a single required course that fulfills Experiential Learning for all degrees, the outcome is met by having the option for students to take a course that provides them with the EL opportunity.

Outcome 3: This is an outcome that has not been standardized. Faculty and EL Facilitators are asked to take into consideration the 8 principles of best practice when setting up their EL activities to make sure that they can assess the students and their performances. A discussion taking place on the campus of Athens State University is associated with the institutional learning goals, and if experiential learning is added to that list or integrated into it, it would allow for us to be able to better align EL activities to the learning objectives. At the same time, all activities that are meaningful within a course should align to the learning objectives, this is part of having intentionality behind the activity that students are being asked to complete.

Outcome 4: In addition to having direct assessment based on seven competencies, there were several opportunities for indirect assessments that are further discussed. The indirect assessments and open-ended questions that were included in those assessment measures have allowed for trends to be identified along with categories that students most commented on. and competencies are identified based on those indirect assessments' measures and open-ended questions that they were asked to complete.

Outcome 5: When it comes to strengthening students' lifelong learning one of the ways that we believe that can be done is by teaching students how to properly reflect on the activities that they have participated in. Majority of the rubrics used by faculty display that most if not all students participated in the EL activity in their courses. By having the students participate, they are allowing students to engage with themselves, other students, and the material that they are learning. The process of reflection, which students were asked to do if they were applying for the EL Scholar recognition, has shown that students are able to analyze and assess their performance and be able to make changes according to the analysis that they have deduced. Therefore, allowing for them to become lifelong learners by continuously reflecting based on life's experiences and adapting and changing based on that reflection.

Analysis of Collected Data

Three different methods were utilized in data collection:

1. Surveys were embedded into courses that offered EL activities to their students. These surveys consisted of several pre- and post- type questions for students to answer based on self-assessment pre-EL activity and post.
2. Students had the choice to complete a reflective application to allow them to be considered to be recognized as an Experiential Learning scholar.

3. The third method with which data was collected was through rubrics that were submitted by faculty members who had students completing EL activities.

Student Survey Assessment Results (FA21–FA25)

Student experiential learning surveys collected between Fall 2021 and Fall 2025 provide indirect evidence of learning and engagement across multiple experiential learning modalities. Three areas to highlight were:

Overall performance against the QEP’s indirect outcome targets is strong. Across 2,371 student survey responses (13 terms), the Integrative Learning indicators (Outcome 3 proxy) consistently meet or exceed the 80% benchmark for students rating their experience at the High Milestone/Capstone levels (3–4 on a 4-point rubric).

The largest positive shifts appear in students’ self-assessed ability to apply theoretical knowledge to practical situations and to generate original ideas (Outcome 5 proxy). Mean pre→post gains range from ~0.61 to ~0.97 on a 5-point scale, with the strongest gains in “apply theory to practice” and “generate original ideas.”

Hands-on learning dominates the dataset. Hands-on activities represent about half of all responses, and “combination” experiences represent about one quarter. Workplace and research experiences are smaller shares but show slightly stronger integrative learning outcomes on average.

Data Overview

This analysis draws on a multi-year dataset of student survey responses collected. In total, the dataset includes 2,371 student responses gathered across 13 academic terms, spanning Fall 2021 through Fall 2025. This extended time horizon allows for both longitudinal analysis and the identification of emerging patterns related to the institutional experiential learning outcomes.

The core measures within the dataset were intentionally designed to align with specific QEP student learning outcomes, using indirect assessment methods. In particular:

- **QEP Outcome 3 (Indirect Assessment)** is addressed through a series of Integrative Learning measures derived from AAC&U VALUE rubric constructs. These items, focus on students’ ability to connect, synthesize, and apply learning across contexts.
- **QEP Outcome 5 (Indirect Assessment)** is assessed through a comprehensive pre- and post-self-assessment instrument measuring perceived growth in knowledge, skills, and abilities. This component was supplemented by a qualitative open-ended reflection prompt that allows students to articulate experiential learning impacts in their own words.

In addition to outcome-aligned measures, the dataset contains several contextual variables that support disaggregated and comparative analysis, including:

- Course-level and college-level identifiers

- Survey response rates by term
- Limited demographic indicators, such as gender, race/ethnicity, age, and first-generation status

Collectively, these elements provide a comprehensive foundation for examining trends in student perceptions of learning, evaluating progress toward QEP goals, and contextualizing outcomes across programs, colleges, and student populations.

Participation Patterns

The distribution of experiential learning types represented in student survey responses from Fall 2021 through Fall 2025, shown in Figure 1, reveals a clear concentration in certain forms of experiential engagement, alongside notable gaps in others. Across the 13-term period, hands-on learning experiences account for the largest share of student responses by a substantial margin. This finding reflects the institution's strong curricular emphasis on applied, practice-based activities embedded directly within courses, such as labs, simulations, projects, and skill-based assignments.

Experiences categorized as a combination of experiential learning types represent the second-largest segment of responses. This suggests that many students are participating in courses or activities that intentionally integrate multiple experiential components, such as hands-on work paired with reflective practice, research elements, or workplace-aligned tasks. The prominence of this category indicates growing instructional sophistication in experiential design, where learning is not confined to a single modality.

In contrast, research-based experiential learning appears at a considerably lower frequency. While present across the dataset, its representation is modest relative to hands-on and combined approaches, suggesting that structured undergraduate research opportunities remain less pervasive across programs. This pattern may reflect disciplinary differences, resource constraints, or limited scalability of research-intensive experiences. However, with the Honors program establishing an Honors course for students to enroll in to work on their thesis with their faculty mentors, it is predicted that the number of participant responses will increase with the opportunity to integrate the EL survey into that course.

Workplace learning experiences, including internships and practicums, occupy a smaller but still meaningful portion of the distribution. Although these opportunities are well-established in certain programs, their lower overall frequency indicates that access to workplace learning may be uneven across colleges or constrained by external factors such as placement availability and student work obligations.

The least represented experiential learning types are expeditions and community-based learning. Their comparatively low response counts highlight areas of underdevelopment within the current experiential learning ecosystem. These findings align with earlier institutional observations that off-campus, community-engaged, and immersive field-based experiences are less consistently embedded across curricula. There is a note to make here as there are also academic programs that work with community partners on class-sponsored projects. However, because of the nature of

those projects and the interactions that the students have with community partners, those projects may be categorized as workplace learning.

Taken together, the distribution underscores a strong institutional foundation in hands-on and blended experiential learning, while also identifying research, community engagement, and expeditions as strategic growth areas. These patterns provide important context for new initiative decision-making, particularly as the institution seeks to broaden the range of experiential learning opportunities and ensure more balanced exposure across experiential learning categories.

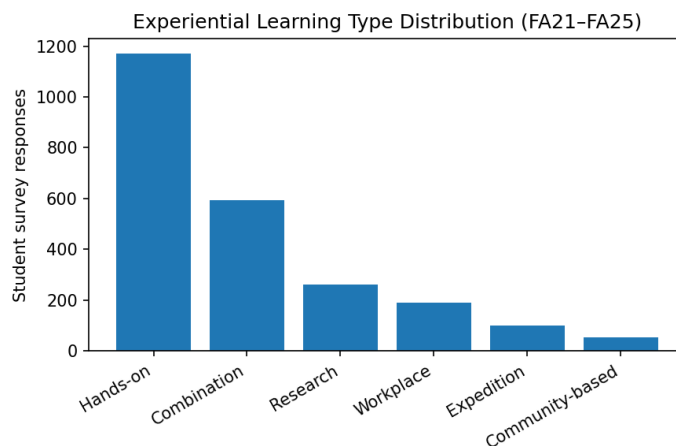


Figure 1 summarizes the distribution of experiential learning types selected by students.

The stacked distribution of student survey responses by experiential learning type across academic years, shown in Figure 2, provides insight into both growth patterns and shifts in experiential emphasis over time. From AY 2021–22 through AY 2024–25, total student responses increase steadily, indicating expanding participation in experiential learning activities and/or improved survey capture as the QEP matured. The slight decline observed in AY 2025–26 likely reflects partial-year data rather than a substantive reduction in experiential learning engagement.

As previously mentioned, across all academic years, hands-on learning consistently represents the largest proportion of student responses. Moreover, this category shows sustained growth through AY 2024–25, underscoring the institution’s continued reliance on applied, practice-based instructional approaches as the dominant form of experiential learning. This trend suggests both curricular stability and scalability in hands-on models across disciplines.

Combination experiential learning emerges as the second most prominent category each year and demonstrates a clear upward trajectory through AY 2024–25. The growth of this category indicates increasing intentionality in course design, with faculty integrating multiple experiential components, such as hands-on activities combined with research, reflection, or workplace-aligned experiences, within a single learning context.

In contrast, research-based experiential learning remains comparatively stable across the period, with modest increases in later years. While research experiences are present and sustained, their

relatively smaller contribution highlights ongoing structural or disciplinary limitations in scaling undergraduate research opportunities across academic disciplines. Please note that during the development of this report, the QEP director does not have data associated with the Honors program to be able to determine how participation in it can impact the growth that is predicted to occur in research-based experiential learning.

Workplace learning shows gradual growth over time, peaking in AY 2024–25. This pattern reflects strengthening partnerships and programmatic efforts in internships, practicums, and other applied professional experiences, though overall participation remains more limited than hands-on or blended models.

The least represented experiential learning types, expeditions and community-based learning, remain consistently low across all academic years. While these experiences are present, their minimal growth over time reinforces their status as underdeveloped areas within the experiential learning framework and aligns with institutional observations regarding barriers to implementation, such as logistical complexity and resource demands. Expeditions can be a barrier as there are additional costs associated with trips that our student population may not be able to contribute to. With the community being a commuter campus, with limited tracking of student volunteer hours, the Bonner Leaders program is a main contributor to data gathered, the collection of data has not been consistent due to a lack of support staff and centralized efforts to gather information.

Overall, the year-by-year distribution illustrates a maturing experiential learning ecosystem, characterized by increasing volume and diversification of experiences, while simultaneously highlighting persistent imbalances across experiential learning types. These findings provide critical context for future initiatives aimed at broadening access to research, community engagement, and expedition-based learning opportunities.

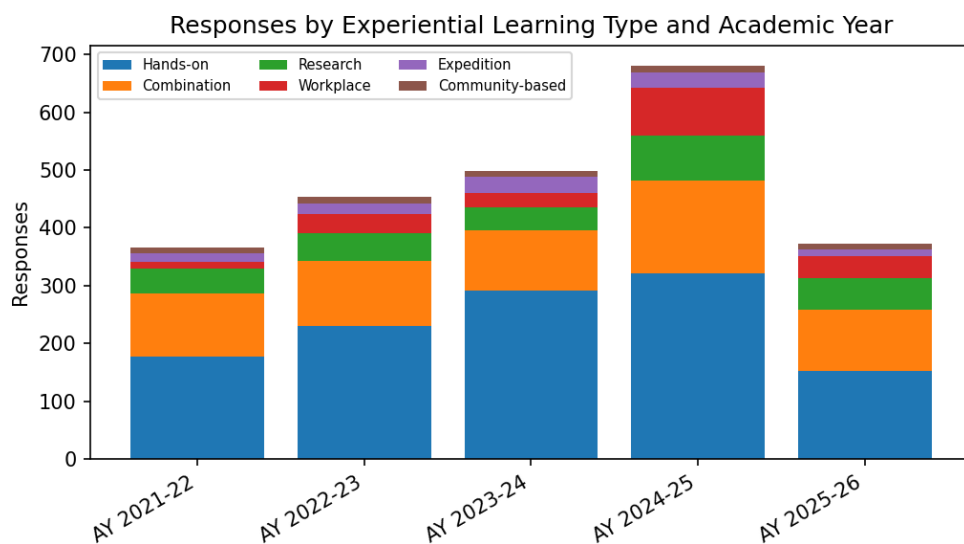


Figure 2 shows how the mix of experiential learning types shifts across academic years.

