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Spring is a special time on the UCF campus. For many of our students, thoughts are turning to graduation. Their once-in-a-lifetime day is a culmination of years of commitment to earn their college degree. In a sense, no one crosses that stage alone. It takes all of us working in partnership to empower our students to achieve this significant milestone.

That sense of collaboration is a hallmark of our university community. This inaugural issue of Catalyst aims to shine the spotlight on many of those key relationships—the vital web of connections that support our ongoing growth and allow us to anticipate and meet the needs of our students, faculty, and alumni.

As you turn the pages of this magazine, you’ll see the commitment of the Division of Teaching and Learning and the College of Undergraduate Studies to create long-lasting, collaborative, university-wide partnerships. We strive to provide the resources, expertise, and support that will influence our ability to provide the best undergraduate education in the nation. How? Scale x Excellence = Impact.

Through an integrative approach to learning, we work alongside UCF’s colleges, Student Development and Enrollment Services, and Regional Campuses to provide our students with a robust curriculum and access to high-impact academic practices. We collaborate with faculty members to develop and employ innovative teaching methods. We also serve as a resource for professional development and provide access to data and assessment that enhance student-learning outcomes.

Together, we provide students with the knowledge and skills they need to succeed academically and professionally. In this issue, you’ll read about how our collaborative relationships empower our students to succeed. An example is Alex Tejada, an Interdisciplinary Studies major, who was just accepted to the Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine. It took a village to enable Alex to achieve this goal. IDS advisors worked with him to create a plan of study. In the College of Sciences, he obtained technical knowledge, and the College of Arts helped him pursue his passion for music. Playing percussion for the Marching Knights Drumline allowed him to be part of a special university community. And the Pre-Health and Pre-Law Advising team gave him guidance and hands-on support through the application process.

As Alex’s story points out, UCF students never walk alone. Each of us plays a role in our shared success.

Dr. Elizabeth A. Dooley

LETTER FROM THE VICE PROVOST AND DEAN
IDS: DEVELOPING STUDENTS WHO ARE DIVERSE, CREATIVE AND FUTURE-FOCUSED

The Interdisciplinary Studies (IDS) Program offers students the opportunity to pursue individually planned programs of study in multiple disciplines with professional advising and courses from across UCF. Each student’s individually designed degree program integrates three distinct areas of study in addition to methodological framing courses. With 1,400 majors in Fall 2016 and 611 baccalaureate degrees awarded in 2015-2016, IDS is one of the largest degree programs at UCF. IDS also offers a B.A. track in Transnational Gender, Race, and Sexuality Studies, as well as a B.S. in Environmental Studies, which combines study of the sciences with exploration of ethical, economic, political, and social aspects of environmental studies.

All IDS degree programs aim to create a meaningful undergraduate education that prepares students for graduate or professional school or their careers. IDS also collaborates with other units at UCF on innovative programming and seeks to create curricular and educational opportunities that enhance all students’ academic experiences. Dr. Claudia Schippert, Interim Director of IDS, describes typical students as students just starting their college career, both transfer students to UCF as well as students just starting their college career. Regardless of how they came to UCF, IDS offers a compelling option for students who have unique or perhaps unconventional plans for their future careers and who are aware that they will need and/or want to explore several distinct areas as well as develop skills to synthesize those diverse skills into a unique set of competencies.

• Students who have unique or perhaps unconventional plans for their future careers and who are aware that they will need and/or want to explore several distinct areas as well as develop skills to synthesize those diverse skills into a unique set of competencies.

• Students with very clear goals of entering specific areas of graduate study, (e.g. medical school), who wish to pursue the best possible preparation in their undergraduate degree.

• Students not yet sure about what they consider the most interesting or exciting academic subject to pursue, and who want the freedom to explore several areas while pursuing their degree.

How IDS collaborates with colleges and units across UCF

IDS students may take courses in every UCF college. The unit’s advisors are in contact with colleagues in all colleges to coordinate best practices, curricular updates, and any relevant information to provide to our students. Faculty from several different colleges serve on the Environmental Studies and the IDS curriculum committee, overseeing the curriculum and providing guidance. To learn more about Interdisciplinary Studies visit its website at is.ucf.edu.

WHY IDS

Students learn skills that are essential to succeed in graduate or professional school or their careers.

Since the curriculum is not narrowly prescribed, students can tailor their academic plan of study to align with their unique future goals.

For some, IDS is a pathway into medical school or another post-graduate degree.

Pursuing an IDS degree leads to personal growth, the ability to identify one’s goals, and real-world skills to pursue those goals.

Graduating IDS students know how to talk about their degree and what they learned – and how their skills are relevant to their post-graduation academic or career plans.

IDS students are self-motivated and responsible – traits that are extremely beneficial for their future plans.

The Interdisciplinary Studies (IDS) Program at UCF offers students the opportunity to pursue individually planned programs of study in multiple disciplines with professional advising and courses from across UCF. Each student’s individually designed degree program integrates three distinct areas of study in addition to methodological framing courses. With 1,400 majors in Fall 2016 and 611 baccalaureate degrees awarded in 2015-2016, IDS is one of the largest degree programs at UCF. IDS also offers a B.A. track in Transnational Gender, Race, and Sexuality Studies, as well as a B.S. in Environmental Studies, which combines study of the sciences with exploration of ethical, economic, political, and social aspects of environmental studies.

All IDS degree programs aim to create a meaningful undergraduate education that prepares students for graduate or professional school or their careers. IDS also collaborates with other units at UCF on innovative programming and seeks to create curricular and educational opportunities that enhance all students’ academic experiences. Dr. Claudia Schippert, Interim Director of IDS, describes typical students as “IDS students are diverse, different, passionate, creative, future-focused, determined and purpose-driven.” Schippert says, “These are students willing to focus on a broad education rather than a narrow, specialized field. They are typically enthusiastic about a passion they want to pursue, and are comfortable dealing with uncertainty at times to learn how to creatively navigate the world.”

