Prepared by: Walter Roettger, Convener, ALTF
March 31, 2017

CHARGE: The Task Force is charged to recommend to Faculty Assembly and the administration whether to include an applied learning experience (as defined by SUNY) as a graduation requirement.

TASK FORCE MEMBERSHIP: The Task Force was constituted in accordance with the bylaws of the Faculty Assembly. During deliberations, it included the following nine members:

- College of Liberal Arts and Sciences: Dr. Gwen Kay, Professor, Director of Honors Program
- School of Communication, Media and the Arts: Jeff Bradbury, Assistant Professor and Internship Coordinator
- School of Education: Dr. Amanda Fenlon, Associate Professor
- Professional staff: Dr. Denise DiRienzo, Director, Center for Experiential Education
- Student Association Appointee: Omar Van Reenen
- UUP: Dr. Ed Lonky, Professor of Psychology
- Student Affairs: Dr. Jerald Woolfolk, Vice President for Student Affairs and Enrollment Management
- Academic Affairs: Rameen Mohammadi, Associate Provost for Undergraduate and Special Programs; Dr. Walter Roettger, Provost (Convener)

TASK FORCE MEETINGS: The ALTF met on seven occasions: February 16, February 20, February 24, March 2, March 9, March 21 and March 28. Agendas were prepared and distributed prior to the meetings; minutes were developed and approved following the meetings. Jerry Oberst, Senior Associate Director of Admission and Gary Morris, Director of Career Services, provided valuable perspectives on the advantages and disadvantages of requiring applied learning during their separate conversations with the Task Force as part of its meetings.

BACKGROUND: This report traces to Governor Cuomo’s 2015-16 Opportunity Agenda that, in turn, prompted language in the New York State 2015-2016 budget. This language led the BOT to issue a resolution requiring SUNY to develop a plan to make applied learning activities available to SUNY students. SUNY followed with guidance that required campus responses to seven questions including:

1. Overview of campus applied learning activities (Part I: submitted February 2016)
2. Campus plan for data collection and reporting (Part II: submitted April 15, 2016)
3. Campus plan for faculty engagement (Part III: submitted April 15, 2016)
4. Campus Plan for student engagement (Part IV: submitted April 15, 2016)
5. Regional Feasibility study (Part V: due May 1, 2017)
6. Campus collaboration plan (Part VI: due May 1, 2017)
7. Campus determination for an applied learning graduation requirement (Part VII: due May 1, 2017)

SUNY Oswego responded to Parts I-IV in a timely fashion drawing upon the resources of the Center for Experiential Learning (CEL) and the Provost’s Office. In addition, CEL and the Provost’s Office developed draft responses to Part V and Part VI of the project. These were further refined in conversation in the Task Force and will be submitted along with the response to Part VII.
DEFINITION OF APPLIED LEARNING: In its initial request for information, SUNY indicated that the experiences must (1) be structured, intentional and authentic; (2) require preparation, orientation and training; (3) include monitoring and continuous improvement; (4) require structured reflection and acknowledgment; and (5) be assessed and evaluated. It is noteworthy that these criteria do not require a worksite experience. In addition to these criteria, SUNY stated that

Applied learning refers to an educational approach whereby students learn by engaging in direct application of skills, theories and models. Students apply knowledge and skills gained from traditional classroom learning to hands-on and/or real world settings, creative projects or independent or directed research, and in turn apply what is gained from the applied experience to academic learning. The applied learning activity can occur outside of the traditional classroom experience and/or be embedded as part of a course.¹

Again, a worksite experience is allowed and even encouraged, but not required. Consequently, SUNY Oswego’s integrative capstones appear to qualify. This report will refer to this usage as the “SUNY definition” of applied learning.

In the course of its deliberations, the Task Force came to understand that the day to day usage of “applied learning” often includes the expectation that it will take place at a worksite where the student participant is exposed directly to the expectations and practices of the workplace. This report will refer to this as the “traditional definition” of applied learning.

CURRENT SITUATION: At present, SUNY Oswego makes applied learning opportunities available to all students who seek one – though entry to particular kinds of experiences may be limited by GPA, class level, or prerequisites depending upon program requirements or type of applied learning experience. A study by our Office of Institutional Research and Assessment indicates that 93% of 2015-2016 graduating seniors participated in one or more courses/experiences that satisfied the SUNY definition. Using the traditional definition, IR&A reports that 66% of the graduating 2015-2016 graduating seniors had one or more applied learning experiences. Thus, a majority of 2015-2016 graduating seniors had an applied learning experience by either definition.

During its deliberations, the ALTF identified reasons for and against an applied learning graduation requirement. These are summarized in tabular form at the end of this narrative and discussed in greater detail in the following narrative.