Survey Response Rates

Survey response rates, shown in Figure 3, were calculated on a weighted basis, defined as the total number of student respondents divided by total course enrollments for each academic term. This approach provides a more accurate representation of participation by accounting for fluctuations in enrollment across terms and instructional modalities.

As illustrated in the figure, the initial administration in Fall 2021 exhibits a substantially lower response rate relative to all subsequent terms. This pattern is consistent with a launch phase in which survey administration processes, faculty familiarity, and student awareness of the QEP-related assessment instrument were still developing.

Following this initial term, response rates increase sharply and then stabilize within a relatively narrow and consistently high range, generally between approximately 70% and 85% across subsequent terms. This sustained level of participation indicates effective institutionalization of the survey process, including improved faculty participation, clearer communication to students, and stronger integration of the survey within experiential learning courses.

While minor semester-to-semester fluctuations are evident, the overall pattern reflects remarkable consistency in response rates over time. Even in later terms, when participation dips slightly, rates remain well above levels typically associated with voluntary student surveys, strengthening confidence in the reliability of the dataset.

Taken together, these findings suggest that early implementation challenges were successfully addressed and that the survey instrument has become a stable and dependable mechanism for capturing student perspectives on experiential learning outcomes. The consistently high response rates in later terms enhance the credibility of longitudinal analyses and support the use of these data for QEP evaluation and decision-making.

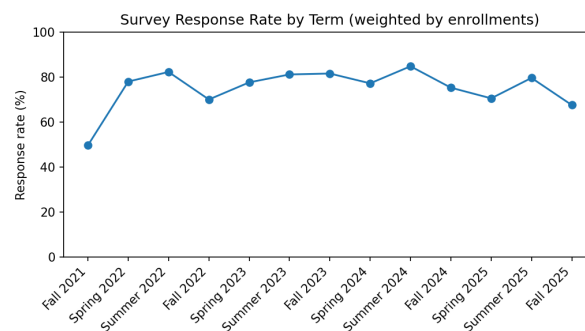


Figure 3. Weighted Survey Response Rates

Outcome 3 Analysis: Connection Between Course and Experience (Integrative Learning)

For evaluation purposes, achievement of **Outcome 3** is operationalized as the percentage of student responses at Levels 3–4, representing the High Milestone/Capstone benchmark. The data is summarized in Table 1.

Across the full dataset (N = 2,370), all four indicators demonstrate strong overall performance, with mean scores well above the midpoint of the scale and a high proportion of students meeting or exceeding benchmarks, institutionally established at 80%:

- **Connection to experience** shows a mean score of 3.50, with 85.2% of students responding at Levels 3–4, indicating that the majority of students are able to meaningfully relate experiential activities to their learning.
- **Connection to discipline** is the highest-performing indicator overall, with a mean of 3.59 and 89.7% of responses at Levels 3–4. This suggests that students are particularly effective at situating experiential learning within disciplinary frameworks and concepts.
- **Transfer of learning** yields a mean score of 3.45, with 86.7% of students meeting the High Milestone/Capstone benchmark, reflecting strong student capacity to apply learning across contexts.
- **Reflection and self-assessment**, while still demonstrating solid performance, has the lowest mean (3.37) and the lowest proportion of responses at Levels 3–4 (81.6%), indicating comparatively weaker performance in metacognitive dimensions of integrative learning. However, still meeting the expected benchmark.

Table 1. Summarized student survey responses

Indicator (Q2–Q5)	N	Mean (1–4)	% at 3–4
Connection to experience	2,370	3.50	85.2%
Connection to discipline	2,370	3.59	89.7%
Transfer	2,370	3.45	86.7%
Reflection/self-assessment	2,370	3.37	81.6%

As shown in Figure 4, the percentage of students scoring at Levels 3–4 remains consistently high across academic years for all four indicators. Each indicator remains at or above approximately 80% throughout the period examined, underscoring the stability and overall strength of integrative learning outcomes over time.

However, the figure also reveals a notable pattern of greater year-to-year variability in reflection/self-assessment compared to the other indicators. While still meeting QEP benchmarks, this indicator is consistently the lowest-performing and appears more sensitive to shifts in instructional context, course design, or student engagement with reflective practices.

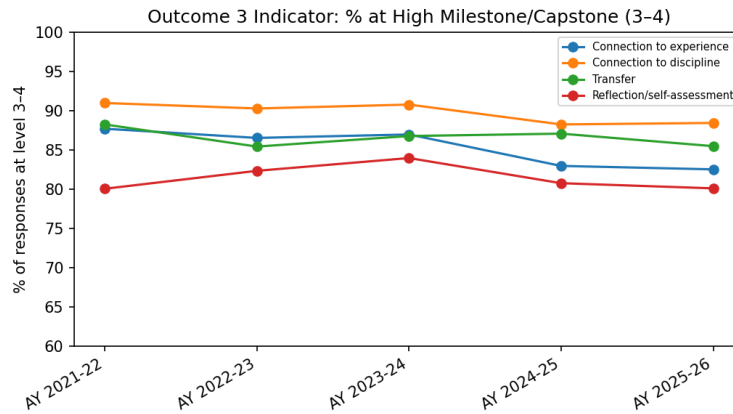


Figure 4 Trends by academic year for the percentage of responses at levels 3–4.

Taken together, these results indicate that Outcome 3 is being met at a strong and sustained level, with strengths in disciplinary connection and transfer of learning. At the same time, the findings identify reflection and self-assessment as a key area for continued monitoring and targeted improvement, especially through intentional scaffolding of reflective activities within courses that have integrated experiential learning.

In addition to examining overall indicator-level performance, Outcome 3 was further analyzed using a composite integrative learning score, calculated as the mean of Questions 2–5 for each respondent. This composite score provides a holistic view of students’ integrative learning performance across experiential contexts and instructional settings.

Figure 5 presents the mean composite Outcome 3 score by experiential learning type. Across all categories, mean scores cluster within a relatively narrow and high range (approximately 3.40–3.55 on a 4-point scale), indicating consistently strong integrative learning outcomes regardless of experiential modality. Specifically to each of the categories that were identified by Athens State:

- Workplace learning yields the highest composite mean, suggesting that immersive, professionally situated experiences may be particularly effective in supporting integrative learning, including disciplinary connection, transfer, and reflection.
- Combination experiential learning follows closely, reinforcing earlier findings that courses integrating multiple experiential components tend to produce strong integrative outcomes.
- Expedition-based experiences, while less frequently represented overall, demonstrate composite means comparable to more common modalities, suggesting high impact despite limited scale.
- Hands-on, community-based, and research experiences also show solid performance, though with slightly lower composite means, indicating opportunities for further strengthening integrative learning components within these formats.

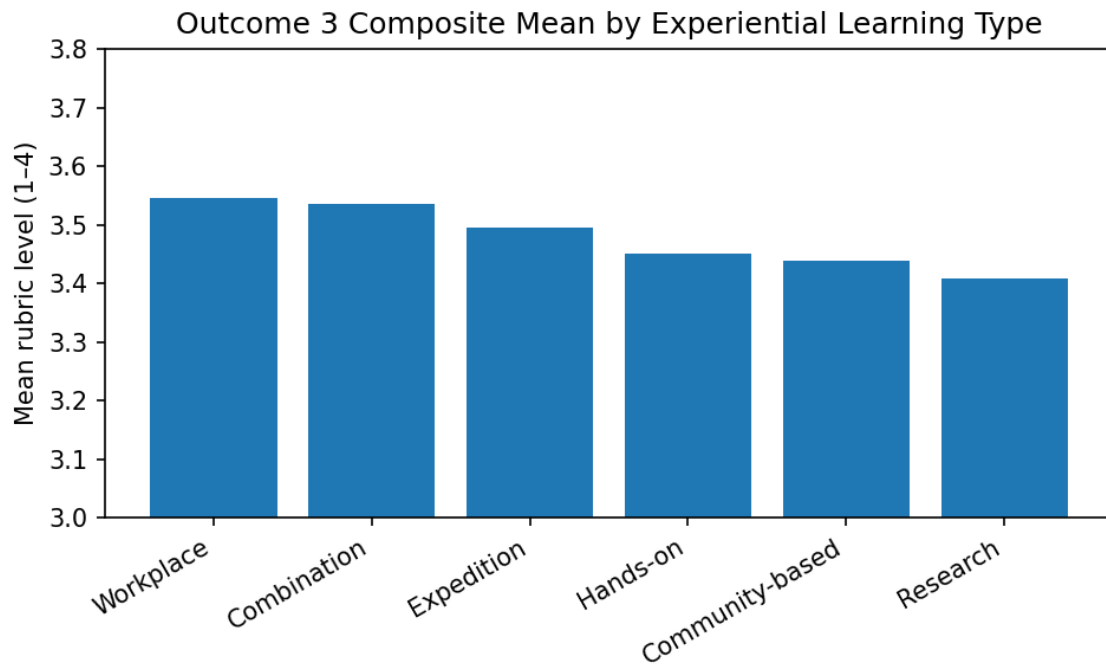


Figure 5. Composite Mean by Experiential Learning Type

While the differences across experiential learning categories are modest, the pattern in Figure 5 suggests that experiential design and contextual authenticity, rather than modality alone, may play a key role in supporting higher levels of integrative learning.

To further contextualize these findings at the course level, Figure 6 displays the top ten courses by response count, ranked by their mean composite Outcome 3 score. These courses span multiple disciplines and experiential learning categories, underscoring the cross-institutional nature of integrative learning success. Several observations have been made from this data:

- The highest-performing courses approach or exceed mean composite scores of 3.6–3.7, placing them solidly within the High Milestone/Capstone range.
- Strong performance is not confined to a single discipline or college, suggesting that effective integrative learning practices have been and continue to be implemented across diverse curricular contexts.
- Variability among the top courses remains relatively limited, reinforcing the overall consistency of Outcome 3 achievement while still allowing for identification of exemplary course models.

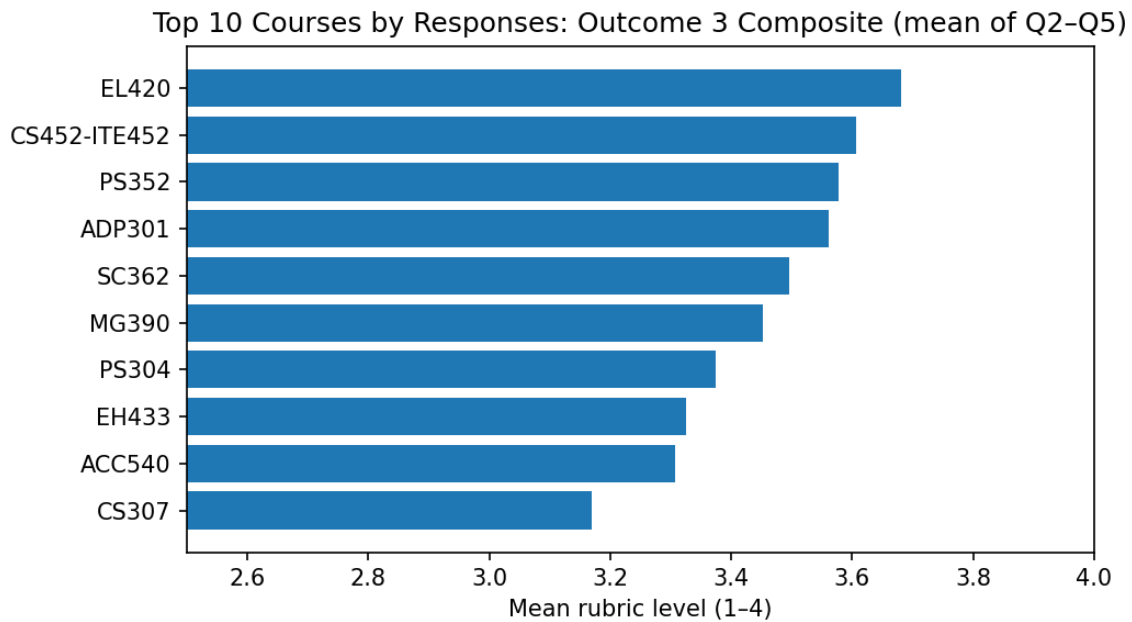


Figure 6. Top 10 Courses by Responses

Together, Figures 5 and 6 provide complementary perspectives on Outcome 3 performance. Figure 5 highlights consistency and strength across experiential learning categories, while Figure 6 illustrates how high-impact integrative learning is being realized at the course level. These findings support the conclusion that Outcome 3 is being met broadly and effectively, while also offering actionable insights for identifying scalable practices and informing targeted faculty development efforts aimed at strengthening integrative learning across all experiential modalities.

