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Purdue Calumet to require experiential learning for all students

HAMMOND, Ind. – It will take more than classroom and laboratory learning to earn an undergraduate degree at Purdue University Calumet. Also required will be an experiential learning component—two, to be exact.

Purdue Calumet officials announced at a news conference today (4/9) that the university is incorporating within all undergraduate academic degree curricula structured programs of experiential learning. Types of programs include internships, cooperative education, applied research with faculty, cultural immersion (study abroad), design projects, community service learning and practicums. Such programs will become a graduation requirement for every student enrolling at Purdue Calumet beginning in fall 2008.

“A high quality education should integrate classroom and laboratory learning with learning that takes place in job-related settings—the same settings in which we expect our students to work after they graduate,” Purdue Calumet Chancellor Howard Cohen said. “We think that is a very effective form of learning, and we are pleased to be able to assure all of our graduates that they will leave Purdue Calumet having learned experientially.”

Purdue Calumet’s Faculty Senate recently approved a recommendation to establish the requirement in the form of two courses or equivalents. The action makes Purdue Calumet the first university within the Purdue system to take such a step.

“Our Faculty Senate and its Experiential Learning Committee recognized the importance of including experiential learning in our curricula and set ground work unlike anything I have ever worked with before,” Faculty Senate Chair and Associate Professor of Nursing Maureen Marthaler said. “We’re excited to move

forward with this emerging new trend of value-added learning in higher education and become a leader within the Purdue system.”

The action follows Purdue Calumet’s receipt last year of a \$1.7 million U.S. Dept. of Education Title III grant to develop a comprehensive experiential education program through faculty and curriculum development. The National Society for Experiential Education has helped Purdue Calumet implement the grant and will expand its partnership with the university.

“For many years, experiential learning has existed in various ways on our campus and others related to specific academic programs,” Purdue Calumet Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs Nabil Ibrahim said. “With respect to the action by our Faculty Senate, the continued implementation of our Title III grant and our growing partnership with the National Society for Experiential Education, Purdue Calumet has positioned itself to provide structure and organization to experiential learning so as to emerge as a leader in the field.”

In its growing partnership role with the National Society for Experiential Education, Purdue Calumet will serve as the Northwest Indiana Center for Experiential Education and become a host site of NSEE’s Experiential Education Academy. Through the academy, faculty of Purdue Calumet and other universities can receive training in experiential education through a six-course certificate program.

Purdue Calumet joins the University of New Haven (Conn.) as a formal, NSEE partner university.

“Purdue Calumet’s action will enable its students to become better prepared to enter their chosen work force area,” said Karen Roloff, president of the NSEE Board of Directors, DePaul University professor of communication and director of DePaul’s communication internship program. “But the real value is going into an experience with learning outcomes in mind—connecting through reflection and intentionality the world of work and the world of learning.”

Purdue Calumet communication alumnus Shawn Platt, senior vice president and director of communications for LaSalle Bank in Chicago, calls “immeasurable” the experiential learning he derived in his hands-on, Problems in Public Relations course at Purdue Calumet.

“My career truly began the first day I walked into that class,” he said. “We had to form a consulting company, onboard a client and conduct an exhaustive communication audit. It was 12 of us coming together to provide a meaningful assessment of our client’s communication dynamics. Ten years later, it remains one of the most challenging experiences I’ve had.”

In preparation for the fall 2008 rollout, Purdue Calumet faculty and staff will identify and develop experiential learning curricula, while faculty development will continue through the Title III grant and NSEE Experiential Education Academy.

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