

Experiential Learning at Antioch College: A Strategy for Renewal

By the Antioch College Renewal Commission

One year ago, the Antioch University Board of Trustees took the historic step of confronting head-on the challenges that Antioch College has faced for decades. To that end, the Board appointed a Renewal Commission to outline a sustainable vision for the renewal of Antioch College.

The Commission met on more than ten occasions, each for periods of at least two days, as well as by teleconference, and engaged in extensive discussions and exchanges of material via email and phone. Our work was assisted by the entire Antioch Community, including the administration, faculty and student body of Antioch College, the Board of Trustees, and the University Leadership Council. With the help of a generous grant from the Mellon Foundation, we were also able to broaden our reach, enlisting the aid of top educational experts from around the country.

The result of our work is captured in this report. Fully implemented, we believe it lays out a blueprint for change that will renew Antioch for the 21st Century, insuring its long-term financial viability while maintaining Antioch's core values of improving the human condition and preserving the centrality of experiential learning that has defined the Antioch Experience for more than half its history.

How will it accomplish this? By making strategic investments in those academic, human and physical resources which have the highest demonstrated impact on student learning and satisfaction, and faculty development, in turn increasing enrollment and retention in a sustainable way that enables even greater future investment.

The report is organized in four key sections: A brief history of Antioch College and a survey of its current condition; a description of the Foundational Commitments the commission considered to be at the core of our work, and any workable plan to renew Antioch College; a look ahead to the future of Antioch College; and, finally, a detailed description of Experiential Learning at Antioch as we hope it will take shape under this new plan.

This section includes the basis for such transformational change, as well as the many, multi-faceted elements of the plan. Chief among these is a detailed description of the new experiential learning communities that are at the heart of a new way of providing Antioch's students with a liberal arts education.

Backed by more than a decade of solid research and practice, this new approach teaches students to solve academic and practical problems actively, by working together both in and out of the classroom in team-taught, interdisciplinary groups. Every study of the effects of learning communities shows that they increase retention substantially, thereby ensuring strong and stable fiscal health. These studies also show that students show strong academic gains in learning communities. Just as important, especially for an institution like Antioch, they are the essential building block for teaching responsible

community culture—increasing students connectedness to each other, to faculty, and to knowledge.

What makes Antioch's new plan unique is that it incorporates the experiential element that has long been Antioch's hallmark. More than that, it actually improves upon Arthur Morgan's original vision – using technology and local resources to create a better-supported, academically integrated co-op experience that takes into account changing student needs and the world in which they live and work. And the new curriculum will focus explicitly on producing leaders, committed to social justice.

This is, we hope, a transformational vision for a new Antioch.

An Antioch that offers students genuine engagement with the real world of work, commerce, and everyday life in its many forms.

An Antioch that is uncompromising in its commitment to rigorous liberal education, its advocacy of comfortable familiarity with valuable knowledge, skills, and values, and its dedication to creating a community that requires personal responsibility and a collective effort to increase the common good.

An Antioch that honors its students by teaching them how to learn, and gives them pride by requiring that they demonstrate clearly the knowledge they have won.

An Antioch that demonstrates to the world that it takes its mission to heart and can prove the claims it makes about the capacities it builds in its students.

This is the new Antioch grounded in tradition, strengthened by a sustainable vision for the future, fueled by a continued commitment to change the world.