Outcome 5 Analysis: Student Self-Assessment (Pre/Post)

To evaluate the impact of experiential learning on student development, paired pre- and post-survey responses were analyzed, which were measured on a five-point scale ranging from Weak to Strong. Responses with a value of zero were treated as missing, and only matched pre/post responses were included in the analysis. This approach ensures that the results reflect individual student growth over time and provides a more accurate representation of learning gains associated with experiential learning participation.

Table 2. Summary of student responses for pre- and post- questions.

Competency	N paired	Pre mean	Post mean	Mean gain
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Apply theory to practice	2,325	3.31	4.27	0.97
Generate original ideas	2,314	3.38	4.34	0.96
Advance within career	2,168	3.42	4.24	0.82
Obtain position in career field	2,168	3.38	4.18	0.81
Perform effectively in career	2,262	3.57	4.31	0.74
Manage time effectively	1,163	3.62	4.34	0.71
Learn on my own	2,333	3.74	4.44	0.70
Solve problems	2,327	3.75	4.42	0.67
Understand societal/cultural/global differences	1,140	3.76	4.42	0.65
Exert leadership	1,134	3.71	4.35	0.64
Appreciate different viewpoints	2,297	3.82	4.45	0.62
Understand ethical standards	1,152	3.90	4.51	0.61

As summarized in Table 2, students demonstrated consistent positive growth across all assessed competency, with mean gains ranging from approximately +0.61 to +0.97. The strongest gains were observed in competencies most closely aligned with experiential learning pedagogy, particularly the ability to apply theory to practice and to generate original ideas. These findings suggest that experiential learning experiences are especially effective in helping students translate academic knowledge into real-world contexts while also fostering creativity, innovation, and independent thinking.

Substantial gains were also evident in competencies associated with career readiness and professional effectiveness, including obtaining a position in a career field, performing effectively in a career, and advancing within a career. The magnitude and consistency of these gains, observed across large numbers of paired responses, indicate that experiential learning contributes meaningfully to students' confidence, preparedness, and perceived ability to succeed in professional environments.

In addition, students reported meaningful improvements in self-directed learning and problem-solving competencies, such as managing time effectively, learning independently, and solving problems. These outcomes reflect the role of experiential learning in promoting autonomy, adaptability, and active engagement in the learning process, skills that are critical for long-term academic and professional success.

Figure 7 visually reinforces the patterns observed in the tabular data by illustrating relative mean gains across constructs. While the second block of survey items reflects fewer paired responses, these competencies nonetheless show meaningful positive gains. Areas such as understanding societal, cultural, and global differences; ethical standards; leadership; and appreciation of different viewpoints demonstrate that experiential learning experiences involving community engagement, leadership roles, or culturally situated contexts are contributing to student development beyond disciplinary knowledge and career preparation.

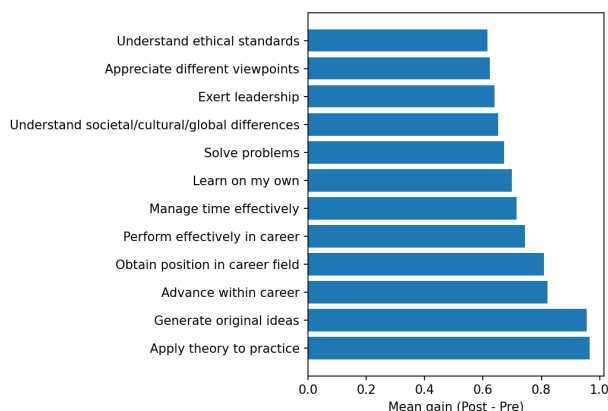


Figure 7 Mean gains by competence

Collectively, the results presented in Table 2 and Figure 7 provide strong evidence that experiential learning initiatives associated with the QEP are producing broad, measurable improvements in student learning outcomes. The alignment of the largest gains with core experiential learning objectives supports the effectiveness of current implementation strategies and underscores the value of continued assessment and refinement to sustain and expand these efforts.

Open-Ended Responses: Thematic Signals

In addition to scaled survey items, students were invited to provide open-ended feedback describing the impact of their experiential learning experiences. A total of 882 open-ended responses were reviewed, anonymized, and entered into an AI tool for assistance in using keyword-based coding to identify high-level thematic signals. Themes were coded as non-exclusive, allowing individual comments to reflect multiple aspects of the experiential learning experience.

Table 3: Thematic Analysis of Open-Ended Student Responses

Theme	Comments mentioning theme	% of comments
Real-world/career relevance	299	33.9%
Application of knowledge	259	29.4%
Confidence/preparedness	56	6.3%
Collaboration/teamwork	56	6.3%
Perspective/diversity	78	8.8%
Skill development	543	61.6%

As summarized in Table 3, the most prominent themes emerging from student comments relate to skill development, real-world or career relevance, and application of knowledge. Over sixty percent of comments referred to skill development, indicating that students most strongly associate experiential learning with the acquisition or strengthening of practical, transferable skills. Similarly, nearly one-third of comments emphasized real-world or career relevance, and just under thirty percent highlighted the application of academic knowledge to authentic contexts.

Together, these themes reinforce the quantitative findings, reported earlier, that experiential learning is particularly effective in supporting applied learning and career readiness.

Other themes appeared less frequently but remain meaningful. References to perspective and environmental differences suggest that some experiential learning experiences are contributing to students' broader understanding of societal, cultural, or global contexts. Mentions of collaboration and teamwork and confidence or preparedness, while present in a smaller proportion of comments, indicate that these outcomes may be occurring but are not consistently relevant to students when responding to the current prompt. This pattern may reflect variation in course design, differences in how collaboration or confidence-building is framed, or limitations in how the open-ended question surfaces these dimensions of learning.

Taken together, the open-ended responses provide qualitative confirmation of the strongest outcome areas identified in the pre-post survey analysis while also pointing to opportunities for refinement. In particular, the dominance of skill development and application-oriented language suggests that experiential learning is achieving its core goals, while the lower frequency of reflection-related signals highlights the need for more intentional scaffolding of reflective practice across experiential learning experiences.

Experiential Learning Scholar Recognition Applications – Aggregate Analysis

This section summarizes findings from the Scholar Recognition application dataset collected during the reporting window from September 15, 2023, through December 5, 2025. The Scholar Recognition began out of the experiential education best practices and principles where one of those principles is to provide acknowledgement. This was also a way to encourage students to complete the experiential learning surveys discussed earlier because the only way they gained access to the Scholar Recognition Application was after submitting the survey. The Scholar Recognition applications are reviewed by a task force that determines whether the student has provided reflective evidence that shows the understanding, impact, and growth that students have had through their participation in the experiential learning activities. If students are selected to be recognized they receive cords to be able to wear at graduation.

The dataset includes 159 student application submissions reflecting a wide range of experiential learning activities across academic and co-curricular contexts. In alignment with FERPA requirements, this analysis intentionally excludes all personally identifiable information; results are reported only in aggregate to protect student privacy while allowing for meaningful program-level interpretation.

Overall, the Scholar Recognition narratives provide strong qualitative evidence that experiential learning functions as a critical bridge between academic coursework and real-world performance, which is consistent with previously discussed analysis. Across submissions, students consistently describe experiential learning as an opportunity to translate theory into practice, develop a clearer professional identity, and build transferable skills essential for post-graduation success.

Commonly articulated outcomes include increased confidence and readiness for professional environments, growth in communication and teamwork abilities, enhanced problem-solving and planning skills, and an appreciation for experiences that include clear structure, feedback, and scaffolding. These themes align closely with the intended outcomes of the Quality Enhancement Plan and reinforce findings from survey-based assessments.

From an organizational perspective, Scholar Recognition submissions are distributed primarily across the College of Arts & Sciences and the College of Business, which together account for more than two-thirds of the dataset. The College of Education contributes a smaller but distinctive set of narratives, many of which center on tutoring, practicum, or field-based teaching experiences that emphasize applied pedagogy and early professional socialization. Submissions associated with Adult Degree Program (ADP) students and the Bonner Leader Program are reported separately reflecting their unique structures and experiential learning models. This data is shown in Table 4 and visually represented in Figure 8.

Table 4: Scholar Recognition Submissions by College/Unit

College/Unit	Submissions
College of Arts & Sciences	56 (35.2%)
College of Business	55 (32.7%)
College of Education	30 (18.9%)
ADP (not in a college)	15 (9.4%)
Bonner Leader Program	6 (3.8%)

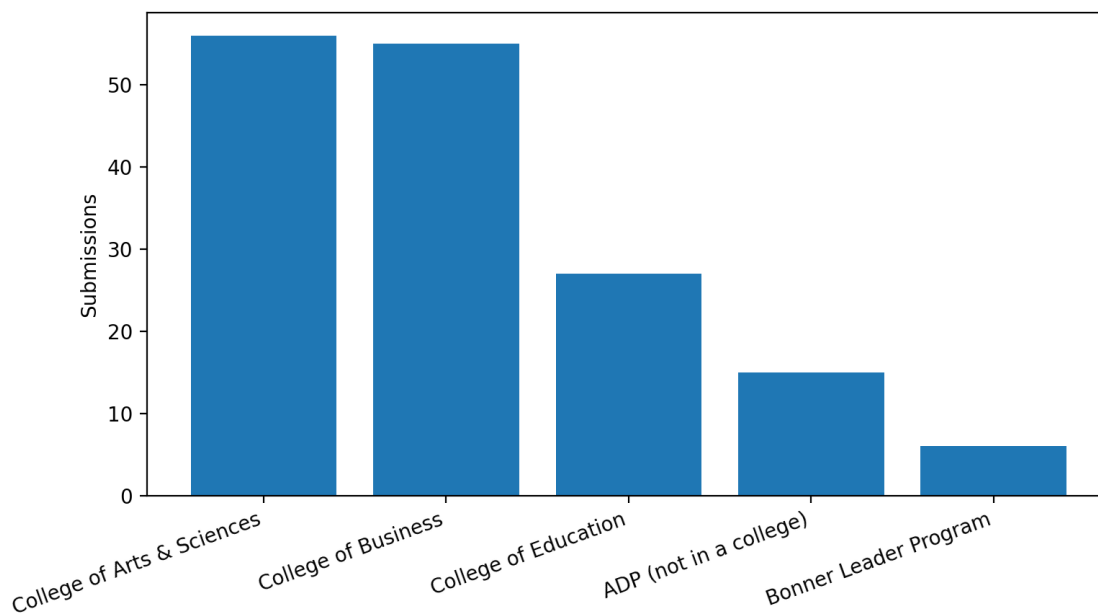


Figure 8: Distribution of Scholar Recognition Submissions by College/Unit

Analysis of activity types represented in the application narratives further illustrates the diversity of experiential learning at Athens State University. Table 5 provides a summary of the data while Figure 9 provides a visual display. The largest share of submissions reflects simulation or

gamified learning environments, followed by capstone or client-based projects, tutoring or clinical teaching experiences, and community engagement or service activities. Smaller but meaningful numbers of submissions highlight research and data analysis, career readiness initiatives, portfolio-based learning, and professional communication projects. A notable portion of submissions fall into an “other or unclear” category, suggesting opportunities to refine application prompts or classification methods to improve analytic precision in future cycles.

