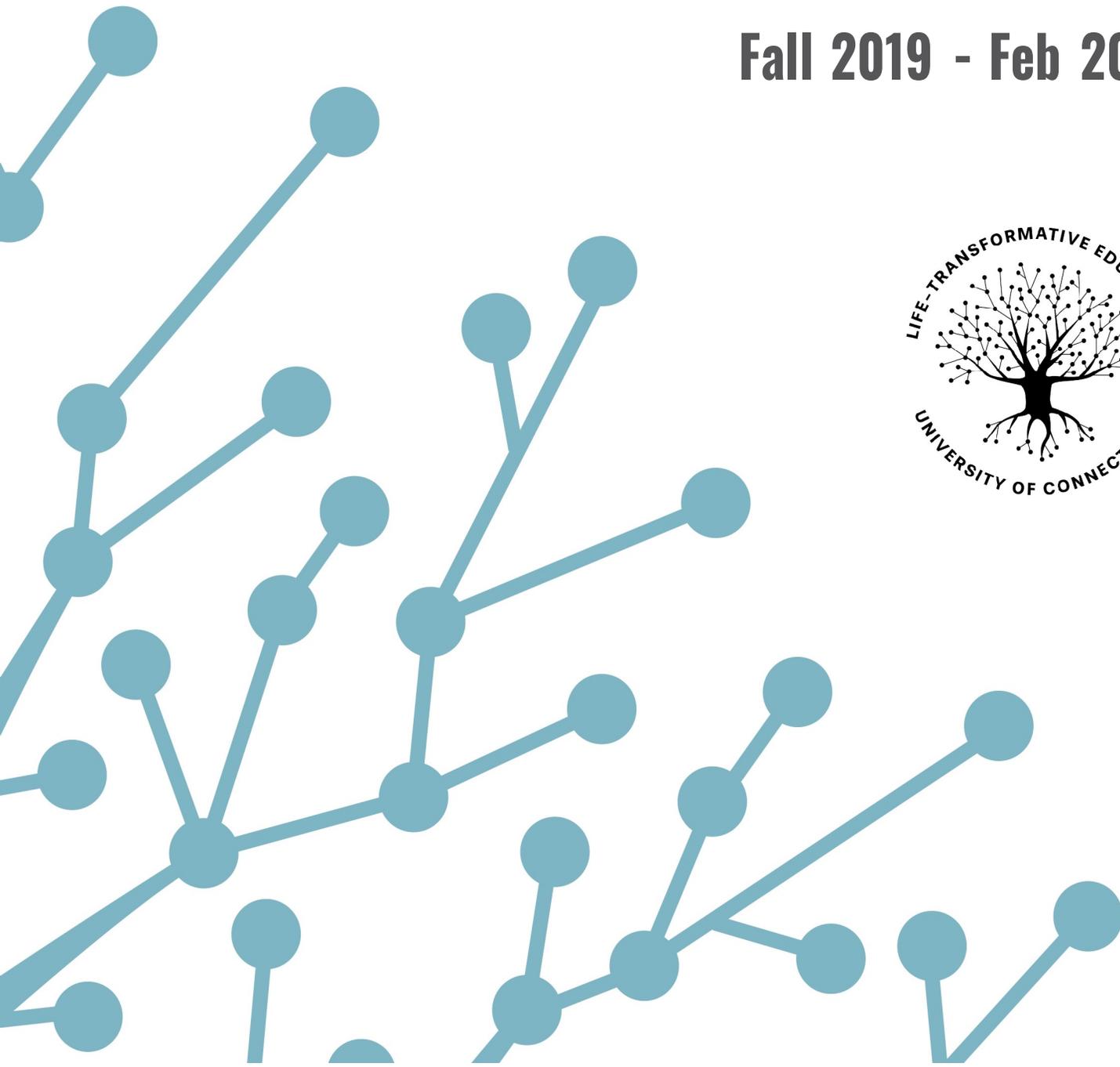
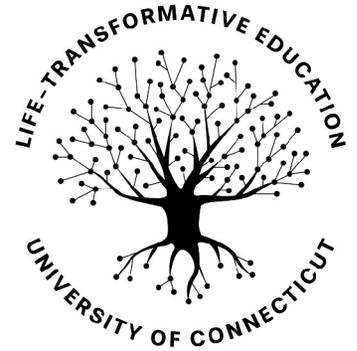