IDS offers a compelling option for both transfer students to UCF as well as students just starting their college career. Regardless of how they came to the program, IDS majors often fit into the following categories:

• Students who want to pursue a degree in Environmental Studies, which allows them to combine a solid background in the sciences with knowledge of ethical and policy issues related to the environment.

• Students who have unique or perhaps unconventional plans for their future careers and who are aware that they will need and/or want to explore several distinct areas as well as develop skills to synthesize those diverse skills into a unique set of competencies.

• Students with very clear goals of entering specific areas of graduate study, (e.g. medical school), who wish to pursue the best possible preparation in their undergraduate degree.

• Students not yet sure about what they consider the most interesting or exciting academic subject to pursue, and who want the freedom to explore several areas while pursuing their degree.
As a child growing up in Northern California, Andrea Krebs developed a love of nature that has evolved into a strong desire to protect and sustain the environment. Heady stuff for a college undergraduate student. But Andrea is far from your average student.

At UCF, she has earned a cumulative 4.0 GPA, (on a 4.0 scale), achieved the President’s Honor Roll, and has been involved in a wide range of extracurricular activities. She prides herself as a member of the Burnett Honors College, and was a National Merit Finalist.

From May to October 2016, she worked as an undergraduate intern/research assistant at the University of Central Florida’s Marine Turtle Research Group in Orlando and Melbourne Beach. There, she gained field research experience on the largest loggerhead sea turtle nesting site in the Western Hemisphere.

“The opportunity to study environmental science in a broader context, across multiple disciplines, was a critical factor in my decision to also pursue my interest in art has not only enriched my experience here at UCF, but will also help set me apart in my career,” she says.

Andrea Krebs says, “She believes that seemingly small actions can produce sizeable results.”

“Participating in this research was an awesome experience that taught me a lot about the environment and myself,” Andrea said. “I realized that my passion was to work toward preserving natural beauty, which is a foundational understanding of this profession by volunteering at UCF’s Arboretum. For all of these reasons and more, Andrea is the winner of the university’s Founders’ Day Award. IDS: The right choice

Andrea is from Kent, Ohio, and is one of a growing number of students at UCF who have chosen to major in IDS. She chose IDS during her sophomore year because the program allows students the flexibility to create a course of study that aligns with their unique interests and goals.

Specifically, Andrea is seeking a Bachelor of Science degree in IDS with a focus in Environmental Studies and is minoring in Studio Art.

As a freshman, she was a walk-on for UCF’s Division Women’s Rowing Team. That experience has taught her self-motivation, discipline and teamwork — all traits that surely serve her well academically and in her future career.

Andrea Krebs is a Merit Finalist, and was a National Merit Finalist, she was recruited academically and prepare her for success after college.

Andrea decided on this minor because she is a talented artist who recently received first place in the IDS Portrait Contest. But her choice of a minor goes beyond her artistic ability. She plans to leverage what she learns from her IDS minor and goals planning to be a landscape architect that blends many of her interests. She plans to be a landscape architect specializing in edible landscapes that have a significant positive impact on the environment. As a landscape architect, she will work closely with businesses, communities, and individuals to replace traditional landscaping with edible and sustainable options. She is deepening her understanding of this profession by volunteering at UCF’s Arboretum. For all of these reasons and more, Andrea is the winner of the university’s Founders’ Day Award.

IDS: The right choice

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Andrea Krebs is a Merit Finalist, and was a National Merit Finalist, she was recruited academically and prepare her for success after college.
IDS GRAD ANABELLE DUNBAR SHARES HER SOLUTION FOR THE CLIMATE CHANGE CRISIS

I have always been passionate about protecting wildlife and the natural world, which is why I became a vegan and volunteered at the Seacrest Wolf Preserve, Chattahoochee Basin Alliance, and the E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center. After high school, I volunteered with AmeriCorps NCCC to help Hurricane Sandy survivors in New York. After that, I discovered UCF’s Interdisciplinary Studies Environmental Track and knew immediately it was perfect for me. It had a great core structure with many options to make the degree an ideal track for my passion.

In February 2016, I was delighted to learn that I won first place in the Carnegie Council essay contest. Climate change is a global crisis of the first order, and I used this paper to show what we face if we continue on the disastrous route we are taking because of our lack of concern for changing our unhealthy lifestyles. I stated that, “To tackle the climate problem, we must each be informed and address what the top contributing factors to the changing climate are and how they can most efficiently be combated.”

We as a nation and as individuals must begin a transition toward more ecologically and economically sustainable ways of living by turning to alternative sources of energy, implementing more viable innovations, and altering certain lifestyles. This includes adding a carbon tax and using the money generated to give subsidies to alternative energies, building more public transportation, reducing our consumption of meat, and reducing our rate of deforestation.

My interdisciplinary way of thinking absolutely contributed to my solution. Every interdisciplinary studies student I have met and shared courses with have all had open minds, cared deeply about creating positive change in the world, and have bright minds to help think of economic and ecological solutions!

Annabelle Dunbar graduated in May, 2016 and was the vendor coordinator for the Central Florida Earth Day Festival (that takes place this year on April 22 at Lake Eola Park). She was also an assistant for Seminole County Commissioner Lee Constantine and at the time of her graduation said that she planned on continuing to learn about the political arena from the Commissioner, and then would most likely continue her studies by going to law school.