Table 5: Scholar Recognition Submissions by Experiential Learning Activity Type

Activity type (derived)	Submissions
Simulation / gamified learning	37
Other / unclear	30
Capstone / client-based project	29
Tutoring / clinical or field-based teaching	19
Community engagement / service	15
Career readiness / professional preparation	8
Research / lab / data analysis	8
Portfolio / prior learning documentation	6
Professional communication / writing	4
Field experience / site-based learning	2
Design / creative project	1

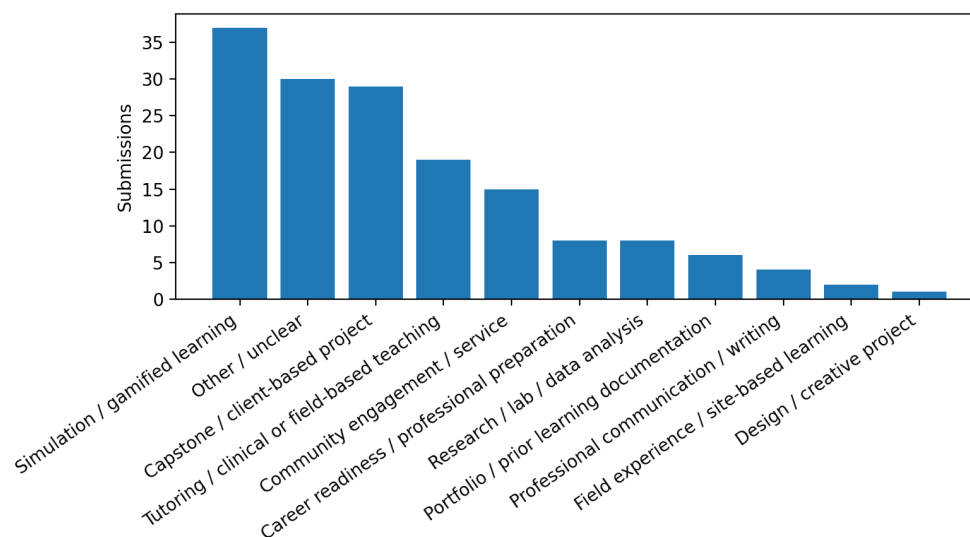


Figure 9: Distribution of Scholar Recognition Submissions by Activity Type

Review of submissions over time shows a pattern of clustered engagement rather than steady monthly participation. Peaks in submissions align with academic cycles and recognition deadlines, indicating that student participation is influenced by term structure, faculty encouragement, and programmatic awareness. While submission volume fluctuates month to month, the overall pattern demonstrates sustained engagement with the Scholar Recognition process across multiple academic terms.

Table 6: Scholar Recognition Submission Volume by Month

Month	Submissions	Month	Submission
2024-03	5	2025-03	9
2024-04	19	2025-04	8
2024-05	1	2025-05	4
2024-07	10	2025-06	9
2024-09	3	2025-07	6
2024-10	8	2025-09	8
2024-11	12	2025-10	11
2024-12	9	2025-11	4
2025-02	7	2025-12	3

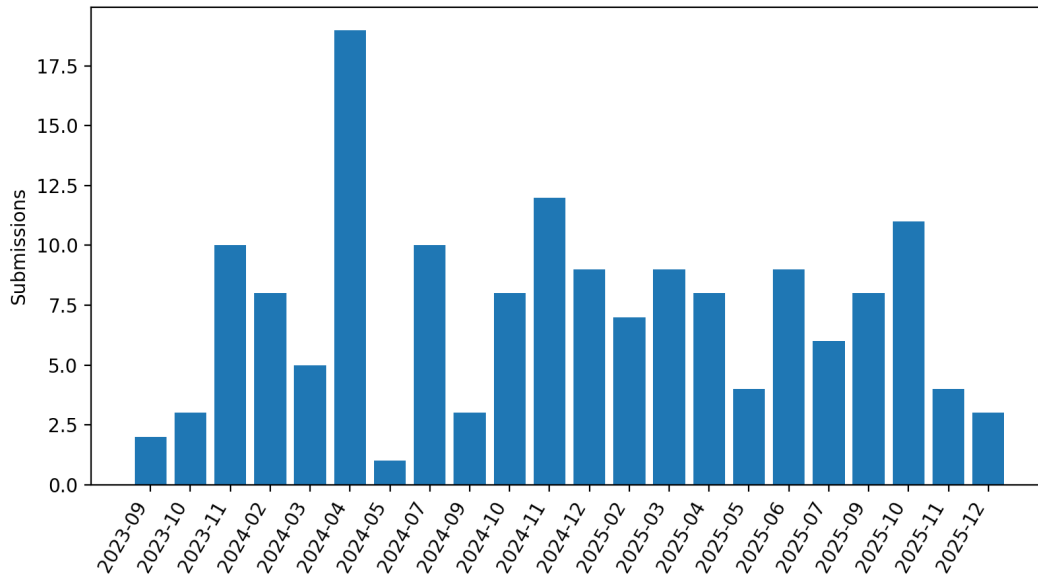


Figure 10: Scholar Recognition Submissions Over Time

Collectively, the Scholar Recognition application data provides a rich, student-authored perspective on the impact of experiential learning at Athens State University. The narratives reinforce quantitative assessment findings by highlighting applied learning, skill development, and professional growth, while the distributional data illuminate where experiential learning is most visible and how students engage with recognition opportunities over time. Together, these insights support the continued use of Scholar Recognition applications as both a celebratory mechanism and a meaningful source of evidence for evaluating the reach, quality, and evolution of experiential learning initiatives under the Quality Enhancement Plan.

Building on the descriptive overview of the Scholar Recognition application dataset, the following section shifts from patterns to a deeper examination of recurring trends and thematic signals across student narratives. While the preceding analysis establishes where experiential learning is occurring and how students are engaging with recognition opportunities, a thematic review allows for closer attention to how students describe the learning itself, what they emphasize, what they value, and how they articulate growth over time. Examining these trends across colleges, activity categories, and time periods provides insight into the shared

characteristics of high-impact experiential learning and highlights areas of convergence, variation, and opportunity that can inform ongoing refinement of experiential learning design and assessment.

Aggregate Trends and Themes Across Scholar Recognition Submissions

A review of all Scholar Recognition submissions reveals several consistent and reinforcing themes that characterize students' experiential learning experiences. Most prominently, students frame experiential learning as fundamentally applied and practice-oriented, frequently describing their experiences as hands-on, real-world, or practical in contrast to more traditional instructional approaches such as readings, quizzes, or exams. Across narratives, students emphasize that experiential learning helps academic concepts “stick” by requiring active engagement, decision-making, and performance in authentic or simulated contexts. This applied emphasis emerges as a defining feature of high-impact experiential learning across colleges and activity types.

Closely connected to applied learning is a strong theme of professional identity development. Students regularly describe experiential learning as instrumental in building confidence, clarifying career goals, and deepening their understanding of professional expectations within their chosen fields. Many narratives reflect a shift from abstract interest to informed commitment, with students noted that experiential learning helped them better understand what a profession “is really like.” These reflections suggest that experiential learning plays a meaningful role not only in skill acquisition but also in helping students assess fit, readiness, and long-term career direction.

Skill development emerges as a central and recurring outcome, with growth being identified in several core competencies. Students most frequently reference gains in communication, both written and interpersonal, alongside teamwork and collaboration skills developed through group-based or client-facing work. Problem solving and decision-making under constraints are also commonly cited, particularly in experiences that require navigating ambiguity, limited resources, or real-time challenges. In addition, many narratives highlight improvements in time management and planning, reflecting the increased responsibility and self-regulation often required in experiential learning environments.

An important note is associated with students providing critiques in a constructive fashion and implementation-focused rather than critical of experiential learning itself. When students identify areas for improvement, they most often request clearer directions, more explicit rubrics, additional feedback, improved tutorials or preparatory materials, and more consistent scaffolding throughout the experience. These comments suggest that students value experiential learning highly and are primarily seeking refinements that enhance clarity, support, and instructional alignment rather than questioning the legitimacy or usefulness of the experience.

Another recurring theme is students' appreciation for low-risk practice environments, particularly in simulations, mock interviews, and guided field or clinical experiences. Students consistently frame these settings as beneficial because they allow experimentation, practice, and learning from mistakes without immediate real-world consequences. This emphasis underscores the importance

of structured experiential learning designs that balance authenticity with appropriate levels of support and safety, especially for students who are early in their professional development.

Finally, equity-related themes, including multicultural awareness, empathy, and responsiveness to the needs of others, appear most strongly in narratives associated with community engagement and education-focused experiences. While these themes are less frequent overall than professional skill development, their presence highlights the broader civic and human dimensions of experiential learning, particularly in contexts that involve direct interaction with diverse populations or learner-centered environments. Together, these findings suggest that while experiential learning at Athens State University is most often experienced and articulated through a professional and skills-based lens, it also holds meaningful potential for advancing equity, perspective-taking, and social awareness when intentionally embedded into experiential learning design.

Building on the aggregate analysis of Experiential Learning Scholar Recognition submissions, the following sections disaggregate findings to examine how experiential learning is distributed and experienced across institutional contexts. While the preceding analysis establishes overarching trends and thematic signals present across the dataset, disaggregating the data by college and program area provides additional insight into how experiential learning is implemented within different disciplinary environments. This approach allows for identification of unit-level patterns, signature practices, and areas of concentration or variation, offering a more nuanced understanding of how experiential learning functions across the institution and informing opportunities for targeted support and alignment.

Findings by college/unit

To better understand how experiential learning is distributed across the institution, Scholar Recognition submissions were analyzed by college and primary activity category. College assignment was determined based on the course or organization identified in each application by the student. Submissions associated with the Adult Degree Program (ADP) and the Bonner Leader Program were treated as distinct units and were not assigned to an academic college, reflecting their unique structures. The table below presents a college-by-category distribution of submissions, allowing for comparison of the kinds of experiential learning experiences most frequently represented within and across academic units. This view provides important context for interpreting both participation patterns and the types of experiential learning emphasized in different instructional and programmatic settings.

Table 7. College by Experiential Learning Activity Type Distribution

College or Program	Capstone / client-based project	Career readiness / professional preparation	Community engagement / service	Design / creative project	Field experience / site-based learning	Other / unclear	Portfolio / prior learning documentation	Professional communication / writing	Research / lab / data analysis	Simulation / gamified learning	Tutoring / clinical or field-based teaching
ADP (not in a college)	3	1	2	0	0	3	6	0	0	0	0
Bonner Leader Program	0	0	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
College of Arts & Sciences	14	6	4	1	2	17	0	4	7	0	1
College of Business	12	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	37	3
College of Education	0	0	2	0	0	9	0	0	1	0	15

While the table highlights aggregate patterns across colleges and activity types, a closer examination of each unit reveals important distinctions in how experiential learning is designed, implemented, and experienced by students. The sections that follow provide brief summaries by college and program area, drawing on both quantitative distributional data and qualitative narrative evidence from the Scholar Recognition applications. Together, these summaries illustrate how experiential learning manifests within different disciplinary contexts, identify signature practices and strengths, and surface opportunities for continued growth and alignment across the institution.