# UConn Life-Transformative Education Task Force

Fall 2019 - Feb 2021



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# Executive Summary

This report is the first piece of an iterative conversation about how we can implement a bold vision of a life-transformative education for every student at the University of Connecticut. Although disrupted by a global pandemic, significant work took place over the last fourteen months related to the goal of more fully realizing the goals of LTE at UConn. The report documents the work done before Covid-19 changed daily life and through the end of the spring/summer of 2020, the work currently being completed for the 2020–21 academic year, and the challenges that remain for future work in LTE implementation.

First, the report presents a summary of key pedagogical approaches that underscore authentic and inclusive learning, in addition to outlining key points of intersection between general education changes currently underway at UConn. Also discussed is the importance of engaged and experiential learning in these pedagogical approaches. Next, the role of advising and mentoring at UConn is examined, promoting suggestions and challenges related to providing emotionally supportive mentorship for all UConn undergraduates.

One of the successes of the LTE project so far has been the bringing together of faculty and staff to envisage a transformative process in relation to campus culture; this success notably began with the *Cultivate* workshop, detailed below. The report then addresses next steps currently in operation, including guiding principles and questions to be addressed and the current configuration of LTE working groups for the current academic year. Finally, the report addresses some of the continued challenges facing our universities, our nation, and the world as we move toward an LTE-focused undergraduate educational experience.

## Introduction: Life-Transformative Education at UConn

Imagine that, when asked the question, “Why are you working here at UConn?” every one of the over 1,400 faculty and 4,500 staff could answer that they are here to help transform the lives of UConn’s undergraduate students. UConn, a comprehensive research university, identifies the centrality of strong and meaningful relationships as the catalyst to create the conditions for every undergraduate student to have life-transformative experiences. At UConn we believe relationships are the vehicle through

which agency, identity, and purpose are best developed. We also believe that we need to be more intentional and systemic in the ways we do this. Students need the opportunity to become inspired and informed in a range of contexts -- in their classes and in environments that are integral to their experience, such as independent research, internships, and experiential learning opportunities.

UConn's goal is to emphasize and foster the growth of diverse opportunities for students to experience education outside the classroom, such as through innovative classes that incorporate real-world research elements or service-learning components, as well as potential expansion of first-year programming beyond the first year, strategically expanding novel learning community experiences, among many other possibilities.

UConn's problem is not a lack of life-transformative educational experiences. We know that there are a number of areas of excellence across the university. Individual professors and programs are deeply committed to this type of educational experience. UConn's challenge is to effectively extend and scale life-transformative educational experiences so that every single one of its 24,000 undergraduate students graduates having had such an experience. To go from good to great, we have to catalyze our culture in gradual and not-so-gradual ways. We have to expand the quantity and variety of our best existing programs. We have to develop new programs by "listening louder" to our students, our alumni, our communities, and converting what we hear into actionable reciprocal impacts for those involved.

***Definition: A life-transformative education is one that engenders identity, agency, and purpose in our students through authentic and inclusive learning experiences and emotionally supportive mentorship.***

In November of 2019, President Katsouleas charged Vice Provost John Volin with leading a Task Force made up of approximately 30 faculty and staff from around the University to begin the work

of meeting this challenge. The Task Force organized itself into working groups, each composed both of members of the Task Force itself and select faculty and staff members with relevant expertise. The five working groups included more than 60 faculty and staff. (For the membership of these groups, see Appendix A. LTE Task Force and Working Group Membership). Although disrupted in differential ways by the pandemic, in June 2020 each working group delivered an interim report, providing the core of this report.

# Authentic and Inclusive Learning

Under the leadership of the Authentic and Inclusive Learning working group, the Task Force identified seven pedagogical approaches that are consistent with LTE's goal of cultivating identity agency and purpose. In conversation with the Best Practices working group, the Task Force identified examples of programs inside and outside of UConn that have implemented these approaches across a variety of disciplines.

