

University of North Florida

Community-Based Transformational Learning

The University of North Florida (UNF) selected Community-Based Transformational Learning (CBTL) as the topic for its QEP. The selection of CBTL will enable UNF to build on a history of community engagement that began in 1972. UNF's initial growth was linked to strong and vibrant community partnerships throughout northeast Florida offering the university resources and opportunities to enhance and expand its educational programs.

As the university has matured, the number of these partnerships has grown and the nature of these relationships has evolved. UNF has become a significant contributing force to the region's economic, civic, and cultural growth. The university has also taken a critical role in addressing community issues in areas ranging from improving manufacturing to addressing increases in crime rates and from improving early literacy to supporting small business growth in the community.

Through ongoing local and international partnerships, UNF has been able to provide students with experiences beyond the walls of the classroom and into community settings. These community engagement experiences allow students to deepen their disciplinary knowledge, translating it into practice while directly applying skills in hands-on activities, and practice important civic skills. These experiences have also provided students opportunities to engage in critical thinking and to improve their professional communication skills. Students often report how valuable and, at times, transformative these activities have been. To date, however, these experiences have been limited to certain curricula, varied in approach, and not always intentionally mindful of the pedagogy associated with the experiences.

Recognizing the benefits arising from community-based learning experiences, UNF's CBTL program is designed to replicate these community-based transformational learning experiences across the curriculum to engage virtually all UNF students. Each experience will be evaluated to ensure that it is founded on pedagogy that maximizes student learning and that ensures students will come to understand the cultural norms within the communities in which they work, while also exploring professional responsibilities.

The CBTL program described herein builds on and extends several ongoing university initiatives integral to UNF's commitment to students, including the institution's Transformational Learning Opportunity program, international studies programs, and other work being carried out in some departments, colleges, and nonacademic units.

Central to executing UNF's CBTL program will be its newly-established Center for Community-Based Learning. The Center will collaborate with UNF's Office of Faculty Enhancement to assist faculty in developing courses that incorporate community-based learning experiences. These courses will be developed across the curriculum over the next five years. The Center will also work with community agencies and businesses to nurture and develop new community partnerships to serve as community-based learning sites for UNF students.

UNF recognizes that it cannot fully realize the potential of the CBTL program without integrating comprehensive assessment of student learning outcomes and continuous modification of its programs based upon its evaluation of the overall program effectiveness.

For information on the development and implementation of the UNF QEP, please contact:

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