College of Arts & Sciences

Volume: 56 submissions (35.2% of the dataset).

Most common activity types in this unit:

- Other / unclear: 17 (30.4% of this unit)
- Capstone / client-based project: 14 (25.0% of this unit)
- Research / lab / data analysis: 7 (12.5% of this unit)

College of Arts & Sciences submissions span STEM labs/research, computing/capstone work, and humanities/social science reflective activities. Across these, students highlight increased comfort with complex tools or methods (i.e., data analysis software, lab techniques, development environments), and growth in problem solving and persistence. Capstone-style entries emphasize working with constraints (time, changing requirements, limited client responsiveness) and the value of communication structures (sprints, updates, documentation).

College of Business

Volume: 55 submissions (34.6% of the dataset).

Most common activity types in this unit:

- Simulation / gamified learning: 37 (67.3% of this unit)
- Capstone / client-based project: 12 (21.8% of this unit)

Narratives in the College of Business most often describe decision-making, prioritization, and process optimization. Students frequently emphasize seeing end-to-end operational flow, learning to balance cost, time, and quality, and appreciating how choices cascade into outcomes (customer satisfaction, reputation, efficiency). A recurring improvement suggestion is greater formative feedback (what was missed, how to improve) and more time/levels to deepen the simulation-based work.

College of Education

Volume: 27 submissions (17.0% of the dataset).

Most common activity types in this unit:

- Tutoring / clinical or field-based teaching: 18 (61.1% of this unit)
- Other / unclear: 9 (33.3% of this unit)
- Community engagement / service: 2 (7.4% of this unit)

College of Education submissions center on tutoring/practicum-style experiences and show a consistent pattern: (1) diagnosing learner needs (often via pre-/post-assessment), (2) adapting instruction to learning styles and context, and (3) reflecting on classroom management, confidence, and readiness. Common recommendations include earlier due dates or earlier start points, more structured coordination for finding students to tutor, and expanded access to teaching resources/technology.

ADP (not in a college)

Volume: 15 submissions (9.4% of the dataset).

Most common activity types in this unit:

- Portfolio / prior learning documentation: 6 (40.0% of this unit)
- Other / unclear: 3 (20.0% of this unit)
- Capstone / client-based project: 3 (20.0% of this unit)

ADP submissions focus on structured reflection, documenting prior learning, and translating professional experience into academic planning and portfolios. Students frequently describe increased self-awareness, improved organization, and clearer connection between workplace competencies and degree completion. A recurring theme is the motivational effect of reviewing accomplishments, alongside requests for clearer eligibility/credit pathways and guidance on documentation expectations.

Bonner Leader Program (not in a college)

Volume: 6 submissions (3.8% of the dataset).

Most common activity types in this unit:

- Community engagement / service: 6 (100.0% of this unit)

Bonner Leader Program submissions emphasize community impact, leadership development, and values-based learning (empathy, inclusivity, civic responsibility). Students describe tangible project work (organizing events, fundraising, coordinating services) and the professional relevance of communication, planning, and stakeholder engagement. The strongest ‘transfer’ language connects service experiences to future teaching or nonprofit leadership work.

Findings by activity type (derived categories)

The following analysis examines Scholar Recognition submissions by derived experiential learning activity category in order to better understand how students experience and articulate learning across different experiential formats. Because the source dataset does not include a standardized activity-type field, categories were determined through review of course or organizational labels and close reading of narrative descriptions, including references to simulations, tutoring, research, field experiences, client-based projects, and related activities. While this approach requires interpretive classification, it allows for a more nuanced understanding of how experiential learning is enacted in practice and how different activity structures shape student learning, skill development, and professional identity formation. The sections that follow present findings by activity type, highlighting participation patterns, contributing units, and dominant learning signals drawn directly from student narratives.

Simulation / gamified learning

Volume: 37 submissions (23.3% of the dataset).

- College of Business: 37 (100.0% of this activity type)

Students describe simulations as effective “practice fields” where they can test strategies, see consequences, and build intuitive understanding of systems. Common learning outcomes include prioritization, trade-off reasoning (cost/time/quality), and process thinking. Improvement requests trend toward richer feedback, longer run-time/expanded scenarios, and clearer tutorials or in-simulation guidance.

Other / unclear

Volume: 30 submissions (18.9% of the dataset).

Primary contributing units (top 3):

- College of Arts & Sciences: 17 (56.7% of this activity type)
- College of Education: 9 (30.0% of this activity type)
- ADP (not in a college): 3 (10.0% of this activity type)

This category includes entries with limited detail, ambiguous descriptions, or responses marked as n/a. Even within limited detail, the dominant pattern remains that students view EL as supporting growth in confidence, planning, and professional skills.

Capstone / client-based project

Volume: 29 submissions (18.2% of the dataset).

Primary contributing units (top 3):

- College of Arts & Sciences: 14 (48.3% of this activity type)
- College of Business: 12 (41.4% of this activity type)
- ADP (not in a college): 3 (10.3% of this activity type)

Capstone narratives emphasize authentic constraints: coordinating with sponsors/clients, managing scope, working in teams, and producing documentation. Students frequently note growth in communication discipline, project planning, and confidence in applying technical skills. Where challenges appear, they often involve limited stakeholder responsiveness, needing more time early to learn the existing codebase/platform, or wishing for larger teams for broader idea diversity.

Tutoring / clinical or field-based teaching

Volume: 19 submissions (11.9% of the dataset).

- College of Education: 18 (94.7% of this activity type)
- College of Arts & Sciences: 1 (5.3% of this activity type)

These experiences show strong alignment with educator preparation, common themes were diagnosing learner needs, differentiating instruction, and reflecting on classroom readiness. Students repeatedly frame the work as confidence-building and professionally formative, particularly because it creates low-stakes opportunities to practice teaching moves and refine them through reflection.

Community engagement / service

Volume: 15 submissions (9.4% of the dataset).

Primary contributing units (top 3):

- Bonner Leader Program: 6 (40.0% of this activity type)
- College of Arts & Sciences: 4 (26.7% of this activity type)
- College of Education: 2 (13.3% of this activity type)

Students frame service as professional development. Common outcomes include strengthened civic identity, empathy, leadership confidence, and practical project coordination skills (events, fundraising, administrative processes). The most common connections associated to service work was made in association to future roles in teaching, nonprofit leadership, or community advocacy.

Career readiness / professional preparation

Volume: 8 submissions (5.0% of the dataset).

Primary contributing units (top 3):

- College of Arts & Sciences: 6 (75.0% of this activity type)
- College of Business: 1 (12.5% of this activity type)
- ADP (not in a college): 1 (12.5% of this activity type)

These submissions highlight gains in professional communication, interview readiness, and understanding of employer expectations. Mock interview feedback from industry participants is repeatedly cited as the most valuable element, especially when it provides concrete guidance on how to improve resumes and present skills effectively.

Research / lab / data analysis

Volume: 8 submissions (5.0% of the dataset).

- College of Arts & Sciences: 7 (87.5% of this activity type)
- College of Education: 1 (12.5% of this activity type)

Students emphasize the value of doing “real” research and analysis. Three of the most commented areas of learning were associated to use of tools, managing data, and interpreting results. They often note that the work is challenging but increases confidence and clarifies whether they enjoy research-oriented tasks. A recurring request is additional guidance for advanced analyses or more time for deeper investigation.

Portfolio / prior learning documentation

Volume: 6 submissions (3.8% of the dataset).

- ADP (not in a college): 6 (100.0% of this activity type)

Students describe portfolio work as reflective and validating, helping them articulate competencies and align experiences to academic and career goals. They frequently note improved organization and documentation practices.

Professional communication / writing

Volume: 4 submissions (2.5% of the dataset).

- College of Arts & Sciences: 4 (100.0% of this activity type)

These narratives emphasize learning professional genres (memos, proposals, reports) and describe clear transfer to workplace communication and career pathways (e.g., technical writing).

Field experience / site-based learning

Volume: 2 submissions (1.3% of the dataset).

- College of Arts & Sciences: 2 (100.0% of this activity type)

Field experiences are described as highly memorable and effective for making abstract content concrete through direct observation and hands-on identification/practice in authentic environments.

Design / creative project

Volume: 1 submission (0.6% of the dataset).

- College of Arts & Sciences: 1 (100.0% of this activity type)

The design-focused submission emphasizes independent learning of professional tools and applying theory to create functional prototypes, highlighting perseverance and problem solving.

Taken together, the activity-type findings illustrate both the diversity and the coherence of experiential learning at Athens State University. Across formats that range from simulations and capstone projects to tutoring, service, and research, students consistently describe applied learning, skill development, and professional growth as central outcomes, even as the specific competencies and challenges vary by activity structure. The variation across activity types underscores the importance of intentional design, feedback, and scaffolding tailored to the demands of each experiential format, while the shared themes reinforce the foundational role of experiential learning in supporting student readiness and confidence. The next section builds on these insights by shifting from activity-based analysis to a broader examination of how these experiences collectively inform institutional trends, strengths, and opportunities for continued refinement.

Faculty Direct Assessment Results (Experiential Learning Rubrics)

Faculty direct assessment provides a critical complement to students' self-reported and narrative-based evidence by documenting observed student performance using common experiential learning rubrics. Between 2021 and 2025, faculty submitted 46 experiential learning rubrics assessing student performance across seven experiential learning competencies. For each rubric, faculty reported counts of students at four performance levels and marked outcomes as *Not Applicable* when competency was not evidenced by the assignment design. This approach allows the analysis to capture both student achievement and institution-wide patterns in how experiential learning is implemented and assessed across courses.

Across all rubric submissions, student performance clusters are strongly identified in the *At Standard* and *Exceeds Standard* categories, particularly in competencies associated with applied learning and professional practice. Unacceptable ratings are relatively rare across competencies, suggesting that when experiential learning outcomes are intentionally assessed, students generally meet or exceed expectations. Reflection outcomes, while assessed less frequently overall, are strongest in courses that require structured reflective artifacts, such as tutoring reflections, capstone projects, and practicum-style experiences.

Implementation Patterns Evident in Faculty Scoring

Faculty rubric data reveal consistent implementation patterns that extend beyond performance levels alone. Use of the *Not Applicable* designation is concentrated in competencies that depend heavily on assignment structure, most notably Collaboration and Professional Development. High-enrollment or individually completed experiential activities frequently assess problem solving or communication while marking collaboration as not applicable. In contrast, when group work is intentionally embedded into activity design, collaboration is assessed and students are overwhelmingly rated at or above standard.

Similarly, Professionalism and Career Understandings are most often assessed in experiential learning activities that involve external engagement or workplace analogs, including practicums, capstone projects, career seminars, mock interviews, portfolios, and client-facing work. Reflection demonstrates the strongest outcomes in courses that explicitly require reflective deliverables supported by prompts or rubric guidance, reinforcing the importance of intentional scaffolding in experiential learning design.

Overall Performance Patterns by Competency

To provide an overall view of student performance across competencies, Figure 11 displays the distribution of rubric ratings by competency, illustrating the number of students rated at each performance level and the relative volume of assessment across outcome areas. This figure shows that most ratings are concentrated at levels 3 (*At Standard*) and 4 (*Exceeds Standard*) across all competencies, while also highlighting variation in how frequently each competency is assessed.