These approaches are not exhaustive of the wide range of pedagogies and models available in the literature, but they do share certain commonalities. Each goes beyond the transfer of knowledge and takes into account the “whole student.” Each empowers students to take charge of their learning. Each helps students find their place and take responsibility for their actions in the world. Each understands learning as inter-/transdisciplinary and integrative; and each takes a process-oriented approach to teaching and learning. Moreover, these approaches tend to motivate students and teachers alike and empower students to solve problems and address societal challenges beyond the confines of the university.

The seven approaches we identified are:

1. ***Social-Emotional Learning***. Social-Emotional Learning is the process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. Social-Emotional Learning builds competence in several domains, including:
  - *Self-awareness* or the understanding of one's emotions, personal goals and values and the ability to recognize how thoughts, feelings, and actions are interconnected;
  - *Self-management* or the skills and attitudes that facilitate the ability to regulate emotions and behaviors, including delayed gratification, stress management, and perseverance;
  - *Social awareness* or the ability to take the perspective of those with different backgrounds or cultures while empathizing and feeling compassionate toward others;
  - *Relationship skills* that provide students with the tools to establish healthy and rewarding relationships;
  - *Responsible decision making* and the knowledge, skills, and attitude needed to make constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions across diverse settings.

Social-Emotional Learning is most typically implemented at the college level by university-wide programs similar to the First Year Programs and Learning Communities at UConn. The intention is to help students understand, care about, and act upon core ethical issues and values. Students develop an internal motivation to positively contribute to the world around them.

2. **Course-based Undergraduate Research Experiences (CUREs).** Participation in undergraduate research is associated with many benefits, but the limited number of apprenticeship-style undergraduate research opportunities available in the labs of individual faculty has historically restricted opportunities. CUREs, or discovery-based courses, are currently gaining traction as a strategy to mitigate this limitation and have made research opportunities available to larger numbers of students. CUREs are courses in which whole classes of students address a research question or problem that is of interest to the scholarly community. Participants use disciplinary methods while working collaboratively and iteratively to answer research questions. Although a form of inquiry learning, CUREs are distinctive in offering student opportunities for making contributions that are of interest to stakeholders outside the classroom; employing an iterative work style; being driven by student results so that new questions and directions are generated each term; and engaging a range of scholarly practices such as collecting and analyzing data, building and defending arguments, and collaborating with one another and more experienced scientists. Two models of CUREs are currently being used: independent CUREs, developed and taught by individual faculty members and network CUREs, developed by a faculty member and then packaged to be implemented by other instructors. The latter affords a built-in curriculum and support system and are promoted by professional societies. Although a product of the STEM fields, the CUREs model also provides opportunities for translation to the arts and humanities classroom. Our faculty in departments such as Molecular and Cell Biology and Allied Health are deeply engaged in the CUREs teaching modality.
3. **Experiential and Action Learning.** Experiential and Action Learning are two closely related theories of learning.

Experiential Learning is typically represented by a four-stage learning cycle in which the learner encounters a new experience or situation; reflects on the experience to identify inconsistencies between experience and their current understanding; conceptualizes a new idea based on this reflection; and finally applies their idea to the world around them in active experimentation.

Action Learning is similar and focuses primarily on the first two steps, with a focus on the second step of reflection. Reflection before, during and after a particular learning experience is built into Action Learning activities.

Experiential and Action Learning may be implemented in the classroom through a variety of teaching strategies, including problem-based learning, project-based learning, place-based learning, and service learning. As one example of many of our programs and majors that engage in both Experiential and Action Learning, all four departments in the School of Fine Arts are focused on course work and studio practices that expose their students to “Experiences” that center on “Action”learning.

