

# Getting REAL:

Using data to tell our experiential learning story

September 23, 2019

Cabell Library, Room 303



**VCU** Center for Teaching  
and Learning Excellence



**VCU** Relevant, Experiential  
and Applied Learning

# Welcome!

As an icebreaker, three questions await you:

- What is your connection with experiential learning at VCU?
- What percentage of undergraduate students do you believe are currently participating in a REAL course at VCU?
- What percentage of sections do you believe are currently providing REAL experiences?

# Objective for today

- To continue sharing progress and keep you informed about REAL
- Share the prototype of a data tool and engage you in its further development
- Encourage your participation in the data collection process going forward

# Defining REAL

VCU's REAL initiative ensures that every VCU student has the opportunity to engage in transformative career-building activities that turn classroom knowledge into real-life experience, action, or service.



# REAL TIMELINE

**Spring  
2016**

**Fall  
2016**

**Spring  
2017**

**Fall  
2018**

**Spring  
2019**



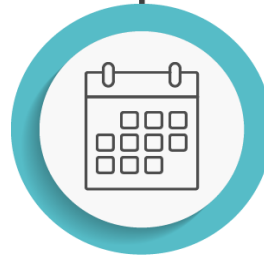
## **State of the University Address**

"All students will have a real-world experience as part of their VCU education."  
- President Rao



## **Steering Committee convenes**

19 faculty and professional staff from the MPC and MCV campuses. "REAL" name adopted



## **VCU Making It REAL report published**

Four REAL themes identified and 10 recommendations offered in steering committee report



## **REAL launch**

AVP for REAL hired, REAL Task Force convened, implementation plan drafted, and Year 1 actions begin



## **REAL Opportunity Audit**

More than 1,000 courses and co-curriculars assessed through a REAL taxonomy. Course codes and pilot tracking mechanisms developed.



**VCU REAL is not  
“add two and stir”**

# About the Opportunity Audit

The Opportunity Audit took place in spring and summer 2019, capturing both credit-based and non-credit experiential learning activities already happening at VCU.

It consisted of two phases:

- **Inventory:** A pre-populated spreadsheet sent to every school/college for review, based off information in Banner
- **Face-to-face:** Follow-up meetings to discuss inventory results, answers questions and address gaps.

# Why this inventory data matters

- A first step towards a comprehensive and holistic picture of experiential learning at VCU (credit and non-credit activities, curricular and co-curricular)
- Helps establish baselines against which we can measure growth
- Over time will help us identify which student populations have access to experiential learning opportunities, and, more importantly, which do not

**REAL is one mechanism for ensuring equity and access to transformative career-building experiences. The dashboard is one tool we can use to measure and calibrate our progress.**



# Experiential learning and equity

Research shows that experiential learning **serves as an equalizer** for many underserved populations, including:

- Underrepresented minorities (~35% of VCU's Fall 2018 cohort)
- Pell-eligible students (~33% of VCU's Fall 2018 cohort)
- First-generation students (~33% of VCU's 2017-18 freshman class)

# What REAL means in practice

REAL means:

- Valuing and empowering students **from all backgrounds**
- New/improved **curricular elements** to ensure adherence to best practices
- New or improved **tracking** of experiential learning across the institution
- Bringing an **equity lens** to experiential learning through information sharing and student exposure to **tailored, career-building** experiential learning opportunities

REAL **does not** mean:

- Increasing a student's time to degree or debt load



# Capturing **REAL** activities

# REAL types

- Capstone
- Integrative learning
- Career exploration and development
- Interprofessional collaboration
- Civic learning and engagement
- Leadership education
- Co-ops
- Living learning communities
- Entrepreneurship and innovation
- Project/performance-based learning
- Field experiences
- Practicums/clinical placements
- Independent study
- Research
- Internship
- Service learning



# REAL pedagogic pillars

- **Hands-on learning** that engages the student in applying or exploring disciplinary knowledge in real-world or simulated contexts
- **Guided reflection** as an intentional metacognitive practice where students articulate personal, civic/social, or academic learning; identify values and attitudes developed through the activity; and/or explore and clarify career goals
- **Mentored experiences** wherein the faculty/staff member or activity supervisor responds regularly to student work, supports student reflection and integration of learning throughout the activity, and encourages goal-setting for future learning
- **Integrative learning** as both a pedagogy and a measure of a student's capacity to connect, synthesize and transfer learning to new, complex situations beyond campus.



# REAL Levels

The REAL Levels are an indication of the degree to which individual experiential learning courses and co-curricular activities incorporate the pedagogic pillars:

- **Level 1:** A course or non-course activity that engages students in a clearly defined experiential learning activity but does not incorporate reflection.
- **Level 2:** A course or non-course activity that engages students in a clearly defined experiential learning activity and incorporates either guided reflection or mentoring.
- **Level 3:** A course or non-course activity in a clearly defined experiential learning activity that incorporates reflection and a mentoring model.
- **Level 4:** A course or non-course activity that adheres to all four characteristics.



# REAL Pyramid (rev. April 2019)

Deep and extended exposure to complex problems and rigorous self evaluation typical of advanced research experiences, applied health graduate work, advanced client-based projects, advanced internship experiences, a co-op experience, select practica and clinicals, serving as an Alternative Spring Break trip leader, serving as a Peer Leader or Mentor, graduating from one of the LLPs

Incorporates integrative learning as a pedagogy and as an intentionally measured outcome in addition to incorporating reflection and mentoring at high levels.