REASONS FOR REQUIRING

1. **Mission and strategy:** Applied learning is supported by our mission and explicitly supported by our Strategic Plan. Thus adding applied learning – whether traditionally defined or SUNY defined -- as a graduation requirement would not involve changes in mission or strategy.

2. **Current practice:** A study conducted by our Institutional Research and Assessment Office indicates that 93% of our graduates in 2015-2016 had a SUNY applied learning experience while 66% had a traditionally defined applied learning experience. Thus, adding applied learning as a graduation requirement using the SUNY definition would involve extending these opportunities to about 7% (about 110) of our seniors while adding a traditionally defined applied learning experience would affect about 34% (about 545) of our seniors.

3. **Definitions:** SUNY’s five criteria, drawn from the National Society of Experiential Education (NSEE), allow our “integrative capstones” to count as applied learning courses.

4. **Potential Benefits:**
   a. **Potential student benefits:**
      1) The evidence about the educational effectiveness of applied learning provided by SUNY and other sources is compelling. For example, the McKinsey Education to Employment Report\(^2\) supplied by SUNY indicates that applied learning is among the most effective learning tools for traditional age students and that employers believe it to be an important contributor to the development of key workplace skills. Similarly, the Gallup-Purdue Study\(^3\) summary provided by SUNY indicates that applied learning experiences are associated with student beliefs that their college experience prepared them well for life. Adding either traditional or applied learning experiences as graduation requirement could engage more students in this experience and foster these perceptions.

      2) Focus groups conducted by Hezel Associates\(^4\) that included SUNY Oswego students indicated that students valued applied learning and saw it as valuable in the development of “soft skills.” They used these experiences to refine career goals and develop networks and reported that their experience enhanced their sense of community. Adding a traditional applied learning experience as a graduation requirement could engage more students in this experience.

   b. **Potential benefits to institution:** Adding a traditional applied learning experience as a graduation requirement could strengthen ties to the businesses, schools and not-for-profits in the local, regional and statewide community and differentiate SUNY Oswego from competitors.

   c. **Potential benefits to community:**
      1) SUNY Oswego is committed to partnering “…with local, national and international communities...[to]…make an impact through research, community service and economic development for collective prosperity, equity, resilience and success."\(^5\) The Center for Experiential Learning’s Research indicates that our students contributed 378,268 hours of service in 2015-2016 with an estimated value of $3,782,680 (at $10/hour). Requiring traditionally defined applied learning for graduation could increase this.

      2) A traditionally defined applied learning requirement would likely increase the number of graduates with work experience. This would arguably increase the number of “work ready” students for the local, regional and statewide economy.

   d. **Potential benefits to stakeholders:**
      1) Many faculty have embraced applied learning as an important complement to classroom activities and included applied learning experiences in program requirements either in the form of worksite placements or integrative capstones.

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\(^3\) Ibid., slide 15.

\(^4\) Ibid., slide 23.

\(^5\) SUNY Oswego, Tomorrow: Impact 3.
Requiring applied learning for graduation (both definitions) could increase faculty engagement.

2) External stakeholders: Admission staff reported that parents and prospective students viewed applied learning positively; this is supported by research. Similarly, our Career Services staff provided data from National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) indicating employer interest in internships and co-ops. Career Services also reported on comments from a small phone survey of local recruiters that indicated that they value applied learning. Adding applied learning as a graduation requirement (either definition) could further engage these groups.

**REASONS FOR NOT REQUIRING**

1. **Mission and strategy:** Our Strategic Plan commits us to continued improvement of retention and on-time graduation rates. There is reason to believe that another graduation requirement would place an additional hurdle before all students in an effort to expand participation in applied learning for a relatively small number. This could have an adverse impact on retention and graduation rates.

2. **Current Practice:** Presently, students who seek an appropriate applied learning experience are able to secure it; 93% enroll in courses that satisfy the SUNY criteria and 66% enroll in courses that have a worksite experience. We believe that the interest and motivation associated with seeking and securing either an integrative capstone or a worksite experience is important to the quality of the experience as is the student choice in developing their own curricular path in consultation with advisers.

3. **Definitions:** The day-to-day usage of “applied learning” connotes a worksite experience for some (but not all) stakeholders. This could cause confusion.

4. **Potential Costs:**
   a. **Potential costs to students:**
      1) Program duration: The addition of another requirement raises another hurdle to be overcome. For transfers and students who change majors, an additional requirement – whether traditional worksite experience or integrative capstone -- has a very real possibility of extending time to graduation.
      2) Access: in many cases, applied learning experiences are competitive – students need to apply and interview. Consequently, it is difficult to guarantee access to a particular experience or type of experience. Though this is particularly true of experiences that are “traditional,” it also applies to those that satisfy the SUNY definition.
      3) Capacity: There are limitations on the number of worksites in a smaller community. In order to have a traditional applied learning experience, some students are likely to have to travel and to travel farther. The resulting time, inconvenience and financial costs are likely to be significant for some. This is particularly true of the traditional definition requiring a worksite placement.
   b. **Potential costs to institution:**
      1) An additional requirement could affect recruiting and retention as prospective students who are not seeking applied learning tilt toward institutions that do not have this requirement.
2) Support programs: Were we to increase the number of applied learning experiences (using either definition of applied learning), it would be necessary to strengthen and expand advising, placement development, oversight, quality assurance and verification activities. This would differentially increase workload and require additional staffing. This would be particularly true of the traditional definition.