ACADEMIC SERVICES PLAYS A KEY ROLE IN STUDENT SUCCESS

Academic Services is a central part of the College of Undergraduate Studies’ commitment to student success. It is responsible for assisting students who request academic record changes such as late adds, late drops, late withdrawals, and medical withdrawals. It also reviews waiver requests for university level requirements. Academic Services administers the myKnight Audit, ensuring all undergraduates have accurate information regarding their degree progression. Additionally, it reviews lower-level transfer credit for the satisfaction of General Education Program requirements, Gordon Rule writing courses, and foreign language proficiency coursework. It also reviews students’ requests for Associate of Arts degrees. While adhering to state rules and university policies, Academic Services works to support UCF’s growing population of undergraduate students reach their goals to become alumni. To learn more Academic Services visit their website.

Assisting Students With Academic Record Changes*  

<table>
<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Late Adds</td>
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<td>717</td>
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<tr>
<td>Late Drops</td>
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<td>Late Withdrawals</td>
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<td>3446</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Intended to help students understand the requirements for various degree programs, the myKnight Audit allows students to use their personalized audit to help them plan the courses they should take to stay on track with their degree.

Since its introduction, Academic Services has assisted 6,000 students in accessing and utilizing their personalized degree audit.

Academic Services' Interdisciplinary Environmental Track

Academic Services is a central part of the College of Undergraduate Studies’ commitment to student success. It is responsible for assisting students who request academic record changes such as late adds, late drops, late withdrawals, and medical withdrawals. It also reviews waiver requests for university level requirements. Academic Services administers the myKnight Audit, ensuring all undergraduates have accurate information regarding their degree progression. Additionally, it reviews lower-level transfer credit for the satisfaction of General Education Program requirements, Gordon Rule writing courses, and foreign language proficiency coursework. It also reviews students’ requests for Associate of Arts degrees. While adhering to state rules and university policies, Academic Services works to support UCF’s growing population of undergraduate students reach their goals to become alumni. To learn more Academic Services visit their website.
SUPPORTING STUDENT SUCCESS WITH A ROBUST CURRICULUM

Managing UCF’s Curriculum Process
The Division of Teaching and Learning and the College of Undergraduate Studies serves an integral role within the university’s curriculum management process. Supporting the Faculty Senate’s responsibility for all curriculum committees and councils, as defined by its constitution, the college works closely with the chairs of both the Undergraduate Curriculum Review Committee (UCRC) and the Undergraduate Policy and Curriculum Committee (UPCC). The dean chairs the Common Program Oversight Committee, the Senate body that oversees university-wide curricular requirements including the General Education Program. The College of Undergraduate Studies assists the committees throughout the review process, ensures approved courses and programs are sent to the appropriate state agencies, and facilitates the annual review of programs within the Undergraduate Catalog. Once proposals have been approved by any of the three curricular committees, the Dean is the next level of approval. Those approved by the Dean of the College of Undergraduate Studies then go to the Provost for final approval. With more than 800 individual course action requests and dozens of program-level revisions proposed by departmental curriculum committees in the last academic year, curriculum management is a central part of the university’s focus on student success.

Aligning Curriculum with DirectConnect Partners
The Division of Teaching and Learning in partnership with UCF’s Regional Campuses, engages faculty who are teaching foundational courses from UCF and DirectConnect partners to review and align course syllabi in respect to learning outcomes, course content, and assessments. As an ongoing activity, curriculum alignment focuses on STEM (e.g., biology, chemistry, mathematics, physics, and engineering courses) and communication foundations courses (e.g., Speech Communications and Writing & Rhetoric).

Coordinating Articulation Agreements
In support of the student success goals outlined in UCF’s Collective Impact Strategic Plan, the university has a centralized undergraduate articulation agreement process. The Division of Teaching and Learning will coordinate the development of these agreements between UCF’s colleges and the Florida College System.

UCF’S DIRECTCONNECT PARTNERS

- College of Central Florida
- Daytona State College
- Eastern Florida State College
- Lake Sumter State College
- Seminole State College of Florida
AAP PUTS STUDENTS ON THE PATH TO ADVANCED DEGREES

Academic Advancement Programs (AAP) prepares UCF students particularly underrepresented, low-income, and first-generation college students to pursue advanced degrees. AAP works in collaboration with faculty, staff, local, and national partners to provide a range of graduate school preparation programs and services. Students have the opportunity to participate in a variety of initiatives designed to increase their awareness and knowledge of the graduate school application process, graduate funding, summer research programs, and fellowship opportunities.

“AAP guides and mentors UCF students to become strong, competitive applicants for graduate programs and graduate funding,” said AAP Director Michael Aldarondo-Jeffries. “We encourage all UCF students to participate in AAP workshops, panels, graduate school and summer programs virtual summer research programs and graduate school recruitment fairs, and graduate school visits, whether they are considering graduate school or preparing to apply to graduate programs.”

AAP programs include:

- McNair Scholars Program
- Research and Mentoring Program (RAMP)
- Research and Mentoring Program – Transfer Students (RAMP-T)
- CAMP YES – Research Track
- T-LEARN (Co-PI on Grant, assist with graduate school preparation/advising)

AAP offers students:

- Graduate school preparation workshops and panels
- Graduate School Visits (2016-17 visits included: Ohio State University, University of California, Irvine, University of California, San Diego, Vanderbilt University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, University of Minnesota)
- Graduate School and Summer Program Virtual Fairs
- NSF GRFP Trainings

STUDENT SUCCESS STORY: JOEY VELEZ-GINORIO

“I have been able to enjoy an incredibly fulfilling journey to my goal of going to graduate school, and it all began with the guidance afforded to me by AAP and McNair. AAP staff not only provided me with guidance about graduate school, but also encouraged me to apply to conferences and summer research programs. Through networking and a strong application, I was accepted to participate in the summer program at MIT’s Center for Brains, Minds, and Machines (CBMM). That summer experience opened up many opportunities. I met amazing mentors, worked on the research of my dreams, and helped form a partnership between the MIT CBMM and the UCF AAP office that has now opened up opportunities for many of my peers.

