# Chapter 10

# Re-Imagining the Future of Experiential Learning Through a Campus-Wide Design Thinking Initiative

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## ABSTRACT

*In 2020, Old Dominion University was awarded a State Council for Higher Education for Virginia grant in order to re-imagine the future of experiential learning at the institution. This campus-wide effort is led by a taskforce to create a vision, framework, and plan for the future of experiential learning at Old Dominion University. The taskforce is composed of stakeholders that include students, faculty, administrators, and community and business partners. In this chapter, the authors report on process and progress, with particular attention to the first three phases of the design thinking process. In the empathy phase, they have engaged in design thinking sprints, hosted monthly taskforce meetings, engaged in an exhaustive review of current experiential learning activities, and deployed surveys of relevant stakeholders. During the defining phase, they analyzed initial data, synthesized their collective empathy work, and identified root issues to craft their "How might we" questions to inform the ideation work. In this chapter, they also share the results of the ideation phase.*

## INTRODUCTION

This chapter details how Old Dominion University (ODU) is employing design thinking as an organizational change methodology to redesign students' experiential learning opportunities on and off-campus. Design thinking is becoming increasingly popular as an organizational development tool, and as such, it is critical to better understand the utility of design thinking and what design thinking authentically looks like in practice. By sharing our experiences, our goal is that the reader will be able to apply the design thinking strategies to understand and address complex issues in their own work.

Since 1995, almost 60,000 students at Old Dominion University have completed more than 115,000 internship experiences. In addition, over the past decade, the university has worked to ensure students have access to multiple opportunities to participate in other meaningful experiential learning activities. University-wide, experiential learning has been consistently supported by institutional leaders, and they have pushed for more innovative experiential learning opportunities. We recognized that while such curricular and co-curricular programming has been strong, these experiences could be strengthened by coordinating efforts across the university. In 2020, ODU was awarded a State Council for Higher Education in Virginia (SCHEV) grant to reimagine the future of experiential learning at our institution. Prior to this grant, ODU lacked a campus-wide framework to guide the design and priorities for experiential learning. In April 2020, the campus engaged in a process to address this challenge. The university's president led this initiative to develop a vision, framework, and strategic plan for experiential learning at ODU to increase student participation and expand program offerings within a cohesive infrastructure.

We begin this chapter by describing the background of the initiative and the campus context, followed by a brief review of the design thinking literature that has informed our work and our campus-specific design thinking framework. While our framework is most likely similar to others in this book, we feel it is important to share our model in order to better understand our initiative. Our chapter is situated within the Ideation section of this book. As such, we conclude this chapter with some of the outcomes from our ideation phase that are centered specifically around how our university can re-imagine our future for experiential learning.

## BACKGROUND AND CAMPUS CONTEXT

ODU is located in Norfolk, VA and is a public doctoral research university with more than 24,000 students, 37% of whom come from underrepresented ethnic groups. The University is nationally known for coastal resilience, modeling and simulation, bioelectrics, cybersecurity, and port logistics and maritime engineering. More than half of the faculty are involved in funded research projects providing research opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students. Further, we have a strong commitment to high-quality pedagogy, providing a variety of enriching learning opportunities for students on and off campus, and partnering with businesses and communities to attracting top talent, nurturing investment and business start-ups, generating high-paying jobs and improving the quality of life for Norfolk and all of Virginia. Examples of these initiatives include the following.:

- The Learn and Earn Program (LEAP) was created in 2011. Available to first and second-year students, LEAP students enroll in a career preparation course and are paid to work in on-campus jobs designed to help them learn skills related to their chosen careers.

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