

## Motion to Create a Signature Experiences Program

Effective Fall 2013

### **Motion:**

Building on the 2010-2015 Strategic Plan, Georgia State University will implement a signature experiences program.

1. A signature experience is an experience in which learning comes alive and students are encouraged to be active in their own education. Specifically, in a signature experience students will:

- (1) Go outside the classroom to apply what they are learning
- (2) Engage in an experience over a sustained period of time (not merely a day or a week)
- (3) Learn through experiences that are not typically encountered in the standard classroom and
- (4) Produce a final product that is evaluated by a faculty member.

The central learning outcome of a signature experience is the ability to apply knowledge/skills outside of a standard classroom context.

2. Final products include (but are not limited to) research papers, conference presentations, presentation of works of art, case studies, and reflection papers.

3. Signature experiences are offered as part of courses that earn course credit. They may not be offered as zero credit courses. (Signature experiences must move students towards graduation.)

4. Signature experiences can be listed by a department as stand-alone signature experiences courses or they may be offered as in conjunction with a non-signature-experience course as a course with a “signature experience dimension.” (In other words, it may be that all students in a course are completing a signature experience or it may be that a course has multiple cross-listed sections and only some of those sections are signature experience sections. This modeled after the distinction between stand-alone and add-on Honors courses.)

5. When a course is offered with a signature experience dimension, this should not be merely a project “tacked on” to the regular work of a course. Instead, the students taking the signature experience dimension version of the course should have some of the work of the regular course replaced by work that meets the criteria of a signature experience. (For example, if a regular course requires 3 papers, the signature experience dimension version of the course might require 2 of those 3 papers and then require that students do group work in the community.)

6. Every major must offer its students at least one signature experience.

7. Other units (e.g., Centers, Student Life units) may collaborate with academic units to offer signature experiences.

8. There will be six categories of signature experiences.

Students have an Arts Signature Experience when they participate in the production or presentation of creative works.

Students have a City Signature Experience when they participate in activities that are related to the unique challenges of urban environments.

Students have a Global Signature Experience when they participate in activities that offer them the opportunity to learn and engage as global citizens.

Students have a Professional Signature Experience when they participate in work-related experiences.

Students have a Research Signature Experience when they work on a research project.

Students have a Service Signature Experience when they integrate service and learning activities to address a community need.

9. Units may place appropriate prerequisites on admission to their signature experience programs. They may also limit the number of students who may enter a signature experience program and set up appropriate admissions processes to determine who is allowed admission to a signature experience program.

10. The Provost will appoint a Signature Experience Leadership Team. The Team will oversee the implementation of the signature experience program. The Team may modify the description of the categories of signature experiences. The team will be at least one-half faculty and include at least two faculty appointed in consultation with the Senate Committee on Admissions and Standards.

### **Implementation Notes:**

The material in this section is not part of the motion. It is a series of suggestions for implementation. The method of implementation may need to change due to factors such as budgets and changes in GSU's computer systems.

A. Every unit must have a signature experience ambassador appointed by the relevant Dean. To minimize costs and maximize effectiveness, units are free to organize their signature experience ambassadors in many different ways. For example, ambassadors may be faculty or staff and a group of departments can share one ambassador.

B. Signature experience proposals must be reviewed to insure that they meet the definition of signature experience above. This review will be done at the College level. The Dean of the college will specify the relevant process. The members of the Leadership Team will assist in this process.

C. In Banner, the signature experience notation is tagged to the section, not the course. The sections should be classified as one of the six types of signature experiences noted above. Students taking signature experience sections will be tracked by linking the sections to the

Banner records of individual students.

D. Completion of a signature experience is not noted as a distinct line on the transcript. However, the Leadership Team may decide to indicate signature experiences with standard notations in course titles. (In other words, the Leadership team may decide to follow the CTW model and put a standard notation on signature experience courses. It is possible that it would be best to do this only after the program is successfully up and running.)

E. To facilitate evaluation of the signature experience program, syllabi for all stand-alone signature experience courses and all signature experience dimension courses will be sent to the Office of Undergraduate Studies. In cases where multiple sections of similar courses are offered, only representative sample syllabi need to be sent.

F. Appropriate general information describing the signature experience program will be inserted into the Academic Regulations section of the Undergraduate Catalog. Each major will describe its own signature experience programs in its section of the Catalog.

G. A survey of academic units reveals that many units are already offering signature experiences. It is expected Colleges will approve the “rebranding” of appropriate existing activities as signature experience programs. Examples include (but are not limited to):

Arts Signature Experiences: the presentation of creative works in gallery exhibits, ensemble performances, and dramatic performances.

City Signature Experiences: activities affiliated with the Cities Initiative of the Strategic Plan, internships with governments or NGOs, historic preservation and urban development activities.

Global Signature Experiences: Model UN team and other international academic teams, study abroad, exchange programs, working with consulates, globally focused community groups, and globally focused religious organizations.

Professional Signature Experiences: internships in business, government, non-profits, museums, media organizations, and educational institutions.

Research Signature Experiences: honors theses, directed readings, debate team, work in laboratories, and research internships.

Service Signature Experiences: service learning activities.

H. Academic units are encouraged to create new signature experiences. Examples of other possible new signature experiences include (but are not limited to):

- A project in which students respond to real-world issues, policies, and opportunities.
- A service project that frames classroom inquiry within extramural student experience.
- A course designed to pair scholarly inquiry with extramural experience.
- Field studies in accounting in which students work in the accounting field.
- Legislative internships outside the US.
- Using language skills in real-world settings such as Grady Hospital, French Chamber of Commerce, and the Latin American Association.
- Gallery, museum, artist assistant internships.

(Some of the items on this list probably already exist at GSU even though they were not reported on the survey.)

I. If possible, there should be University-wide standard course numbers associated with the stand-alone versions of each the six types of signature experiences.

J. In order for faculty to receive proper credit for the additional work of offering signature experiences, the new faculty annual report system should include a clear way for faculty to indicate that a course is a stand-alone signature experience course or a course with a signature experience dimension.

**Rationale:**

Goal 1, Initiative 3 of the Strategic Plan calls for GSU to implement undergraduate signature experiences. This motion forwards that goal.

This motion attempts to balance the desire to infuse signature experiences across the curriculum with the desire to improve graduation rates. It also attempts reflect an appreciation of current budget realities.