I’m currently at MIT, as a visiting researcher, continuing my work from this past summer. I’ll be there for seven months, and then return to UCF to finish my undergraduate studies and apply to graduate school.”

Joey’s advice to other UCF students aiming for grad school: “Get involved in summer research, networking, and setting yourself up for strong letters of recommendation. Most students I meet are not doing one of those things, and they have been essential for me. It is difficult to pick up on strategies to take advantages of those three things without having appropriate guidance. McNair has been essential for me in understanding the process to the extent I do now.”

AAP Scholars

AAP Assistant Director Natalia Toro celebrates with AAP graduates

100% ENROLLMENT

of UCF’s McNair Scholars who graduated in Spring and Summer 2016 enrolled in post-baccalaureate programs immediately following graduation. The rest of the scholars chose to accept employment opportunities, internships, or continue to prepare to apply to graduate or professional school.

ADVANCED ACADEMIC PROGRAMS HIGHLIGHTS

Joey is a junior in Computer Engineering

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STUDENT SUCCESS STORY: ITZA BERTLAN

Itza Beltran, a senior Mechanical Engineering major planning to begin a doctoral program in the fall, credits the Summer Research Academy (SRA), coordinated by Undergraduate Research (OUR), with changing her career trajectory. As a transfer student from Valencia College, SRA exposed Itza to research and helped her create networks that have facilitated her academic journey towards graduate school. “Thanks to SRA I learned about the McNair Scholars Program and was compelled to apply,” said Itza. She was accepted into the program, coordinated by AAP, which has provided her with guidance and support towards her goal of attaining a Ph.D. She feels that AAP and the McNair Program have been integral to her success. She shares, “I feel like being part of AAP has helped me in every single way – it has helped me grow as a student and as a researcher because it provided me with all the tools that I needed to continue my journey towards a Ph.D. in mechanical engineering. But it also has provided me an academic family. I feel a sense of community in the office, everyone really cares about each other and is always there to provide support.” Soon after becoming a McNair Scholar, Itza was selected as an National Science Foundation-funded CAMP-YES Program scholar, and joined the Center for Environment and Academic Research (CATER) lab. Under the mentorship of Dr. Jayantha Kapat, she began to work on both computational and experimental projects that contribute to the creation of higher efficiency turbines. With the support of AAP, Itza had the opportunity to participate in two summer research experiences: the first at the University of Colorado Boulder, and the second at the University of California, Irvine. According to Itza, “Ultimately, those summer research experiences provided me with a new perspective of research development that reinforced my desire to pursue a Ph.D. in Mechanical Engineering.” This spring break, Itza was in Berlin taking part in the Siemens Global University Challenge – Hackathon, as part of one of five teams worldwide that participated in the final competition. Given her personal experiences, Itza feels that AAP and the McNair Program have been an integral part of one of five teams worldwide that participated in the final competition. Given her personal experiences, Itza was eager to mentor younger students, and as a senior became a mentor with the T-LEARN (Transfer - Learning Environment and Academic Research Network) program, an NSF-funded program sponsored by OUR. “The best reward as a mentor has been to witness my mentees’ sense of accomplishment and appreciation as they feel closer to reaching their academic and career goals,” shares Itza.

Don’t be afraid to ask questions and don’t limit yourself - seek the resources that you need and don’t wait.

OUR: EXPOSING STUDENTS TO RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES

Undergraduate Research (OUR) provides undergraduate students with the resources they need to take their first step into academic research. The experience provides students with critical skills, such as communication and problem-solving, that enables them to be successful in graduate or professional school or their careers.

OUR is investing in helping students find opportunities to fill the gap between classrooms and textbooks and real-world experiences. The team works with faculty, colleges, and programs across UCF to match students with appropriate research opportunities. On average, OUR works with 1,800 students and 600 faculty mentors campus-wide.

“We are continually impressed by the dedication of our faculty to provide undergraduates with access to research opportunities and mentorship,” says Kimberly Schneider, Director of Undergraduate Research.

In addition, current researchers serve as peer mentors advising students on different ways to get involved in research based on their needs and their time remaining at UCF. Students can drop in to the OUR office or make an appointment during scheduled hours. At OUR’s Summer Research Academy, students also have the opportunity to learn about research options, meet with faculty, and earn course credit in a three-day event open to all majors. The academy accepts 100 students each year.

The Learning Environment Academic Research Network (L.E.A.R.N™) program, a signature OUR program sponsored by the National Science Foundation (NSF), provides first-year and transfer STEM students with an in-depth introduction to undergraduate research opportunities. (See page 18.) The OUR team also works with students at various stages of their research careers during their competitive Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship (SURF) program. SURF students have the opportunity to research and present their work at the end of the summer alongside students from around the country who participate.

Top and bottom photos: Undergraduate students presenting their research at the 2016 Showcase of Undergraduate Research Excellence.
CONT FROM PAGE 17

Current researchers have the opportunities to participate in the Showcase of Undergraduate Research Excellence (SURE) poster symposium and submit their work to the peer-reviewed UCF Undergraduate Research Journal. OUR also provides travel awards to support students who are accepted to present their work at local, national, and international conferences. On April 6, OUR hosted another successful SURE. “The Showcase is in its 14th year and continues to grow,” says Schneider. “This year’s was the largest to date. Four hundred and seventy students presented 365 posters. For the first time, we had two sessions of poster presentations.” UCF Research Week also included professional development workshops on topics such as getting started in research, asking for and using feedback, and communicating research.