3) Resource considerations for the campus: increased staffing and expanded programs would be associated with increased delivery costs. This is true of traditional experiences and those which follow the SUNY model.

c. Potential costs to community (These costs are particularly relevant for the traditionally defined applied learning):
   1) At present, SUNY Oswego partners with nearly 200 K-12 schools, 400 businesses, non-profit organizations and governmental entities to provide and sustain applied learning placements. These relationships are subject to the vicissitudes of economic change
   2) There are limitations on capacity or the number of worksites that may be developed and maintained in the local community. This will require travel and cost for some students.

d. Potential costs to Stakeholders: According to Admission staff, many prospective students and parents appear to understand “applied learning” as including a worksite experience – i.e., the traditional definition. Conversations with Career Services staff suggest at least some employers also use the term in this way. These competing understandings could lead to confusion among key stakeholders including parents, prospective students and employers regarding the educational experience and specific job readiness.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION: The ALTF notes that:

- Research indicates that applied learning is a valuable pedagogical technique.
- Applied learning is available to all SUNY Oswego students whose programs require it and/or who seek it and who meet requirements;
- A majority of SUNY Oswego’s 2015-2016 graduating seniors had experiences that satisfied the SUNY definition (93%) or the traditional usage (66%);
- An additional graduation requirement could potentially pose significant costs to students, the institution, the community and stakeholders.

On balance, these potential costs appear to the Task Force to outweigh the potential benefits. Therefore, after due consideration, the Applied Learning Task Force recommends that SUNY Oswego not adopt applied learning activities as a local graduation requirement for all undergraduate students.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Require</th>
<th>Not Require</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mission &amp; Strategy</td>
<td>• AL is supported by mission and Strategic Plan</td>
<td>• We have 93% participation (SUNY) without graduation requirement</td>
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<td>• New graduation requirement adds hurdle that could adversely impact</td>
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<td>retention and graduation</td>
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<td>Current practice</td>
<td>• 93% of students experience AL reflecting our commitment</td>
<td>• 93% are able to secure AL</td>
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<td>• All who want are able to get AL</td>
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<td>• Interest and motivation (as demonstrated by seeking rather than</td>
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<td>requiring) contribute to successful AL experiences</td>
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<td>Criteria &amp; definitions</td>
<td>• SUNY’s broad definition and criteria can be satisfied by a large</td>
<td>• Traditional definition and SUNY</td>
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<td>number of SUNY Oswego courses</td>
<td>definitions do not appear fully consistent. This could lead to</td>
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<td>confusion.</td>
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<td>Potential Benefits/Costs</td>
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<td>• Student impacts</td>
<td>• Research provides compelling evidence of educational effectiveness</td>
<td>• Requirement could lengthen time to graduation, esp. for transfers and</td>
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<td>(McKinsey, Gallup-Purdue, Hezel)</td>
<td>major changers</td>
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<td>• Difficult to guarantee for all due to standards and requirements</td>
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<td>• Could lead to significant travel time and inconvenience/cost for students</td>
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<td>• Institutional impacts</td>
<td>• Strengthened ties to local, regional and statewide businesses, schools</td>
<td>• Additional requirement could impact recruiting and retention</td>
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<td>and not-for-profits.</td>
<td>• Requirement would require increased support programs; these would fall</td>
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<td>differentially on programs</td>
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<td>• Increased support would require increases in staffing and financial</td>
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<td>resources</td>
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<td>• Community impacts</td>
<td>• SUNY Oswego students contribute contributed 378,268 hours of service</td>
<td>• Difficulty of sustaining worksites in economic downturns</td>
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<td>in 2015-16 valued at nearly $3.8 million</td>
<td>• Placement capacity limitations would require greater/further outreach</td>
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<td>• Required AL could increase work ready graduates for jobs</td>
<td>and increase the likelihood of student travel</td>
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<td>• Stakeholder impacts</td>
<td>• Many faculty have embraced AL as important complement to classroom</td>
<td>• Many if not most faculty as well as parents, prospects and employers</td>
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<td>• Parents, prospective students and employers view AL positively</td>
<td>appear to understand applied learning as including a worksite experience.</td>
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SUMMARY OF REASONS FOR/AGAINST REQUIRING APPLIED LEARNING (AL)