4. **Service Learning.** The American Association of Community Colleges defines Service Learning as “the combination of community service and classroom instruction, with a focus on critical, reflective thinking as well as personal and civic responsibility.” Service Learning programs are distinguished from other approaches to experiential education by their intention to equally benefit the provider and the recipient of the service. Service learning may be offered through credit-bearing and non-credit-bearing opportunities, the latter including fellowships, internships, research projects, international or domestic service learning trips, and co-curricular programs. High quality service learning shares several characteristics, including integrated academic and service objectives, collaborative community partner relationships, student representation and leadership, development of student civic responsibility, student reflection upon learning and drawing connections between academia and real-world problems, and program evaluation. UConn’s Service Learning Initiatives provides official support for a wide range of service learning opportunities, although faculty and staff across the university offer more informal, often non-credit, service learning opportunities in a variety of ways, such as the Natural Resources Conservation Academy (NRCA).
5. **Social Justice Education and Dialogue–Based Learning.** According to Landreman and MacDonald-Dennis, social justice education is rooted in the “process of challenging monocultural assumptions and efforts to understand the histories, traditions, and experiences of marginalized people toward creation of a heterogeneous society.” From a student perspective, social justice education requires that educators employ critical pedagogical practices that “reject the notion that education is a value-neutral process and instead attempt to make the political dimensions of education transparent through examining the ways schools and other institutions have operated that reproduce discourse, values, and privileges of existing elites.” From an educator’s perspective, social justice

education requires educators to have awareness of content and process and “step outside of it to assess and mediate interactions in the group,” which requires instructors to possess social justice facilitation competency. There are two common frameworks that exist for social justice facilitation, experiential social justice learning and the intergroup dialogue. Study Circles is one model of dialogue that has been used in community building initiatives where members of a community join together to build relationships, deliberate about community issues, and explore ways to collaboratively create needed changes in their community. This model is currently being used at UConn through the Humanities Institute Initiative on Campus Dialogues. Another dialogue model is the intergroup dialogue model (IDG), a specific curriculum and pedagogy developed by higher education scholars to increase students’ capacities to engage across social differences in order to learn about oneself, others, and the social world. The first UConn IGD course, a graduate-level course in the Higher Education and Student Affairs program, ran four years ago and others have since followed.

6. ***Human Rights Education (HRE)***. Human Rights Education is rooted in the provisions of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which identifies education as the primary method for advancing human rights. The 2011 UN Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training codifies the international consensus on the nature and scope of HRE and provides an internationally recognized definition of HRE. This definition states that HRE “comprises all educational, training, information, awareness-raising and learning activities aimed at promoting universal respect for and observance of all human rights,” and includes education *about* human rights, education *through* human rights, which includes learning and teaching in a way that respects the rights of both educators and learners, and education *for* human rights, which includes empowering persons to enjoy and exercise their rights and to respect and uphold the rights of others. Within higher education, human rights programs have blossomed. Research on all aspects of human rights has proliferated across a wide range of academic fields, including the traditional disciplines of law and political science, but also literature, history, economics, social work, business, and others. Alongside this scholarship, universities and colleges have also incubated human rights education programs at the undergraduate, graduate, and professional levels. HRE approaches can be found in practice throughout UConn, particularly in the cultural centers and Human Rights Institute. New leadership in ODI (Office of Diversity and Inclusion) has reinvigorated conversations throughout the UConn community at the college, school, and department level around initiatives to tackle and address issues that exacerbate “othering,” one of the core reasons for Human Rights abuses.

7. ***Education for Intercultural Citizenship and the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture.*** Teaching for Intercultural Citizenship means that students apply the knowledge, skills and attitudes of intercultural competence to a contemporary problem. Intercultural competence includes such things as a concern about social justice and a belief in the values of humanistic thought and action; a readiness to encourage a questioning attitude; a willingness to promote social action in the world; and the identification with others beyond the limits of national boundaries. In practice, Teaching for Intercultural Citizenship might involve inclusion of students in decisions about the focus of their learning, learning activities that lead to engagement with people from outside the classroom, and taking decisions to participate in community life outside the classroom. Speaking to this concept of Teaching for Intercultural Citizenship is the “Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture,” (RFCDC) a framework developed by the Council of Europe that is designed to be integrated in education in all subjects in order to develop the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values required for successful dialogue across difference. Applications of Intercultural Citizenship and the RFCDC have shown that there are natural connections with human rights education, education for social justice, and dialogue-based teaching and learning. Both models have been used in a number of interdisciplinary contexts, including with the Literature and Languages Department at UConn.