Visit the OUR website at our.ucf.edu for information about upcoming research events and information on how to subscribe to its email list.

L.E.A.R.N.™ PROGRAM SUPPORTS FIRST-YEAR AND TRANSFER STEM STUDENTS

Students at the University of Central Florida and two other colleges are benefiting from a $1.8 million federal grant designed to keep first-year students on the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) track.

Undergraduate Research Director Dr. Kimberly Schneider (PI) and Michael Aldarondo-Jeffries (Co-PI), Director of Academic Advancement Programs, are collaborating with the National Science Foundation grant with peers at Florida Atlantic University (FAU) and Western Carolina University. L.E.A.R.N. has been expanded to those universities and it has grown at UCF as well. UCF’s current L.E.A.R.N. program, now in its sixth year, provides 28 first-year undergraduates with the opportunity to live together in a residence hall, where they take part in academic, social, and community service activities.

In Fall 2016, UCF started a similar program, called T-L.E.A.R.N., for transfer students who started with their Associate of Arts degrees. Twenty students were welcomed into that program.

Under the programs, all students have the opportunity to participate in research. On Feb. 24-25, a group of L.E.A.R.N. students attended the Florida Undergraduate Research Conference at FAU. They met graduate recruiters, attended professional development workshops and had the chance to meet with L.E.A.R.N. students from FAU.
EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING WORKS TO MAKE SURE UCF STUDENTS GET REAL-LIFE EXPERIENCE

According to the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) 2014 Student Survey Report, graduating seniors with internships were 16 percent more likely to receive a full-time job offer. Interns also command higher salaries than their peers.

“That number tells the story about the importance of learning outside the classroom,” says Dr. Jason Jude Smith, Director of Experiential Learning at UCF. “Being competitive in graduate school or professionally now requires students to be proficient in their areas of study and work as a team.”

Smith continues, “Internships, co-ops, and service-learning are ways to develop these highly sought-after skills.”

That’s where Experiential Learning can help. Experiential Learning provides UCF’s students with the expertise and resources to prepare, secure, and complete academic internships, cooperative education (co-op), and service-learning experiences.

In 2015-2016 alone, Experiential Learning directly supported 2,158 placements. Further, more than 76 percent of Experiential Learning-supported experiences were paid, with students earning more than $8 million to support their educational endeavors.

The team provides a full complement of services that range from vetting potential internship and co-op experiences to one-on-one guidance for students. (See page 21 for a complete list of services). Additionally, Experiential Learning also supports the creation, delivery, and continued improvement of service-learning courses at UCF. Through opportunities to work with community partners such as non-profit organizations, public schools, government agencies, campus groups, or businesses with specifically philanthropic missions, students develop skills and knowledge that will help them to become civically responsible members of the community.

“Successfully providing students with experiential learning experiences requires the entire UCF community,” emphasizes Smith. “That’s why the Experiential Learning team makes collaborating with colleges and units across campus a priority.”

Experiential Learning supports universitywide experiential learning in several ways, including:

• Supporting faculty in the creation, delivery, and evaluation of experiential learning courses.
• Data collection and reporting for colleges and units.
• Providing support for funded projects with an experiential learning component.
• Collaborating with Career Services to provide a cohesive experience to employers and students.

To learn more about Experiential Learning visit its website at explore. ucf.edu

INTERNSHIP ENABLED ANJALI CHERUKURI TO PARTICIPATE IN GROUNDBREAKING RESEARCH

Anjali Cherukuri worked with Experiential Learning to obtain an internship at the Arnold Palmer Hospital for Children in Orlando. She reflects on her experience in Spring 2017, with Anjali beginning a new internship at the hospital this spring.

As a research assistant for the Pediatric Cardiology/Congenital Heart Disease Department, I had the unique opportunity to contribute to the clinical research being done there. During my time at the hospital, I worked on multiple studies, some of which have even been published and presented in conferences across the world.

One such study that I contributed to is entitled “Venous and Concomitant Multi-Occlusion Cardioplegia Solutions in Congenital Heart Surgery: A Single-Center Comparison.” This study was presented at a poster presentation at the combined European Congenital Heart Surgeons Association—Congenital Heart Surgeons Society meeting in Venice, Italy, and it was also published in the World Journal for Pediatric and Congenital Heart Surgery.

In addition to contributing to clinical research, I was able to shadow surgeons at the performance of surgeries on transplant patients, which was truly breathtaking. Overall, this was truly a once-in-a-lifetime experience that would recommend it to anyone who is interested in entering the medical field and a large, complex clinical practice because it gives the students insight on what it’s like to work at a facility which is a rare opportunity.

Smith continues, “Internships are a great way to gain real-life experience in the career field that you are interested in, and Experiential Learning does an excellent job of finding a right match for you. I would definitely recommend it to someone to anyone.”

WHAT NEXT FOR ANJALI? After completion of her experience at Arnold Palmer Hospital for Children, Anjali began a new internship at the hospital. She will graduate this spring with a degree in Biomedical Sciences.
ACCEPTED! IDS GRAD GETS GREENLIGHT FOR MED SCHOOL

When Interdisciplinary Studies (IDS) graduate Alex Tejada saw the blue envelope from the Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine in the mail last month, he said that he knew what was inside would determine the direction of his life.

“I was so excited and immediately knew what it was since that’s how they described the acceptance letter at the interview,” he recounted.

The letter, in its first paragraph, got right to the point and told him about his acceptance to the Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine. After ecstatically sharing the good news with his family and friends, he emailed the news of his acceptance and a heartfelt thank you to the Director of UCF’s Pre-Health and Pre-Law Advising (PHPL Advising), Dr. Erin Myszkowski.

