

The purpose of the initial proposal is to identify a problem or opportunity as it relates to one of the strategic framework priorities. It is not intended to outline a specific plan or solution.

Title (*Brief working title that captures the essence of the problem or opportunity.*)

Expanding and Enhancing Learning through the Washburn Transformational Experience

Problem/Opportunity Statement (*One or two sentence description of the problem or opportunity. Should focus on specific, observable indicators. Should not infer cause and should not include solutions.*)

The Washburn Transformational Experience (WTE) program affords students a unique opportunity to enhance their academic journey at Washburn through intentional, faculty-supported experiences in community and civic engagement, leadership, scholarly/creative endeavors and study abroad. Since Fall of 2021, 673 students have completed the WTE pre- and post-surveys. The results of these surveys indicate that students have meaningful outcomes like increased communication skills; formed strong relationships with a faculty member and/or a community-based supervisor as well as increased professional and personal networks; increased knowledge of a community, a culture or a country; and increased understanding of academic concepts from classes as a result of their WTE experience. Opportunity exists to bolster and streamline the WTE program to ensure every Washburn student has both access and means to pursue a WTE should they so choose, and that faculty are supported and encouraged to mentor students as they pursue these experiences.

Proposal Themes (*Select one quality initiative theme for the proposal*)

- Expand Learner Success Opportunities and Pathways
- Enhance our Environment to Learn, Work, and Thrive
- Accelerate Collaborative Partnerships to Grow the Community

(For more on Washburn's Strategic Framework, see the [Strategic Framework](#))

Description of how the problem or opportunity relates to the identified theme

Priority 1.A.i. Optimize academic portfolio of program offerings to attract learners and prepare graduates for success: WTE is a unique program that sets us apart from our peer institutions. With opportunities in multiple areas that expand the learning experience outside the classroom, Washburn students stand apart in the job market and on graduate school applications because of the breadth and depth of these experiences.

Priority 1.A.ii. Increase number of experiential learning opportunities beyond the classroom: The WTE program deepens students' academic experiences and provides students with unique opportunities to learn alongside faculty mentors. These hands-on, student-driven, experiences enhance students' perceptions of the world around them and cultivate the skills necessary for making positive change. WTE projects include internships, original research, artistic endeavors, travel, and civic engagement.

Priority 1.C.i. Increase academic success of all Washburn learners: These experiences give students opportunities to apply their course work and tailor their learning experiences to their particular interests and passions. In addition to studies that have shown that civic engagement, internships, undergraduate research, etc., can be beneficial to overall retention and completion rates, current research indicates that an undergraduate research experience, for example, could dramatically reduce equity gaps in degree completion. For the highest impact, however, these programs must be made accessible to all students through funding for scholarships and faculty participation. WTE experiences connect students to faculty members who share their interests and passions, promoting a sense of belonging.

Benefits (*Description of desired outcomes, both tangible, such as decreased costs or increased revenue, and intangible, that is those improvements that are important to control, protect or enhance but are difficult to quantify. Benefits should be realistic and measurable.*)

Bolstering and streamlining the Washburn Transformational Experience program will lead to increased numbers of declarations and completions in all four focus areas. Removing barriers from completion and increased promotion of the program will allow every student the option to pursue a WTE. Studies have shown that student participation in "high impact" activities, including research...increase student success, measured by GPA, and retention. Elevating the visibility of WTE will differentiate Washburn as an institution where students can truly customize their learning experiences, and it will also increase the prestige of Washburn by contributing to a culture of academic, artistic, and professional excellence.

Students from any major can pursue a WTE, therefore, most academic departments stand to benefit. The WTE provides a mechanism for faculty mentors to engage in deeper learning opportunities with students, which can create excitement about their discipline. Faculty can feel they are making a difference by providing a high-impact practice to students that achieves goals like fostering curiosity, deepening learning, and aiding retention efforts. Additionally, funding support like faculty stipends or conference travel support can be attractive to faculty members and further Washburn's culture as a great place to work and a

premier institution for academic excellence.

Finally, WTE experiences allow students to bolster their proficiency in University Student Learning Outcomes. Communication is included by each WTE participant engaging in a final presentation at events like Apeiron, Day of Transformation, or professional conferences. Global citizenship, ethics and diversity as an outcome is taught and reinforced through experiences like studying abroad or reflection. WTE experiences also foster within students critical and creative thinking as they work to integrate new knowledge and understandings to their view of themselves, their field, and the world.

Scope (Description of the scope or impact on the institution as a whole. Specify if the scope is focused on specific areas, units or departments.)

* The scope of this proposal focuses on the four WTE areas – Scholarly/Creative, Study Abroad, Civic and Community Engagement, and Leadership. The recent relocation of all four WTE areas to Plass Learning Resources Center offers the opportunity for enhanced collaboration and unified messaging about the value of the WTE for students. We believe there is an important story to tell about how WTEs can be used in the growth and development of students from prospective students to graduates. Students who have completed WTEs, along with faculty mentors, can help us tell the story about how the WTE allowed them to make an impact in their communities, develop essential skills, produce new knowledge, create groundbreaking art, or explore new places.

Stake Holders (Identify all persons/groups that have an interest or position in the issue – both internal and external to the University.)

* Most importantly, enhancing the WTE would impact students, particularly those interested in pursuing a WTE. The WTE coordinators for all four areas are key stakeholders, as is the Provost's office, to whom these coordinators report. Other important stakeholders are the deans, department chairs, and faculty members who serve as mentors. Support staff assist with WTE documentation, faculty compensation, and data collection. External stakeholders for the WTE areas include community partners, internship employers, and international partner universities. Admissions and Recruiting staff discuss the unique opportunities that await prospective students at Washburn University and share how the WTE program elevates the student experience.

Team Members (Individuals who will work on development of full proposal and/or may work towards project implementation.)

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10/30/2024

Submitter Signature

Date

After signing, click Submit Form below. Submitters will be contacted after committee review in late November 2024.