All of these frameworks and approaches lend themselves to foster students’ identity, agency, and purpose in education and in their lives, and each is practiced at UConn. However, identifying pedagogical approaches conducive to LTE is not the main challenge; the problem of scale, along with the reward structure in academic institutions, are universally the barriers to systematic implementation, especially in larger institutions. The issue of scalability is also coupled with the ways in which such work is woven into the institutional reward structure. Almost every approach mentioned above requires enormous time commitment on part of the instructors, staff and in some cases, also on part of the students. Due to the complexity of such projects, they often tend to be smaller-scale in terms of both class size and availability to various disciplines, which raises the question: How we can scale them up so that every student has the opportunity to participate in LTE experiences, while at the same time we mitigate diversity, equity and inclusion issues around who has the time and availability to access these initiatives?

# Advising and Mentoring

Competent and compassionate advising is essential to undergraduate student success. The importance of advising (by both faculty and staff) has been recognized for many years at the University of Connecticut and various committees and task forces have undertaken the subject with the intent of improving the student experience. Research success is often measured in terms of funds awarded, a metric of debatable value, and published scholarship; these outcomes are rewarded in higher education. Advising, even more so than teaching, lacks concrete products that are readily enumerated, and it is more challenging to objectively differentiate good advising from mediocre efforts. Moreover, at this moment, there have been no perceived career incentives for faculty members to aspire to be successful advisors and deeply engaged mentors nor are there clearly delineated career ladders for staff advisors, both of which make the “staffing” of advising and mentoring more challenging.

Undergraduate student advising ranges from excellent to abysmal, and the difference is largely due to one of department/college culture and individual commitment on the part of the faculty/staff advisor in addition to the undergraduate advisee. The most recent significant institutional effort to improve undergraduate advising at UConn occurred in 2014/2015 with reports from an external consultant and the Academic Advising Task Force, the latter producing a publicly available report that reaffirmed the need for and value of advising at UConn as well as current shortfalls in advising efforts. Few of its recommendations were formally embraced on an institutional basis, at least partially due to changing personnel in the Provost’s office. Members of the LTE Advising and Mentoring Working Group have shared many personal observations that further reinforce the 2015 report’s findings and the lack of institutional action during the interim period between that report and this one. The Executive Summary of the Academic Advising Task Force included the following observation:

A number of factors have contributed to the need for a renewed commitment to advising including significant enrollment increases, the abandonment of advising responsibilities by some faculty members purposefully or through benign neglect, failure of department, college and university administration to address this abdication of responsibility, and ever increasing requirements for faculty and staff members to address complex non-academic student concerns that have emerged significantly in the past decade (e.g., mental health issues, social justice issues, and financial stressors).

Advising has the potential to be a primary activity in an undergraduate education where every student should have the opportunity for an *authentic* and regularly occurring one-on-one meeting with a faculty member. One of the most significant things that UConn can do to show that it cares about its students and wants to prepare future successful leaders, is to commit itself, from the President's Office down through the Provost's Office and the Deans, to the criticality of faculty- and staff-based undergraduate advising and mentoring.

The rise in the role of the professional staff advisor should also be noted here. While the number of staff members who are serving in full-time advising positions has increased over the past several years at UConn, there still remain challenges in ensuring that students experience the types of advising and mentoring outlined as critical to life-transformative education. The increase in staff advisors has, in some cases, unintentionally created opportunities for faculty members to abdicate advising responsibilities. The increase in professional advising positions has not always kept up with increases in enrollments and the fluctuation of enrollments in majors that can naturally occur. In addition, there are other staff members who play important advising roles for students, whether that is serving as a student's supervisor, an advisor of a student organization, or as someone who becomes a trusted resource for students who participate in a variety of programs and services on our campuses. The complexities of the varying types of advising and mentoring provided by faculty and staff members at UConn are a significant issue in scaling LTE.