Alex began his medical school application as a senior rather than as a junior because he said he wanted to wait to feel ready for it. “It is an extremely tedious and meticulous process,” he explained, “and I wouldn’t be where I am today if it wasn’t for the guidance Erin’s office gave me. They helped me to connect information and have something to work with through the whole application process, including my personal statement.”

Alex graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Interdisciplinary Studies with Physical Science, Biology and Life Sciences as his areas of study, and Music as a minor. He said he wanted to meet the necessary and recommended requirements to apply for medical school, but he also wanted to take other courses and stay active with his music and his position in percussion for the Marching Knights Drumline. “The great thing with IDS is that I had the freedom to do the things I wanted plus the requirements I needed. This made me a more well-rounded applicant,” according to the committee that interviewed me. When I was filling out the application for medical school there wasn’t a box for IDS as my major, so I had to type it in, but that made me stand out in a good way.”

PHPL Advising supported Alex’s application process with guidance about what to include in his personal statement, among other suggestions. It’s the part of the application in which the student describes why they want to be a doctor and to attend medical school. “PHPL Advising helped me connect the dots, connect the information. It helped a lot,” he said. After working with the PHPL Advising Personal Statement Reviewer, Caitlyn Baker, and getting his writing to where he was satisfied with it, Alex said he showed his personal statement to friends, family, and doctors he was working with at the UCF Health Center before sending it with his application. “I didn’t just want to meet the requirements on the checklist,” he explained, “I wanted to show I do other things too, show who I am.”

Do something that gives you sustenance and use the time as an undergrad to discover what it is in life you really care about.
PUTTING STUDENTS ON THE PATH TO HEALTH AND LAW CAREERS

So, you’ve decided that you want to pursue a medical or law degree. Your first call should be to UCF’s Pre-Health and Pre-Law Advising (PHPL Advising).

“Between prepping for entrance exams, going on interviews, and submitting the required materials, applying to and gaining acceptance to professional schools can be challenging – especially when there are thousands of other applicants,” explains Dr. Erin Myszkowski, Director of PHPL Advising. “Our office focuses on guiding students in any undergraduate major to become competitive applicants for health professional schools and law school.”

PHPL Advising mentors students who are pursuing careers in legal and medical professions. The PHPL advisors encourage UCF students to pursue their major of choice, and guide them through the multiple aspects of their preparation and application, with the ultimate goal of helping them become a competitive professional school applicant.

An example is recent IDS graduate Alex Tejada (see story on page 22). Alex worked closely with PHPL advisors and staff including Myszkowski and Catlyn Baker, PHPL’s Personal Statement Reviewer. He was recently accepted to the Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine and will begin medical school this fall.

“Students are advised to follow their true interests and passions,” says Myszkowski. “For instance, a student may love music – like Alex – and want to major or minor in Music at UCF, but also aim to go to medical school to become a physician. Our advisors embrace their choice of major, and help them find the best way to progress toward their goal.”

Navigating the process

A successful journey to medical or law school can be complex and challenging. To help students prepare effectively and navigate the process, PHPL Advising offers a full range of support and resources. Students have access to knowledgeable PHPL advisors by appointment or walk-in.

Creating a competitive edge

As students advance toward the formal application process, additional services and support are provided by PHPL Advising to afford students the best chance to succeed in the highly competitive process:

Letters Packet – Compilation of letters of evaluation and other supporting documentation for UCF applicants to medical (M.D. and D.O.), dental, and podiatry schools.

Mock Interviews – One hour, video-recorded, open-file practice interviews for students who are offered an interview at a health professional school.

Personal Statement Reviews – Drafts of personal statements can be reviewed via email and sent back to students within one week.

Workshops – Five to six workshops on common topics of interest every fall and spring.

Practice Tests – Electronic and paper-based practice tests include: MCAT (Medicine and Podiatry), DAT (Dental), PCAT (Pharmacy), OAT (Optometry), GRE (Veterinary, PA, PT, OT, Public Health), and LSAT (Law).

Professional School Visits – Host one-on-one meetings and presentations by health professional schools and law schools.

Outreach Presentations and Events – Conduct in-person presentations and webinars by request to student organizations, advising offices, departments, and more on the UCF main campus and regional campuses.

Collaboration across the campus

Communicating and collaborating with faculty, advisors, staff, and administrators across campus is essential to make sure Pre-Health and Pre-Law students are positioned for success. Multiple programs and services help facilitate that collaboration. Two examples are the mock interviews for Pre-Health students as well as the UCF-FSU Law 3+3 Program for Pre-Law students.

“We partner with 12 different faculty, advisors, staff, and administrators from units across campus to conduct mock interviews for our Pre-Health students,” Myszkowski says. “Last year, we conducted over 160 mock interviews for students with the assistance of our colleagues and partners. Additionally, our UCF-FSU Law 3+3 program is offered to students in three different colleges and 13 different majors.”

To learn more about PHPL Advising visit its website at phpladvising.ucf.edu.

Of our student satisfaction survey respondents agreed that their mock interviews in Pre-Health and Pre-Law Advising were beneficial and helped to prepare them for actual health professional school interviews last year.
EXCEL PROGRAM BOOSTS STEM DEGREES

Now more than a decade-old, the EXCEL program’s goal to increase students obtaining B.S. degrees in STEM continues to deliver positive results.

Launched in 2006, EXCEL (a former National Science Foundation STEP Program) has increased the graduation of UCF STEM students participating in the program by 50 percent over non-participants. Recruiting 200 incoming freshmen each year, EXCEL connects students, faculty, and disciplines through an engaged learning community, which ultimately leads to increased success of STEM students.

The program has proved successful in enhancing the EXCEL students’ experiences during the first two years of college through improved student learning in math and science courses, block housing shared by STEM-focused students, a tutoring center, and early engagement in research experiences. EXCEL participants also work in cohorts, making it easy for them to team up with study partners in required courses that may have several hundred students.

