



ON-CAMPUS

by Sheila Wagner

Experiential Learning at Delaware Valley University

As young college graduates enter the real world job market, it is very often the experiences outside the classroom that set them apart from fellow applicants. Students at Delaware Valley University can be sure that they are ready when that time comes because of DelVal's Experience360 Program.

In September of this year, the university accepted a national award for being a leader in experiential learning. The Experience360 Program was named the 2019 Outstanding Experiential Education Program by the National Society for Experiential Education (NSEE). NSEE awards this honor in recognition of "an outstanding institution that has demonstrated an exceptional commitment to experiential education."

Outstanding Experiential Education

"Having a prominent organization recognize Delaware Valley University as a national leader in experiential learning is rewarding," said Dr. Benjamin Rusiloski, vice president for academic affairs and dean of the faculty. "We plan to continue to expand and refine our program and serve as a resource for other schools."

Students start preparing for their careers from the very first semester on campus, beginning with a course incorporating professional development and problem-based learning and ending with the creation of a co-curricular transcript that includes experiences such as internships, study abroad, research and civic engagement.

Experience360 Program

Experience360 Program Director Darrah Mugrauer explained that undergraduate students complete at least two experiential learning activities as a component of their required curriculum at Delaware Valley University. Each individual academic department has its own set of requirements from which students can pick and choose the most appropriate activities for their career and professional development goals. There are eight types of activities, Mugrauer added, which include Academic Internship, Career Exploration Experience, Student Research, Study/Cultural Experience Abroad, Community Service, Civic Engagement, Leadership Development, and Experiential Learning coursework.

"I transferred [to Delaware] and immediately found that the E360 program provided urgency and a practical experience that is imperative to having prior to graduating. The position I am in right now is directly because of the program and the personal development you receive directly from the professors." — FRANCIS ARNOLD, JR., '16

All undergraduate students participate in some facet of the Experience360 Program. In their first year, students participate in DelVal Experience seminar coursework, focused on problem-based learning and professional development. Each activity within the Experience360 Program includes real-time reflection within online coursework. These classes are led by faculty and staff instructors who provide feedback and guidance to students. While there are credit-bearing and non-credit bearing components to the program, all reflection activities are graded and included in a student's GPA.

Career Goals And Action Steps

According to the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), employers tend to rate recent college graduates lower on certain key career competencies, such as professionalism and work ethic, than students rate themselves. "Through data collected over seven years within the Experience360 Program," said Mugrauer, "we found that DelVal students are rated highly by employers." Mugrauer believes that is because the program encourages self-reflection and development of both soft skills and industry specific skills based in hands-on learning. The program requires students to



The image shows a bright green Mean Green Commercial Electric Zero Turn Mower. It features a large cutting deck with multiple blades, a black seat with a headrest, and a steering wheel. The background is a sunny, open grassy area with trees under a clear blue sky. The Mean Green logo, consisting of three stylized green leaves above the words "MEAN GREEN" and "MOWERS" in a bold, sans-serif font, is positioned in the upper left corner of the advertisement.

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consider, reflect and respond to professional development and career goals in a number of ways throughout participation.

Prior to the experiential learning activity, Mugrauer continued, students must identify a career goal and action steps to assist in their planning. As part of activity approval, students must prepare learning objectives related to the activity that are then approved by site supervisor and faculty. While participating in the experiential learning activity, students are required to read materials related to the activity and professional etiquette if applicable. Students also write a pre-flection paper outlining learning objectives, short-term and long-term goals. "Building this reflection into the activity through the process allows for students to gain more from their experiences and use them to grow," Mugrauer stated.

Francis Arnold, Jr., who graduated from DVU in 2016 said, "I transferred there and immediately found that the E360 program provided urgency and a practical experience that is imperative to having prior to graduating. The position I am in right now is directly because of

the program and the personal development you receive directly from the professors." He thanks the entire business department at DVU for their commitment to supporting, challenging and empowering students which enabled him to persevere.

Strategic Plans For Future

"Experiential education is at the center of University's strategic plan," noted Mugrauer. DVU's founder, Dr. Joseph Krauskopf, developed their institution with a mission of "science with practice."

The Experience360 Program allows students to continue to work towards this mission in and out of the classroom, partnering with campus and community members to become learners and leaders in their fields. They continue to seek and foster relationships that aid in providing their students with opportunities for unique hands-on learning experiences within and outside of the walls of a traditional classroom. The University's strategic plan calls for developing a Center for Teaching and Learning. "This Center will serve our internal campus

community in areas of experiential learning and serve as a resource for the larger community, including other institutions," she added.

DelVal President Dr. Maria Gallo stated, "Delaware Valley University is leading the way in experiential education. As we implement our new strategic plan, we will continue to expand and enhance our innovative and effective approach to experiential learning."

Mugrauer is justly proud of the fact that since the pilot class graduated from the E360 Program in 2015, the University's career outcomes rate has increased by a total of 5.5 percentage points. She concluded, "We think this increase speaks to the value of experiential learning and the impact it is having on our students and alumni."



ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Sheila Wagner has spent the last several years working as a professional editor and recently became the staff writer for *Private University Products and News*. Wagner can be reached at sheila@pupnmag.com.

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