Students and the important role they play in the advising relationship is also imperative to address going forward. Conversations in the working group have centered on the roles and responsibilities students have, as perhaps the most important person involved in the advising relationship. The desire to better understand the needs and expectations of students, especially given the current climate and pressures of higher education, is paramount to establishing a strong foundation for LTE at UConn. One of the goals moving forward for the Task Force will be to increase the participation of our student members and finding new ways to include the student voice in subsequent suggestions and plans for implementation.

As we shift gears to focus on initiatives that champion quality advising and mentoring, we are committed to engaging the student body in conversations around the high impact practices that have most affected their student experience. We will also reexamine the recommendations of the 2015 report, even as we focus on additional training and technology that supports the ability of faculty and staff to remain deeply committed to their work of research, service, and administrative responsibilities.

# Cultivate Kick-Off Event and LTE Speaker Series

In September 2020, the LTE Task Force hosted a large online workshop called *Cultivate*. The intention of *Cultivate* was to create a space of welcome “to inspire, develop, and empower Life-Transformative Educators at UConn.” The workshop brought together over 150 of our colleagues, effectively bridging faculty and staff and bringing together our main Storrs and four regional campuses, to discuss the possible ways to expand and add upon the high-impact work already happening in the LTE space across all of our campuses. In a virtual space, we utilized breakout rooms to have participants develop ideas using a series of Google docs, which will form part of the iterative development of LTE as we continue to draw in ideas from ever widening members of our community. The Assessment working group have analyzed the key ideas emerging from this workshop by producing a draft report for the task force based on these contributions, and these ideas will now be folded back into the focused discussions of each of the relevant working groups. Additionally, participants in *Cultivate* are now able to identify themselves as active participants in the LTE initiative (regardless of whether or not they are involved in the task force or working groups) and we will be utilizing this first cohort of life-transformative educators in an exploratory mentoring project to help support students through the pandemic, and as ambassadors for LTE who can help further engage their colleagues across the University in our initiative.

Building on the momentum of the *Cultivate* workshop, an LTE Speaker Series has been created for the current academic year. This was launched with a talk from the University’s Vice President and Chief Diversity Officer, Dr. Franklin Tuitt, with a follow-up event where participants were able to engage in breakout groups to discuss the content of Dr. Tuitt’s presentation. Our spring programming will focus on our colleagues across all of our campuses and the experiential programming they are deeply engaged in. Our final Spring 2021 event will feature an invited guest who can speak to the intersections between diversity, equal access, inclusion, and LTE.

## Next Steps

UConn already has many promising initiatives with proven success from which we can build, and UConn clearly enjoys a culture of life-transformative education across the university. But to scale and extend these initiatives to each and every student at the university we must emphasize and strengthen the cultural values that support LTE.

Among the cultural values the Task Force identifies as values crucial to LTE's success are:

- *Generosity*—of spirit, attention, and resources. Our other values stem from a magnanimous commitment to each other.
- *Equity*—creating initiatives that allow all students equal access, regardless of ethnicity, financial status or gender identification.
- *Inclusion*—seeing all students, not just the “ideal” student or the “average” student.
- *Agency*—empowerment and entrepreneurship.
- *Care*—an ethic of care for the people around us.
- *Legacy*—attention to the institution and to leaving behind something better for the future of Connecticut.

These are values that are already widely held at UConn. However, we also recognize that *values are honored or undermined in practice*. When an institution honors its values, it is reflected in tangible things – behaviors, programs, and budgets. In order for LTE to thrive, we must find and address the gaps between our shared values and actual practice. This is how we'll go from good programs and examples of success to an integrated program of LTE that students, faculty, staff, and all our stakeholders can recognize as a hallmark of a UConn education.

This will be the work of the Task Force during the next year. Moving into the spring of 2021, the LTE Working groups have been restructured and received new charges (see Appendix B. LTE Working Group Structure). Work in the LTE Working Groups is framed by three **guiding questions**:

- a. What are the initiatives we can suggest for Fall 2021 that require relatively few additional resources and minimal changes in practice relative to our current operations?
- b. What are the initiatives that require relatively few additional resources, but may have barriers concerning in-grained practices or culture?
- c. What are the longer-term initiatives that will need significant additional resources (personnel, finances)?