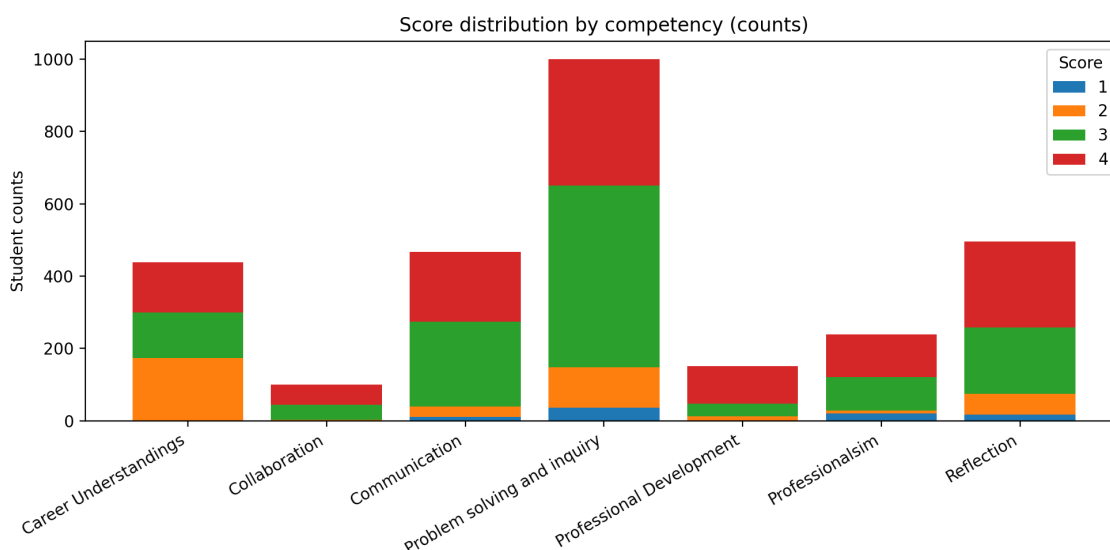


Figure 11: Score Distribution by Competency (Counts)]

When examined at the competency level, Problem Solving and Inquiry demonstrate strong attainment. Of the 1,004 total ratings, 84.9% of students were rated at levels 3 or 4, while 14.7% were rated at levels 1 or 2. This distribution reflects the central role of applied analysis, decision-making, and inquiry in many experiential learning activities.

Reflection, assessed in 496 total ratings, shows a similar pattern, with 84.9% of students rated at levels 3 or 4 and 15.1% rated at levels 1 or 2. These results indicate that when reflection is intentionally embedded into assignment design, students are generally able to meet or exceed expectations.

Communication exhibits one of the strongest performance profiles. Across 467 total ratings, 91.4% of students were rated at levels 3 or 4, with only 8.6% rated at levels 1 or 2. This concentration of higher-level ratings aligns with experiential learning activities that require communication artifacts such as reports, presentations, portfolios, or client-facing documents.

In contrast, Career Understandings displays greater dispersion. Of 439 total ratings, 60.4% of students were rated at levels 3 or 4, while 39.6% were rated at levels 1 or 2. Although a majority of students met or exceeded expectations, this competency shows the lowest weighted average score, identifying a clear opportunity for targeted improvement.

Professionalism, assessed in 239 total ratings, also demonstrates strong attainment, with 87.9% of students rated at levels 3 or 4 and 12.1% rated at levels 1 or 2. Performance in this competency is strongest in experiential activities that mirror workplace norms or involve external engagement.

The highest weighted average among all competencies appears in Professional Development, where 83.6% of the 165 ratings fall at levels 3 or 4 and only 7.9% fall at levels 1 or 2. While this competency is assessed less frequently, the high performance levels suggest strong student engagement when professional development outcomes are intentionally evaluated.

Finally, Collaboration, though assessed in fewer contexts, only 100 ratings, exhibits the strongest concentration of high-level performance. Of the 100 students, 97.0% of them were rated at levels 3 or 4, with only 3.0% rated at levels 1 or 2. This pattern underscores the effectiveness of group-based experiential learning designs when collaboration is structurally embedded.

To complement the distributional view, Figure 12 presents the weighted average rubric score by competency, enabling direct comparison across outcomes while accounting for differences in rating volume.

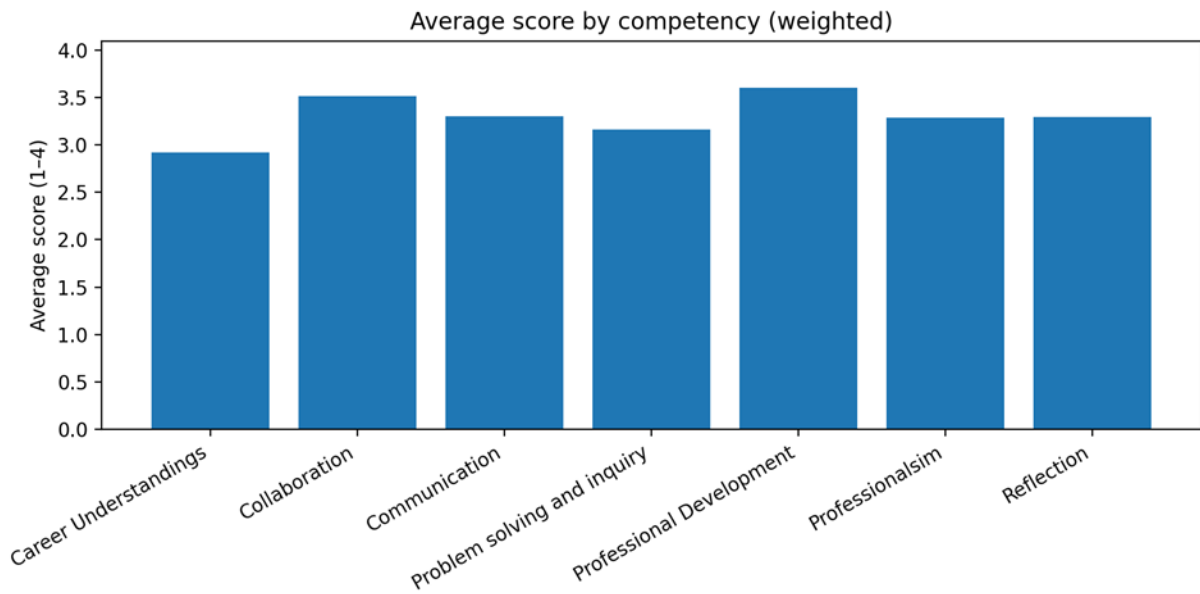


Figure 12: Weighted Average Score by Competency

Together, Figures 11 and 12 demonstrate that student performance is generally strong across experiential learning competencies, while also identifying Career Understandings as a focused area for continued improvement.

Trends and Patterns by Semester and Year

To examine changes over time, rubric results were aggregated across all competencies by semester and year. Figure 13 presents the average rubric score by term, offering a longitudinal perspective on experiential learning performance across the analysis period.

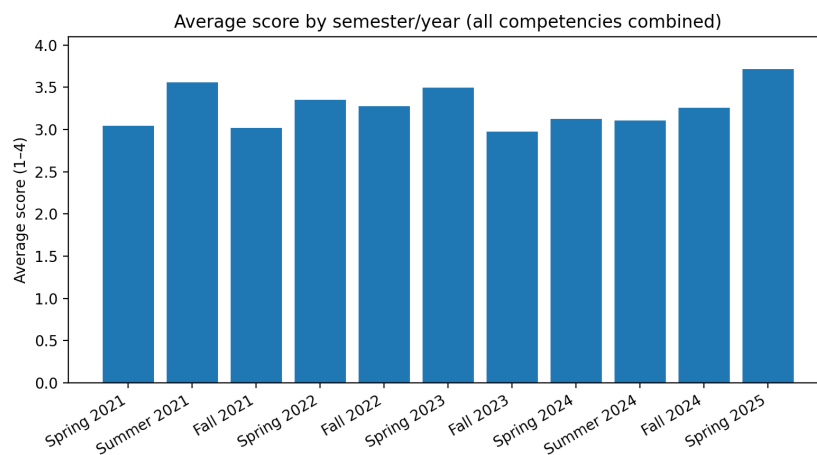


Figure 13: Average Rubric Score by Semester/Year (All Competencies Combined)

Overall term averages range from 2.97 in Fall 2023 to 3.71 in Spring 2025. Variation across terms likely reflects differences in participating courses, experiential learning designs, and rubric application. However, the stronger performance observed in later terms suggests increasing alignment between experiential learning implementation and assessment expectations. It is also noteworthy to keep in mind that over the Summer 2025 several faculty participated in the Athens Academy and received training in association with the QEP and the Experience | Success initiative.

Finally, disciplinary patterns were explored by aggregating rubric results across all competencies by subject prefix. Among high-volume prefixes, Biology (BI) demonstrates the highest average score (Avg = 3.90), while Adult Degree Program (ADP) reflects the lowest (Avg = 2.86). These differences warrant follow-up to determine whether they reflect variation in assignment design, student preparedness, experiential learning format, or rubric interpretation practices, and they provide a foundation for targeted faculty discussion and calibration.

Key Themes and Implications

Taken together, faculty direct assessment results indicate strong overall attainment of experiential learning competencies, with most students performing at or above standard when outcomes are assessed. At the same time, uneven assessment coverage and variability across competencies and disciplines highlight clear opportunities for improvement. These findings support targeted efforts to strengthen Career Understandings, expand intentional assessment of underutilized competencies, and promote cross-disciplinary sharing of effective experiential learning practices to enhance consistency and quality institution-wide.

Direct Measures vs Indirect Measures: Alignment Map

The QEP assessment design intentionally combines direct evidence (faculty scoring rubrics) and indirect evidence (student self-report surveys). Table 4 maps rubric outcomes to the closest corresponding competencies captured in student surveys. This crosswalk enables defensible triangulation across sources and supports SACSCOC expectations for multiple measures.

Table 4. Mapping of Rubric Outcomes

Direct (Faculty Rubric Outcome)	Closest Indirect Survey Construct(s)	Interpretive Notes for Triangulation
I. Problem Solving/Inquiry	Pre/Post items related to applying theory to practice, problem solving, decision-making, and producing solutions	Use as evidence that EL supports applied learning and transfer; compare with pre/post gains.
II. Communication	Items related to communicating ideas, explaining work, professional writing/presentation confidence	Use in conjunction with open ended survey question identified themes about resumes, interviews, presentations, and professional documents.
III. Collaboration	Items related to teamwork, working with others, and group learning	Expect more Not Applicable in direct measures when assignments are

		individual; interpret differences accordingly.
IV. Professionalism	Items related to workplace readiness, professional behaviors, and confidence	Triangulate with scholar applications describing professional growth and identity formation.
V. Career Understandings	Items related to career clarity, relevance to goals, and understanding of career expectations	Review scholar application narratives that show career pathway clarity and motivation.
VI. Reflection	Integrative learning/reflection indicators and pre/post self-assessment awareness	Key area for comparative analysis: direct rubric reflection may differ from applicant reflections due to selection effects.
VII. Professional Development	Items related to growth orientation, pursuing learning beyond class, and future plans	Pairs strongly with VALUE rubric dimensions and student intent to continue learning and engaging professionally.

Triangulation across student surveys, faculty rubrics, and scholar applications reveals convergent evidence of applied learning, professional growth, and career readiness. Divergences in reflection outcomes are explained by differences in measurement and student self-reporting.

This section integrates three lines of evidence: (1) student survey results (indirect evidence), (2) Experiential Learning Scholar applications (qualitative reflective evidence), and (3) faculty rubric scoring (direct evidence). The triangulated findings below emphasize where evidence converges, where it diverges, and what those patterns imply for continuous improvement.