**Level  
4**

Incorporates reflection and mentoring at moderate to high levels

Deep exposure to complex problems typical of courses at 300 and 400 levels, structured internships, a faculty designed undergraduate research experience, participation in a study away, work study research assistantship.

**Level  
3**

Deeper exposure to a complex problem typical of 100 and 200-level courses, a career shadowing experience with a non-profit or NGO, an introductory research experience, participation in an alternative spring break, etc.

Incorporates either reflective practice or structured mentoring

**Level  
2**

Incorporates at least one extended "hands-on" activity where disciplinary content is tested against experience in a real-world or simulated real-world context.

Exploratory experiences, one-offs, exposure to issues. Examples: volunteer activities, exploring a student club or organization, participating in 1 cr. research forum.

**Level  
1**



## Integrative Learning Across Experiences

# Preliminary results

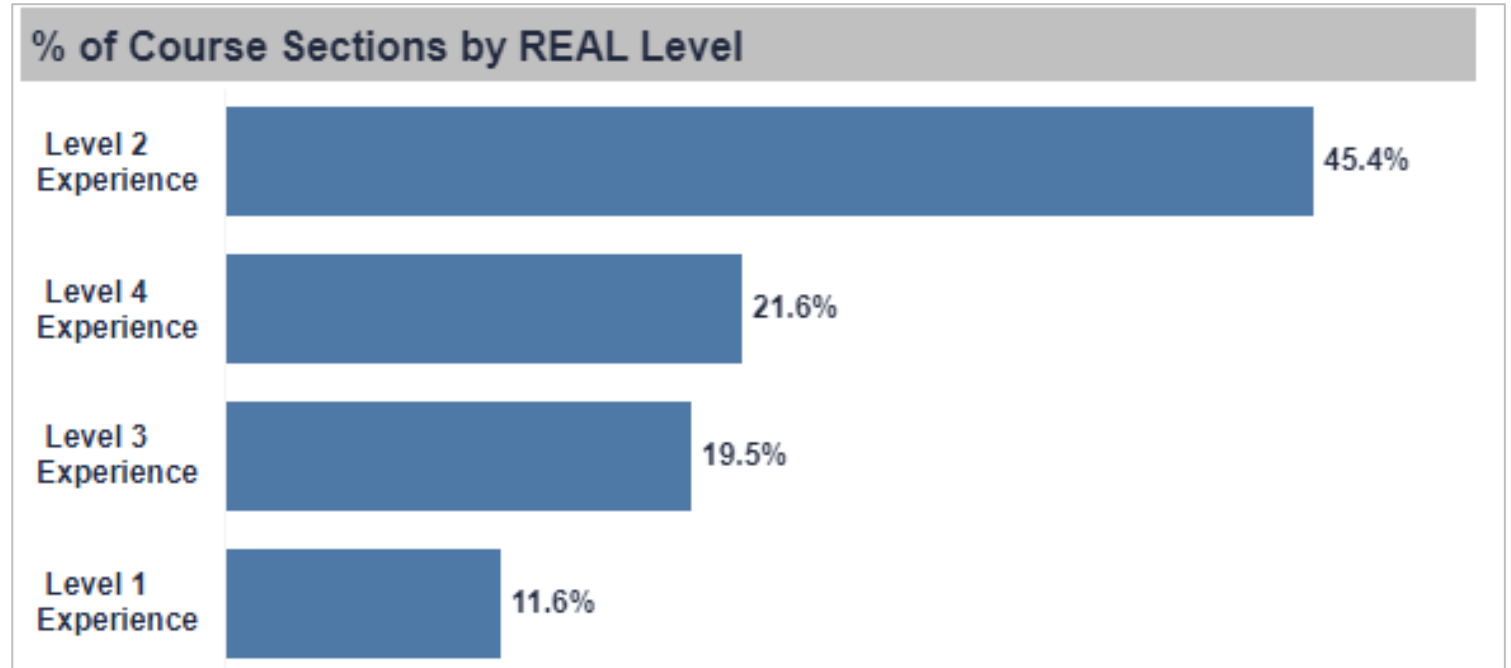
As of Census 1:

- Nearly **50% of all students (14,824 total)** are currently enrolled in a REAL experience at some level
- Approximately **52% of undergraduate students** are currently enrolled in a REAL experience at some level
- Of all the courses being offered this semester, **20% include REAL experiences (1,444 sections!)**



# Preliminary results

Of the REAL activities occurring in the Fall 2019 semester, the majority of them (86.5%) are happening at Level 2 or higher.



# REAL Dashboard

- High-level view of REAL participants (students and sections)
- First time a comprehensive snapshot of REAL curricular experiences is available
- Beta version
  - Additional feedback related to requirements & features
  - Ongoing testing and validation of data and process
  - Potential platform change

# Dashboard demo

<https://public.tableau.com/profile/vcu.decision.support.systems#!/vizhome/REALDashboard-Fall2019Census1/Summary>

# Dashboard wrap-up

- Dashboard will evolve based on feedback
- Understanding of the program will evolve with more mature data
  - Data cleanup related to REAL level attributes and grace period for adding courses
  - More comprehensive picture will emerge with additional academic terms

# Discussion questions

The following prompts may be used as a framework to guide conversation at your tables:

1. What is one thing you wish you had more information on regarding REAL?
2. What questions do you hope to answer with a dashboard? How would you use the information?
3. What recommendations or questions do you have about the REAL course designation process going forward?

# How do I get my courses counted?

Email Erin at [real@vcu.edu](mailto:real@vcu.edu) to let her know your information needs to be added.

**Please note:** The designation process will be under the purview of the REAL Council beginning **January 2020**.

**Thank You!**