Furthermore, are a set of **universal principles** that will underline all of our work.

- **Student engagement:** As mentioned earlier, student engagement is crucial. There are several ways to directly engage students. For example, engaging with Living and Learning Communities. The Vice Provost Office hours can be used to ask specific questions on a regular basis. “LTE” topic-based student conversations with rotating students can be formed on a monthly basis. This will be a necessary “all and...” approach.
- **Experiential learning:** Conversation around experiential learning initiatives and the ways we recognize and award such work by students, staff and faculty should be mindful that “learning happens on both sides of the classroom door.” How we encourage/value/accentuate both learning possibilities is central to our thought process.
- **DEI:** We do not have a specific DEI focused work group, yet all conversations will necessarily be filtered through that lens. We will be cognizant that what may look like viable initiatives may also have unintended consequences that affect underrepresented communities.
- **General education:** Both UConn’s General Education Oversight Committee (GEOC) and DeltaGE2 general education committee are deeply thoughtful about the ways we integrate experiential learning more intentionally in the current work to restructure our GenEd requirements. Some of the difficult questions here are, how do we maintain the current credit requirements while adding, or encouraging, courses that line up well with an LTE philosophy and DEI focus (such as UNIV course on Anti-Racism)?
- **Strategic plan intersection:** As one of the President’s three initiatives, LTE across campuses can both support and be supported by the development of the Strategic Plan. What are the ways we can affect culture and practice through the Strategic Plan language?

Bearing these values, guiding questions, and universal principles in mind, the six newly restructured **Working Groups** are charged with the following:

1. **The Authentic and Inclusive Learning Experiences (A&IL)** group will identify the experiential learning work currently happening around campus, determine any gaps in our offerings and make recommendations for filling them, and identify the specific cultural, administrative, and other barriers that prevent every student at UConn from taking advantage of these opportunities.

Specifically, it will be charged with answering the following:

- How do we define/characterize the qualities of Authentic and Inclusive Learning at UConn?
- How do we invigorate General Education with ideas around experiential learning (for example, requiring an “A&IL” course in the curriculum)?
- How do we invigorate UNIV courses like the anti-racist course as a way to remain relevant with current social movements and scientific discoveries (“LTE” courses) (Common Intellectual Experiences are High Impact Practices)?
- How do we institutionally recognize/award this work?

2. The **Advising and Mentoring** group identified four areas for continued work. Working closely with the Research and Assessment and Best Practices working groups, the group will explore and make recommendations on the following:

- Assessment of advising, including job duties and reward structure: What does “quality advising” look like?
- Advising roles, expectations, and support for faculty, staff, and students, including training and professional development; checklists and other aids; offer letter language; and other supports for faculty and staff advisors.
- Advising models, scaling, and structures, including advising in academic departments and large major options; flexibility across schools/colleges/departments; equity across schools/colleges/departments; uneven workload issues; integration of career services/career development; and optimal working relationships between faculty and staff advisors.
- Barriers to effective and equitable advising and mentoring.

3. The **Research and Assessment** group will continue its work of data collection and analysis. The group will collaborate with these programs and with the other LTE Working Groups to provide specific formative and summative evaluation tools that can efficiently monitor the key components of LTE. Specifically, the group will:

- In Spring 2021, UConn will participate in the SERU (Student Experience in the Research University) Undergraduate Survey. SERU is designed as a census and online survey that offers a systematic environmental scan of the student experience within major research-intensive universities. A specific module of the SERU survey has been selected to most closely align with metrics that will allow us to measure a baseline of current LTE-type practices at UConn and then assess the impact of our work over future years as we continue to have students complete the SERU Undergraduate Survey.
- Continue to analyze outputs from the Fall 2020 Cultivate event to better understand how the UConn faculty and staff community understands LTE and help inform strategies for moving forward.
- Obtain and review existing summative and formative data collection tools for already established support programs across the university (e.g., academic support, cultural centers, learning communities, recruitment and retention).
- Develop program specific tools that can be used on an ongoing basis (particularly in small group settings) to support the LTE initiative.

