A Roadmap:

The Positive Role of Acknowledging Students' Successes in Experiential Learning

This is a helpful roadmap to use when considering how to identify and celebrate students' successes during an experiential learning course or opportunity.

The University of Tennessee-Knoxville's Experience Learning Resource Guide (2016) states that "Recognition of learning and impact occur throughout the experience by way of the reflection and monitoring processes and through reporting, documentation, and sharing of accomplishments. All parties to the experience should be included in the recognition of progress and accomplishment. Culminating documentation and celebration of learning and impact help provide closure and sustainability to the experience" (p. 25).
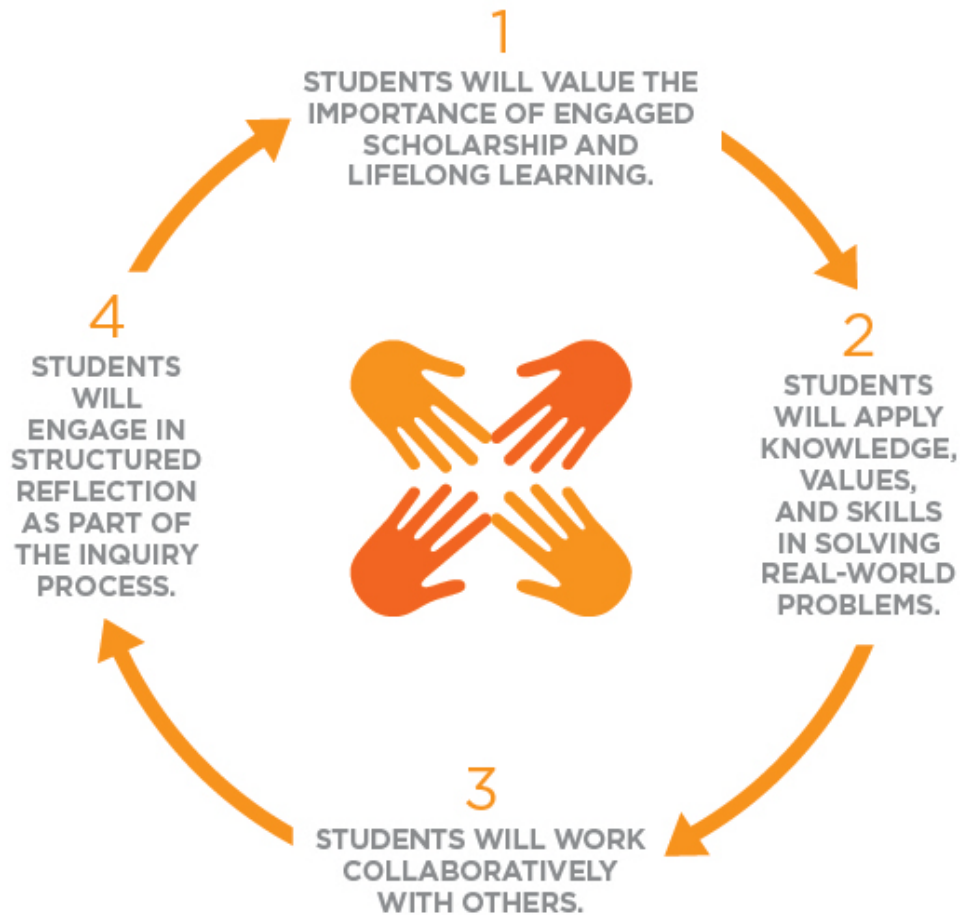
First, it is important to realize that students can succeed in various ways, as both learning and impact can be considered processes by which students are recognized.

Oftentimes, the two are closely related. Consider, for instance, a service-learning student providing services to a local non-profit closely related to her academic discipline. The student may be learning theoretical content that supplements her coursework, and she may simultaneously be applying that new knowledge to transform another individual's life through her service. Both can be considered "successes", and although one may be more visible than another, it does not diminish the quality of the less public-facing achievement. The significance of acknowledging both successes is significant, as studies indicate that oftentimes "students cannot apply even recently learned information to new situations" (Eyler, 2009). Thus, by proactively celebrating these accomplishments when they occur, you are reinforcing the value of real-world application in a meaningful way.

