

Partnering for Possibilities

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[Link to Presentation >> http://bit.ly/402dFc3](http://bit.ly/402dFc3)



Full Presentation Summary:

The increasing demand for a highly skilled workforce is driving an urgent need for academic experiential learning opportunities that help to upskill and reskill (Dolan et al., 2022). Though much of higher education has remained relatively slow to respond to, Excelsior University has developed unique approaches to offer flexible and personalized options for its diverse student body of working adults, active-duty military service members, industry leaders and those working on the front lines of health care.

Research has suggested that experiential learning creates optimal learning opportunities for adult learners because adults have experiences to reflect, inquire, and develop and implement new ideas (Ash & Clayton, 2004; Kolb, 1984). Experiential learning is a process through which students develop knowledge, values and skills from direct experiences and can include techniques, such as case analyses, simulations, internships, research papers, field projects, and reflection exercises (Dunlap & Grabinger, 2003; Selwyn, 2015). In recent years, several scholars on education and andragogy have advocated incorporating experiential learning in courses (Ash & Clayton, 2004).

In the Fall of 2021, the School of Graduate Students launched the online Master of Science in Organizational Leadership with an Emphasis in Technology and Data Analytics program, and its online Graduate Certificate in Data Analytics. Uniquely, the School developed project options in three of the major courses: Strategic Management of Innovative Technology, Data Analytics, and Big Data and Visualization. Students choose from a self-selected project topic, projects co-developed with real-world companies, or experiential learning experiences offered through a partnership with Forage—a virtual work experience platform that partners with Fortune 500 companies to offer bite-sized, virtual work experience programs that give students a genuine career advantage. These three experiences provide autonomy for the way in which students can demonstrate and apply their learnings.

- In the self-selected project, students select a real-world entity to work with and analyze in the provided framework. They must interview individuals, analyze data, and compile reports and recommendations for their entity.
- The School has also partnered with real-world companies to offer project options. Each partnership was forged through our industry connections and grounded in our rigorous course development process. Our subject matter experts worked closely with our partners to develop company introductions and course projects. Students are asked to sign a waiver that allows us to share their findings with the company, which helps to form a reciprocal relationship.
- In a partnership with the Career Readiness Center, the School formed a relationship with Forage. These experiences replicate work at top companies and connect students to the companies themselves, which we believe is an invaluable way for students to culminate their learning in a course.

In this presentation, we will share the impetus for this project option model, as well as the impact of good leadership, meaningful partnerships, and well-designed courses on the success of such a project. Audience members will get a chance to hear about faculty and student reactions, as well as plans to keep the project options current and the industry partnerships strong.

References

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