To increase diversity in the STEM workforce pipeline, EXCEL has committed to supporting more students in STEM underrepresented populations. One strategy aimed at assisting women in STEM underrepresented populations is the EXCEL (Girls EXCELing in Math and Science (GEMS) mentoring program. Launched in 2010, GEMS focuses on reducing the first-year retention gap between male and female EXCEL students (a 15 percent differential in 2009). After only one year, the retention gap dropped to eight percent and has remained at less than four percent since. This support continues through the mentorship network as students have the opportunity to participate in Women in Science and Engineering (WISE) Mentoring at UCF, a six-month mentorship pairing with a female industry professional in their chosen discipline.

Collaboration: Key to Success

Since the inception of the program, collaboration has been a key driver of EXCEL’s success. There are four colleges involved: Undergraduate Studies, Sciences, Medicine, and Engineering and Computer Science.

Relationships were established early in the EXCEL process with the Office of Undergraduate Admissions to ensure the right student populations were getting the message about this expanded opportunity. The program is part of every Open House, alongside Honors, Housing and UCF’s colleges. The EXCEL Admissions, Advising, and Retention Committee (AARC) develops the programs advising and retention strategies. AARC members include representatives from Admissions, involved academic colleges and First-Year Advising.

EXCEL Director Dr. Melissa Dagley notes, “Our collaborative approach to planning and interacting with students is producing strong results. For instance, the first-year retention rate for students in the EXCEL program is 92 percent; UCF’s first-year retention rate is 89 percent.”

SKY’S THE LIMIT FOR EXCEL ALUM KEON VEREEN

Keon Vereen was a member of UCF’s first EXCEL cohort in 2006. He took advantage of all that EXCEL had to offer, both curricular and co-curricular activities.

Keon stood out to me because he was determined to be an Aerospace Engineer and was willing to do whatever it took to get there,” said Dagley.

Vereen is a first-generation student who understands the power of peer mentoring. He returned to campus to mentor and interact with students in EXCEL, RAMP, and the McNair Scholars program.

“My dad passed away in 2006. My mom didn’t want to let go of him, so I basically grew up on the campus. It’s like I never left. I consider this my second home,” said Vereen.

Here are a few of Vereen’s many achievements:

- Participated in EXCEL URE (Spring 2008, Summer 2008). He was accepted to Research and Mentorship Scholar (Fall 2008 – Spring 2010) and McNair Scholar (Fall 2008 – Spring 2010).
- Awarded the RAMP Master’s fellowship for an Accelerated B.S. to M.S. program in Aerospace Engineering at UCF.
- Began his Ph.D. in Aerospace Engineering, University of Washington; in Fall 2013 and was awarded the most prestigious national fellowship for Ph.D. students (2013-2016). The most prestigious national fellowship for Ph.D. students, he also received the McNair Graduate Fellowship.

EXCEL students six-year graduation rate is 70%. All EXCEL cohorts have an average first-year STEM retention rate of 81.2%. The average first-year STEM retention rate for all other students is 92%, which is 3% higher than UCF’s first-year.

Partnerships are a significant driver of EXCEL’s success. For example, EXCEL collaborates with UCF’s Academic Advancement Programs and Undergraduate Research to provide students with opportunities beyond their time with EXCEL (first two years).

To learn more about EXCEL visit its website at excel.ucf.edu.
WHAT'S NEXT? QUALITY ENHANCEMENT PLAN Focuses on Improving Student Outcomes for Real-World Success

The QEP involves developing and executing a university-wide, multi-year initiative seeking to improve student learning outcomes. The effort is a campus QEP, UCF’s next step in collaboration with the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACS/COC).

Dr. Anna Maria Jones, the Director of the QEP explains, “The mission of UCF’s current QEP, What’s Next: Integrative Learning for Professional and Civic Preparation, is to prepare our graduates to successfully enter and participate in the next steps of their professional and civic lives. What’s Next seeks to help students plan for their futures post-graduation: not only set goals but to identify the knowledge and skills necessary to reach those goals. The initiative encourages students to connect their classroom knowledge and skills to real-world contexts and, thereby, to develop the ability to transfer knowledge and skills from one context to another. Finally, this initiative promotes opportunities for students to reflect on their experiences, to communicate their knowledge and experiences, and to develop the ability to successfully advocate for themselves in their lives beyond the university.”

QEP Awards Programs

In order to realize the goals of the program, QEP funds faculty and staff projects that address the QEP’s theme, What’s Next: Integrative Learning for Professional and Civic Preparation, that seeks to improve undergraduate student learning outcomes. The QEP offers the following awards:

• Program Innovation & Enhancement Awards: These awards range from $3,500 to $10,000 for individuals or teams who wish to make changes to existing programs or create new programs to enhance undergraduate student learning outcomes. For the 2016 cycle of awards, more than $150,000 in funding was awarded to 25 total projects across 31 separate faculty and staff units.

• College Seed Fund Awards: These awards of up to $5,000 are available for UCF colleges to assist them to meet the university’s goal that by 2020 every UCF undergraduate will graduate with a high-impact signature experience in their major. Through these awards programs, the QEP supports our faculty and staff across the university in developing and improving our integrative learning experiences and ensuring that UCF is moving towards our goal of having each student participate in at least one high-impact experience before graduation.

As an older faculty member, the Center has proven invaluable in keeping me current on the latest trends. Whether it is advances in technology (online textbooks, digital storytelling) or approaches to reaching and relating to today’s students, the Center has been vital in keeping my students engaged and my classrooms full.