Convergent Findings (Evidence Aligns Across Sources)

Applied learning and relevance: Student surveys consistently show positive pre/post movement in applying learning to real-world contexts, and faculty rubric data frequently assess Problem Solving/Inquiry at At Standard or Exceeds Standard. Scholar applications reinforce this by emphasizing meaning-making through authentic tasks and professional contexts.

Career clarity and professional readiness: Faculty rubrics often assess Career Understandings and Professionalism when experiential learning resembles workplace practice (career seminars, capstones, internships, practicum-style activities). Student narratives similarly emphasize increased confidence, career direction, and improved professional artifacts (resume, interviewing, portfolio).

Divergent Findings and How to Interpret Them

Reflection discrepancy (surveys vs scholar applications): Survey-based reflection indicators are generally strong but can appear lower relative to other competencies. In contrast, scholar applications are explicitly reflection-centered and therefore exhibit higher reflective depth by design. This divergence is expected, applicants represent students who are motivated to reflect, have stronger reflective writing, and are asked to produce reflection as the primary artifact.

Not Applicable patterns (direct vs indirect): Faculty rubric submissions often mark Collaboration and Professional Development as Not Applicable when the experiential activity is completed independently or when those dispositions are not explicitly elicited. Student surveys may still show perceived collaboration or growth even when the assignment structure does not provide direct evidence. This suggests an opportunity to clarify the definition of collaboration and to intentionally design evidence-producing artifacts when those outcomes are targeted.

Reflection: Comparative Interpretation and Improvement Implications

The combined evidence suggests that reflection is present and meaningful across experiential learning implementation, but its measured strength varies by instrument and by student population. Faculty rubric reflection is strongest in courses that require structured reflection prompts and provide opportunities for students to identify strengths, weaknesses, and next steps. Scholar application reflections show deeper narrative integration and perspective change, but these are drawn from a self-selected group and should not be treated as representative of all students. Accordingly, the improvement opportunity is not that reflection is absent, but that reflection is unevenly scaffolded across courses. A consistent reflection framework (common prompts, minimum reflective elements, and rubric-aligned descriptors) would likely increase the proportion of students demonstrating advanced reflection in both direct scoring and indirect self-report.

Faculty Lived Experiences with Experiential Learning

While quantitative indicators provide important evidence of student learning outcomes, they do not fully capture the professional judgment, instructional decision-making, and reflective practice that shape experiential learning in authentic classroom contexts. To complement student survey data and faculty rubric assessments, this report incorporates faculty lived-experience narratives gathered through a reflective survey and supplemented by faculty participation in a structured experiential learning fellows program. Together, these perspectives provide rich contextual insight into how experiential learning is conceptualized, implemented, refined, and sustained across instructional settings.

Across responses, faculty consistently described experiential learning not as an isolated pedagogical technique, but as an intentional instructional philosophy grounded in the desire to move students beyond passive consumption of content toward active engagement, application, and discovery. Many faculty indicated that experiential learning had been embedded in their teaching practices prior to the formal launch of the Quality Enhancement Plan and was subsequently expanded, formalized, or strengthened through the Experience | Success initiative. In several cases, the QEP provided a shared institutional language, increased visibility, and structural support that elevated experiential learning from an individual instructional choice to a recognized and valued component of institutional practice.

Faculty reflections revealed a broad range of experiential approaches tailored to disciplinary contexts and student populations. These included semester-long research projects culminating in public presentations; tutoring frameworks that bridge observation and independent instruction; structured field experiences in professional settings; oral history projects that generate primary-source community narratives; industry simulations and plant tours connecting management concepts to workplace realities; virtual and technology-enhanced communication exercises; remote “virtual laboratory” environments using specialized software; and hands-on hardware programming experiences requiring precision and

troubleshooting. Despite this diversity, faculty emphasized a shared goal: creating authentic learning environments where students engage meaningfully with real-world processes, audiences, and expectations.

Faculty highlighted multiple motivations for incorporating experiential learning, including the need to bridge theory and practice, strengthen workforce and graduate-school preparation, respond to student interest in applied learning, and provide authentic opportunities for working adult students who may not have access to traditional extracurricular experiences. Experiences were deliberately selected to align with course learning outcomes and professional standards. In both in-person and remote instructional contexts, faculty described designing environments where students could experiment, encounter productive struggle, and learn through iteration without irreversible consequences.

Implementation narratives emphasized that experiential learning reshaped classroom dynamics in substantive ways. Faculty described shifts from instructor-centered delivery toward environments characterized by dialogue, collaboration, experimentation, and reflection. In research-based contexts, faculty noted powerful moments when students realized they were generating new knowledge or contributing meaningfully to a project. In professional education settings, candidates gained confidence by applying structured frameworks to learners and reflecting on measurable growth. In technical and laboratory-based courses, students confronted the realities of setup time, troubleshooting, and the importance of attention to detail, lessons that could not be replicated through lecture alone. In community-engaged projects, students encountered lived experiences and stories that deepened their understanding of history, culture, and human experience.

At the same time, faculty were candid about the challenges associated with experiential learning. Common themes included increased planning demands, coordination with external partners or community participants, difficulty maintaining momentum across semesters, and the need for flexibility when projects required extended timelines. Faculty also described the necessity of scaffolding, particularly in remote or technologically intensive environments, where students sometimes experienced initial anxiety or reluctance to experiment. Students accustomed to assignments with clearly defined answers occasionally expressed hesitation when faced with open-ended, iterative tasks. However, faculty consistently framed this discomfort as a meaningful stage of learning. With appropriate guidance and support, students developed resilience, persistence, and a growth-oriented mindset.

Reflection emerged as a central mechanism in translating experience into learning. Whether through structured observation rubrics, tutoring reflections, narrative learning forms, post-field experience commentary, or research presentations to external audiences, faculty emphasized the importance of requiring students to articulate what they learned and how they applied it. Several instructors observed that when reflective expectations were clarified and overly prescriptive guidelines reduced, students produced more authentic, creative, and insightful narratives about their growth. In professional programs, reflective practice strengthened alignment with licensure and performance-based assessment requirements.

Faculty observations of student engagement further reinforced the value of experiential learning. Students were described as enthusiastic about opportunities to interact with professionals, engage with community members, participate in simulations, use emerging technologies, or present their work publicly. In

communication-focused simulations, students reported increased confidence and reduced anxiety. In research settings, students expressed pride in publicly presenting findings and often sought to retain tangible artifacts of their work. In tutoring and field-based contexts, students recognized measurable impact on those they served. In technical environments, students reported satisfaction in programming hardware or solving complex problems through persistence. Across contexts, students frequently requested additional experiential opportunities.

From the faculty perspective, the most significant impact of experiential learning was observed in students' ability to apply knowledge, think critically, attend to detail, and persist through complexity. Faculty described improvements in self-efficacy as students began to view themselves as capable contributors, emerging professionals, researchers, teachers, or problem-solvers. Experiences that culminated in authentic products such as presentations, recorded interviews, software applications and systems, simulation results, or externally reviewed projects, were particularly impactful because students could tangibly demonstrate competence. Faculty consistently noted that experiential learning enhanced the depth, authenticity, and quality of student work.

Several faculty also observed that experiential formats are particularly important in a rapidly evolving technological environment. Because these assignments require hands-on engagement, iterative problem-solving, data collection, physical presence, or performance-based demonstration, they emphasize authentic learning in ways that cannot be replicated through text production alone. This alignment further underscores the continued relevance and sustainability of experiential pedagogy.

Participation in the experiential learning fellows program further reinforced these themes at the faculty level. Faculty described the program as a catalyst for growth, constructive challenge, and professional reflection. Rather than merely affirming existing practices, the experience encouraged deeper intentionality, new perspectives, and continued refinement of experiential activities. Engagement with colleagues fostered collaboration and opened new opportunities for innovation. Faculty credited structured mentorship and institutional support with strengthening their commitment to sustained experiential practice.

Taken together, faculty lived-experience narratives provide compelling qualitative evidence that experiential learning is not only feasible across diverse instructional contexts but also transformative for both students and instructors. These perspectives affirm that experiential learning, when supported institutionally and implemented intentionally, deepens student learning, strengthens professional skills, and fosters a culture of reflection, engagement, and continuous improvement that aligns directly with the goals of the Quality Enhancement Plan.

Role of Faculty Lived Experience in Continuous Improvement

Findings from the faculty lived-experience survey will inform ongoing continuous improvement efforts by identifying instructional practices faculty perceive as most effective, surfacing recurring implementation challenges, and highlighting areas where additional guidance, coordination, or institutional support may enhance sustainability. When analyzed alongside student outcome data and faculty rubric results, these perspectives provide a more complete and actionable understanding of experiential learning as enacted across courses and disciplines.

The accomplishments and institutional advancements associated with the Quality Enhancement Plan Director's leadership are detailed earlier in this report and directly inform the sustainability and infrastructure recommendations outlined below.

Reinstate the Office of Experiential Learning and Special Projects (or Center of)

To sustain the outcomes achieved through the Experience|Success initiative, the QEP Director proposes the consideration of reinstating the Office of Experiential Learning and Special Projects. During the QEP implementation cycle, experiential learning expanded significantly across academic programs, supported by faculty engagement, student participation, and coordinated assessment processes. However, many operational responsibilities, including survey administration, rubric collection, recognition tracking, and reporting, were centralized within the QEP Director role. To ensure continuity beyond the QEP cycle, a permanent, distributed leadership structure is necessary.

As Athens State University continues to advance the Experience|Success initiative, experiential learning has become a defining feature of the institution's academic identity. Across colleges and units, faculty, staff, and administrators have developed meaningful opportunities that allow students to apply theory in authentic contexts. While this decentralized growth has been productive, it has also resulted in siloed structures, uneven support, and limited coordination, particularly in the areas of assessment, reporting, compliance, and sustainability.

To ensure the long-term success of Experience|Success beyond the current QEP cycle and the removal of QEP requirements by SACSCOC, this proposal recommends the reinstatement and restructure of the Office of Experiential Learning and Special Projects. This office would function as a centralized yet collaborative umbrella, aligning existing directors, programs, and emerging roles under a shared vision while preserving disciplinary autonomy and established leadership.

The proposed Office of Experiential Learning and Special Projects formalizes and aligns existing directors and units already contributing to experiential learning under a coordinated institutional framework. This model does not replace current leadership; rather, it connects and integrates roles that are currently operating in parallel.

Experiential Learning Framework

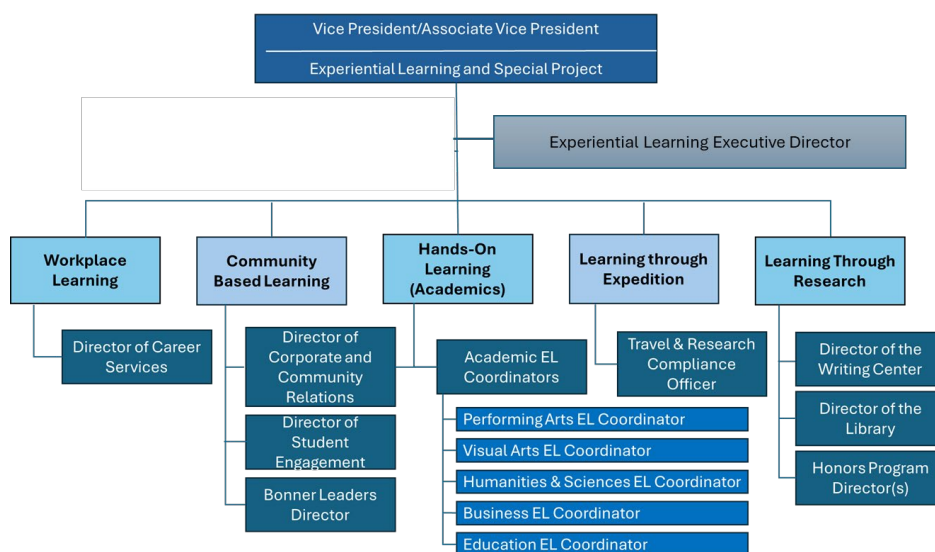
Athens State has identified five core categories of experiential learning, each representing a distinct but interconnected pathway through which students engage in applied learning:

1. Hands-On Learning
2. Workplace Learning
3. Community-Based Learning
4. Learning Through Research
5. Learning Through Expeditions

All five categories are already active at Athens State and supported by existing personnel. However, they currently operate independently, limiting opportunities for shared planning, collective assessment, and institutional storytelling.