T TEACHING & LEARNING INNOVATION

In experiential learning contexts, you may consider acknowledging students' successes as they relate to the Experience Learning initiative's four Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs):

1 STUDENTS WILL VALUE THE IMPORTANCE OF ENGAGED SCHOLARSHIP AND LIFELONG LEARNING.

2 STUDENTS WILL APPLY KNOWLEDGE, VALUES, AND SKILLS IN SOLVING REAL-WORLD PROBLEMS.

3 STUDENTS WILL WORK COLLABORATIVELY WITH OTHERS.

4 STUDENTS WILL ENGAGE IN STRUCTURED REFLECTION AS PART OF THE INQUIRY PROCESS.

Given that these are four goals of the Experience Learning initiative (University of Tennessee, 2016, p. 36) and can be incorporated into your course for assessment purposes, it makes sense to leverage them for the secondary purpose of acknowledging student success. **These SLOs provide a framework by which to identify and celebrate the good work that students are doing and the things that they are learning in experiential learning courses or experiences**.

TEACHING & LEARNING INNOVATION

Another way that you can promote your students' achievements in experiential learning courses is by promoting the inclusion of their accomplishments on the university's recently-debuted Co-Curricular Transcript (CCT).

Not all experiences are eligible for inclusion on the CCT, but those that are may include the following:

- Leadership Experiences
- Service Experiences
- International Education Experiences
- Professional or Applied Experiences
- Undergraduate Research Experiences

Please visit **our website** for more information about how your students' achievements can be highlighted on a Co-Curricular Transcript.
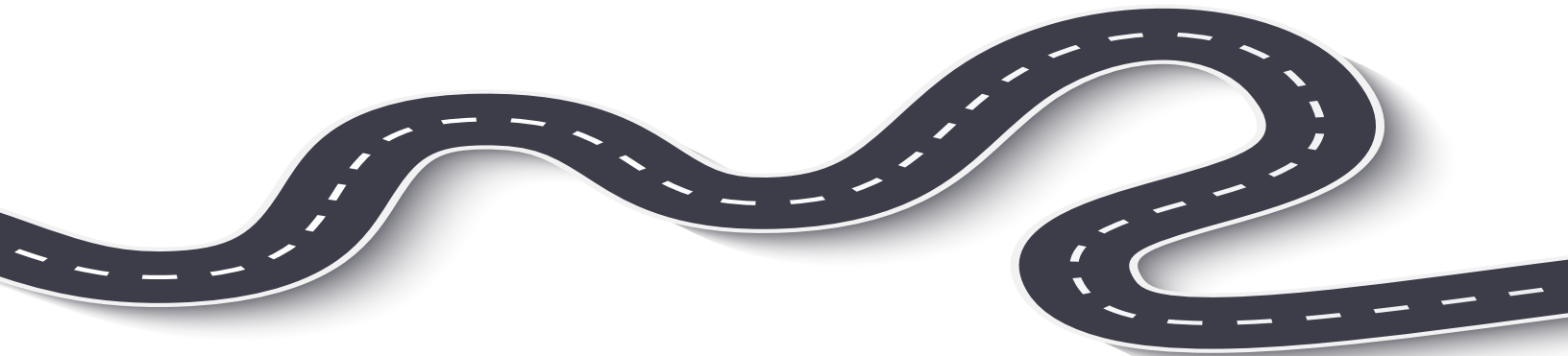
These strategies for recognizing students' accomplishments can reaffirm the value of experiential learning for the student, the instructor, and community partners, if applicable. Reflecting on the overall experience can provide a list of triumphs to celebrate, failures to learn from, and can demonstrate the personal and academic growth that occurred throughout the process. *Moreover, individual and group reflection, accompanied by the mutual celebration of a successful experience, can provide a sense of closure for involved parties.*

References

Eyler, Jane. (2009). The power of experiential education. Liberal Education, 95(4).

University of Tennessee. (2016). Experience Learning: Resource guide. Retrieved from

https://experiencelearning.utk.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/21/2018/04/442930-ELResourceBookUpdate-v2.0accessible-smaller.pdf