James C. Clark, Ph.D.
Lecturer, History

The Karen L. Smith Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning has provided me the necessary guidance and support to succeed in the classroom and beyond. The Center’s workshops, book clubs, and regular informal events have provided invaluable insights on what’s happening in courses from the student perspective.

Insights from the Student Consultants program have informed another important Faculty Center collaboration, the Sandbox Classroom. The Division of Teaching and Learning and the Office of Instructional Resources, and the Downtown UCF team worked together to design a cutting edge, experimental classroom that will be in use by faculty and students beginning in Fall 2017. The space will feature flexible furniture, natural light, and cutting edge technology to encourage active learning and critical research across the disciplines.

To learn more about the Faculty Center visit their website at fctl.ucf.edu

The Faculty Center Makes Connections

1,530 Participants in FCTL programs

160 Internal Partnerships
In addition to funded awards programs, the QEP provides a range of faculty development opportunities aimed at supporting our undergraduate faculty in implementing integrative learning experiences within the classroom. Each year, the QEP offers innovative workshops promoting integrative learning pedagogies.

For instance, during 2016, Film Instructor Lisa Peterson’s Digital Storytelling pilot project allowed 18 faculty and staff to learn digital storytelling techniques. When Peterson adopted a digital storytelling project in her own classroom, one student reflected, “Prior to the BFS program, any art projects I did were based off of my own knowledge and were done with very little preparation and were very unorganized. I was able to see first-hand the overall importance of planning and preparation.”

To build on this success, in Spring 2017, Peterson and the QEP offered a workshop to teach faculty from 10 additional units in digital storytelling in the classroom. Over the 2017 spring semester, the QEP office will also offer workshops on Research Intensive Courses and Alumni Engagement & Professionalization.

In addition, as part of the Summer Faculty Development Conference, the QEP invites proposals for projects that address the QEP’s theme, What’s Next: Integrative Learning for Professional and Civic Preparation.

Students interested in the Knights of Distinction program have prepared him or her for what’s next. Students must complete minimum hours in each of the five milestone categories: Planning & Self-Assessment, Campus Citizenship, Leadership, High-Impact Learning, and Knights in the World. Each year, the QEP offers innovative workshops promoting integrative learning pedagogies.

Knights of Distinction is a flexible program designed to allow students to build their own personalized pathways to distinction. Students must complete minimum hours in each of the five milestone categories, plus an additional 60 hours in any combination of milestones 3 to 5, before graduation. However, there is no minimum number of hours that must be maintained in any given semester. In other words, it is up to the students to decide when and how they want to earn their hours.

As students complete each milestone, they engage in writing assignments to reflect upon what they accomplished and learned from their experiences. Each of these assignments builds towards an e-portfolio capstone that allows students to reflect on their achievements, to “connect the dots,” and to share their stories with others. This e-portfolio is directed at an audience of the student’s choosing (for example, a potential employer or a graduate school committee) focused on demonstrating how a student’s time at UCF has prepared him for or her for what’s next.

Once accepted to the Knights of Distinction program, students will complete a total of 310 hours in five milestone categories:

Planning & Self-Assessment
Campus Citizenship
Leadership
High-Impact Learning
Knights in the World

Knights of Distinction is a new program that is designed to help students integrate their experiences in and beyond the classroom to match their goals post-graduation. Students who earn the designation Knight of Distinction demonstrate that they are able to make connections between theory and practice and that they possess valuable skills such as problem solving, teamwork, time management, and communication that employers and graduate schools value. The title Knight of Distinction recognizes not only the student’s academic commitment to learning and civic engagement, but also the student’s achievement and civic achievements in the world beyond the classroom.

To learn more about the QEP visit its website at undergrad.ucf.edu/whatsnext.
OEAS: DATA AND ANALYTICS HELP DRIVE BETTER DECISION MAKING

Operational Excellence and Assessment Support (OEAS) supports UCF’s efforts to improve the quality of student learning outcomes and the effectiveness and efficiency of university operations through assessment and analytics.

OEAS contributes to data-driven decision making across all academic programs and administrative units through integrated processes that include continuous quality improvement, analytical and survey studies, technology integration and guidance in assessment.

Further, OEAS acts as an independent external grant evaluator for state and federal grants and works with the principal investigators to assure that the evaluation and research components of the grant are in concert to yield meaningful information.

“OEAS empowers all UCF faculty members, staff members, and leadership to harness the power of evidence to create or change strategies they implement to improve student learning, student success and operations,” says OEAS Assistant Vice President, Dr. Patrice Lancey. “Strategies implemented through evidence-based Institutional Effectiveness Assessment inquiry affect educational practices, programs and operations at UCF.”

To learn more about the OEAS visit its website at oeas.ucf.edu.

OEAS HIGHLIGHTS

Provides collaborative workshops and individualized assessment consultations with faculty and staff members to improve the quality of student learning and operations.

Promotes and provides guidance in best practices for meaningful and impactful assessment for continuous improvement.

Provides self-serve knowledge management web application at assessment.ucf.edu, to house plans and reports and to provide collaborative peer mentoring and quality assurance for Institutional Effectiveness Assessment.

Conducts statistical studies and publishes analytical reports to enhance informed, data-driven decision making across campus.

Designs and disseminates enterprise level survey studies each term such as the Entering Student Survey, Graduating Student Surveys and First Destination Surveys.

Provides self-serve portal access to analytical reports for the UCF community through the OEAS Knowledgebase at knowledgebase.ucf.edu.

Coordinates the dissemination and use of results for the National Survey of Student Engagement every three years.

Produces brief analytical reports for UCF leadership and other internal and external stakeholders using multiple sources to answer specific strategic questions.

Provides support to other enterprise level planning processes and university-wide student success initiatives.

Serves as external evaluators for funded projects.
Innovation | Excellence | Distinction

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