Organizational Structure

The structure includes oversight by a Vice President or Associate Vice President for Experiential Learning and Special Projects, responsible for institutional alignment, assessment continuity, and integration of experiential learning into accreditation and strategic planning processes. Reporting to this role would be an Experiential Learning Executive Director, who would coordinate campus-wide experiential learning efforts, supervise college-level coordinators, standardize assessment practices, and support continuous improvement based on QEP findings.



Figures 14 Centralized Experiential Learning Structures

This layered structure, executive oversight, operational leadership, college-level coordination, and alignment with existing directors, distributes responsibility for experiential learning across the institution while preserving accountability for assessment and student learning outcomes. It reduces reliance on a single QEP Director position and embeds experiential learning within permanent institutional roles.

Leadership Structure

At the top of the proposed structure is a Vice President or Associate Vice President for Experiential Learning and Special Projects. This role is intentionally positioned above the executive director level to provide institution-wide coordination without superseding existing directors. The VP/AVP would focus on:

- Strategic alignment of experiential learning efforts
- Institutional assessment and reporting (QEP, accreditation, internal impact)
- Cross-unit collaboration and problem-solving

- External partnerships and national visibility

This role ensures experiential learning remains a cohesive institutional priority, rather than a collection of disconnected initiatives.

Experiential Learning Executive Director

Reporting to the VP/AVP would be an Experiential Learning Executive Director, serving as the operational and coordinating lead for experiential learning across the institution. This role provides the necessary leadership layer to manage day-to-day coordination while maintaining strategic alignment.

The Experiential Learning Executive Director would:

- Coordinate experiential learning across all five EL categories
- Supervise college-level Experiential Learning Coordinators
- Support assessment, reporting, and continuous improvement efforts
- Coordinate campus-wide experiential learning initiatives, events, and recognition activities

This position also creates an intentional transition point for responsibilities currently centralized within the QEP Director role, strengthening sustainability beyond the QEP.

College-Level Experiential Learning Coordinators

To ensure experiential learning remains embedded within academic units, college-level Experiential Learning Coordinators would be designated in each college. These coordinators would support faculty engagement, encourage student participation in surveys and recognition processes, promote rubric completion, assist with digital badge integration, and serve as local advocates for experiential learning. This approach mirrors successful models used at peer institutions, where coordinators serve as discipline-aware liaisons between faculty, students, and central EL leadership.

The following coordinator roles are proposed:

- Performing Arts Experiential Learning Coordinator
- Visual Arts Experiential Learning Coordinator
- Humanities & Sciences Experiential Learning Coordinator
- Business Experiential Learning Coordinator
- Education Experiential Learning Coordinator, aligned through the existing Internship Coordinator role

All coordinators would be supervised by the Experiential Learning Executive Director and work collaboratively across colleges.

Core Responsibilities of Coordinators

College-level coordinators would assume many of the operational, advocacy, and engagement functions currently managed by the QEP Director (2021- 2026), including:

- Connecting faculty with experiential learning opportunities (hands-on, community, workplace, research, expeditions)
- Encouraging student participation in EL surveys and recognition applications
- Supporting faculty completion of experiential learning rubrics
- Assisting with digital badge assignment and curricular alignment
- Advocating for experiential learning within their colleges
- Serving as recognizable points of contact for community and industry partners
- Review applications for scholar recognition
- Evaluate EL courses for compliance with principles of EL

By embedding coordinators within colleges, Athens State strengthens faculty engagement, improves assessment response rates, and ensures experiential learning is integrated intentionally rather than incidentally.

Alignment of the Five Experiential Learning Categories

Hands-On Learning

Hands-On Learning remains faculty-driven and course-embedded. Oversight for assessment, reporting, and best practices would remain under the direct supervision of the VP/AVP, ensuring institutional consistency while preserving academic freedom.

Workplace Learning

Workplace Learning would be coordinated through the Director of Career Services, encompassing internships, practicums, employer partnerships, mock interviews, and resume development tailored to disciplinary expectations.

Community-Based Learning

Community-Based Learning spans student organizations, honor societies, the Bonner Leader Program, and faculty-led partnerships. Aligning this category with the Director of Community and Corporate Relations strengthens coordination and expands institutional partnerships.

Learning Through Research

Learning Through Research would continue to be supported by the Writing Center, Library, and Honors Program(s). Housing these efforts under a shared experiential learning umbrella enhances collaboration, research visibility, and student scholarly engagement.

Learning Through Expeditions and Research-Related Travel

Given the administrative and compliance demands associated with travel, this proposal recommends a part-time Travel and Research Compliance Officer. This role would:

- Coordinate travel documentation and approvals for students

- Support conference and expedition logistics
- Educate students on publishing, copyright, and research compliance
- Provide training related to IRB processes and animal research oversight

This role reduces faculty administrative burden while strengthening institutional compliance and student preparedness.

Strategic Value and Institutional Impact

Through this model, Experience|Success transitions from a defined initiative to an institutionalized practice. The proposed reinstatement of the Office ensures continued collection of direct and indirect measures, sustained faculty engagement in assessment, ongoing student participation in recognition processes, and coordinated reporting for institutional effectiveness. This structure positions experiential learning as a permanent and measurable component of the Athens State academic experience

The proposed structure—VP/AVP → Experiential Learning Executive Director → College-Level Coordinators, aligned with existing directors—creates a scalable and sustainable model that:

- Reduces reliance on a single QEP Director role
- Improves coordination, assessment, and reporting
- Enhances faculty and student engagement
- Strengthens community and workforce partnerships
- Positions Athens State for national recognition

This alignment also supports future exploration of eligibility for a Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education designation, using experiential learning as a defining institutional strength.

National Visibility and Momentum

Athens State enters this phase with growing national recognition, including leadership engagement with the Society of Experiential Education. Faculty and staff involvement at the national level underscores the institution's readiness to move from strong practice to recognized leadership in experiential learning.

This moment represents an opportunity to formalize infrastructure that matches Athens State's visibility and ambition.

Continuous Improvement and Sustainability for Experiential Learning at Athens State

Athens State University's approach to continuous improvement in experiential learning is grounded in evidence gathered from multiple complementary sources, including student pre-post surveys, faculty direct assessment rubrics, Scholar Recognition applications, and qualitative student narratives.

Collectively, this data demonstrate that experiential learning is producing strong outcomes in applied learning, skill development, and career readiness, while also identifying specific areas where additional intentionality and consistency will strengthen long-term impact.

A central focus of ongoing improvement efforts is the strengthening of reflection and self-assessment practices across experiential learning activities. While students consistently perform well in competencies such as problem solving, communication, professionalism, and collaboration, both quantitative and qualitative evidence indicate that reflection is less consistently embedded and assessed. Courses that require structured reflective artifacts, supported by guided prompts and aligned rubric language, demonstrate stronger outcomes in this area. These findings point to an opportunity to establish shared minimum expectations for reflection design that preserve disciplinary flexibility while promoting deeper integrative learning.

Another priority area for continuous improvement is the expansion of program-level visibility and tracking of experiential learning. The current assessment report provides robust evidence for outcomes related to student learning gains and instructional alignment, particularly through outcomes-based survey analysis, faculty rubrics, and Scholar Recognition narratives. However, program-level metrics showing the proportion of bachelor's programs that include experiential learning, and how that coverage has changed over time, are not yet fully developed. Addressing this gap will require clearer definitions, consistent tagging or documentation practices, and visualization analysis that complement course-level evidence.

Improvement efforts are also informed by student and faculty feedback related to implementation quality. Students' open-ended responses consistently emphasize the value of clear expectations, meaningful feedback, sufficient time on task, and well-scaffolded activities, particularly in simulations, project-based learning, and tool-intensive experiences. Faculty assessment patterns similarly show that competencies are most effectively assessed when assignment design explicitly supports them. Together, these findings underscore the importance of providing consistent scaffolding assets such as tutorials, checklists, exemplar artifacts, and guidance on "what good looks like," especially for experiential learning activities that require new technologies, external coordination, or complex deliverables.

The report also highlights opportunities for refining assessment practices to support continuous improvement. While pre-post self-assessment results show strong gains across most outcomes, the potential for response-shift effects suggests value in continuing to triangulate findings using direct assessment artifacts in representative courses. In addition, uneven assessment coverage across competencies indicates a need for clearer guidance on when specific outcomes should be assessed and how they align with different experiential learning formats. Currently the pre-post questions are asked at the same time. Recommendation is for the survey to be split into two, where faculty have students complete the survey before the activity, and then after the activity rather than considering both answers at the same time after the activity.

Looking ahead, the findings support a sustained focus on data-informed refinement rather than expansion for its own sake. Next-phase improvement efforts may include deeper college- and program-level analyses, section-level variability reviews used as developmental tools, and equity-focused analyses conducted in aggregate where data allows. Together, these strategies reinforce experiential learning as a living institutional practice, one that evolves through evidence, reflection, and shared learning rather than static compliance.

Conclusion

This internal report documents the design, implementation, and impact of the Experience | Success initiative through multiple forms of evidence, including student surveys, faculty direct assessment, qualitative narratives, and participation patterns across colleges and experiential learning formats. Taken together, these findings demonstrate that experiential learning is a meaningful and effective component of the Athens State University student experience, particularly in supporting applied learning, professional skill development, and career readiness.

Across assessment methods, students consistently show strong gains in applying theory to practice, generating original ideas, solving problems, communicating professionally, and navigating authentic or simulated professional environments. Faculty rubric data supports these trends, with most assessed students performing at or above standard when outcomes are intentionally aligned with assignment design. Student narratives further enrich this evidence by highlighting increased confidence, relevance, motivation, and the value of low-risk environments that allow experimentation, reflection, and learning from mistakes.

At the same time, this report intentionally surfaces areas for refinement rather than presenting experiential learning as complete or static. Reflection and self-assessment emerge as ongoing developmental priorities, alongside the need for clearer program-level tracking, more consistent instructional scaffolding, and stronger alignment between learning objectives, experiential activities, and assessment practices. These insights do not diminish the success of the Experience | Success initiative, but instead, they provide a clear and actionable roadmap for thoughtful, evidence-informed improvement.

Building on this foundation, the proposed re-instatement of an Experiential Learning and Special Projects Office, or similar, supported by a layered leadership model and embedded college-level coordinators, positions Athens State University to move decisively from initiative-based success to institutionalized excellence. This structure preserves collaboration, honors existing leadership and practice, and ensures that experiential learning remains a defining, measurable, and sustainable component of the Athens State experience. With continued attention to quality, alignment, and sustainability, Athens State University is well positioned to deepen and extend experiential learning as a cornerstone of student success, ensuring that students consistently have opportunities to take theory and put it into practice.