4. A new **Communication** working group will consider how LTE is communicated internally and externally, and how messaging and communication strategies may differ from students to faculty to staff to external partners and affiliates. This group will develop communication and publicity strategies to be implemented by the staff of the Provost's Office. The group will maintain close connections with all of the working groups, the LTE Task Force and the LTE Core Committee. Immediate areas of focus include:

- Should communications come from the LTE Task Force or from the Provost's Office?

- What improvements should be made to the UConn LTE website?
  - What additional communications assets and collateral are required?
  - Development of a publicity calendar for LTE
5. The **Best Practices** working group will continue to focus largely on internal best practices, spanning Storrs and regional campuses. The work of the Best Practices working group was significantly impacted by the pandemic, when it was assessed that core stakeholders were not able to step back to focus on the best practices of “normal” times in the midst of a rapid transition to online modalities. Through the remainder of the current academic year the group will:
- Distribute a survey to identify best practices at UConn related to core elements of life-transformative education, with specific emphasis on a) the potential scalability and/or replicability of programs, b) the institutional barriers leaders of these programs have faced in their development or would foresee in expanding these programs.
  - Hold focus groups for students at Storrs and all four regional campuses to better understand student perceptions of “best practices” in relation to LTE. This work will be shaped by an evolution of the overall task force / core leadership approach to greater student engagement in LTE through the coming academic year.
  - Summarize and present material in a way that highlights analysis for internal use so as to better inform structural and cultural issues central to the expansion of LTE at UConn and that looks at how existing frameworks such as high-impact practices (HIPs) might overlap with LTE. Information will also be shared with the Communications group to help provide them with material to showcase best practices to internal and external audiences.
6. Finally, a set of ad-hoc **Rapid Response Groups** will be assembled to address discrete issues submitted to them from the working groups. Rapid Response groups will be made up of at least one member who attended the *Cultivate* LTE Conference and others who have yet to formally participate in an LTE conversation. Rapid Response Groups are proposed to and charged by the

Vice Provost's office and LTE co-chairs and will carry out and report on their activities during the semester in which they are charged.

- The first of the rapid responses will involve a program of mentorship for students who have been identified as at-risk of disengagement from the University during the disruptions of the pandemic. *Cultivate* participants will be invited to act as mentors and a rapid-response group will oversee providing training and support for mentors, and an assessment of their impact.

## Conclusion

A final note concerns the circumstances in which this work will be performed, that is, during a global pandemic and its economic repercussions and amidst a nationwide reckoning with anti-Black racism and white supremacy. COVID-19 has revealed gaps and blind spots in UConn's and our shared national culture.

In March, when the pandemic forced an abrupt shift to virtual learning and working environments, we were treated to a harsh lesson in the ways in which UConn does and does not live up to its values in practice. Most distressingly, the crisis demonstrated that many more of us are functionally excluded from our shared values and visions than we previously thought. Examples of exclusion range from outright discrimination to material inequality to labor inequities. We are saddened and outraged by discrimination and hate displayed toward Asian students, faculty, and staff born in misconceptions and misinformation about the virus's spread and origins. We have come to a new understanding of how the residential campus experience hides serious material and financial inequalities among students in terms of housing, technology, access, space, and health—things that become apparent when learning moves to whatever constitutes “home” for our students but which will follow them back when they return. The same goes for faculty and staff, who are asked to provide labor under widely varying circumstances (health conditions, familial obligations, housing circumstances, technology access).

COVID-19 has also reminded us of the continuing effects of anti-Black racism and white supremacy in our national life. COVID-19 has disproportionately affected communities of color both inside and outside of UConn, not only in its economic and educational consequences, but in health outcomes – in matters of life and death.

This summer's protests reminded us that systemic racism is still a scourge and that no institution is untouched. That includes UConn.

Moreover, the shift to online teaching, the human toll of the virus, and the economic crisis have changed many things for the foreseeable future. We face an institution under strain, one possibly more attentive to immediate practical problem-solving than to the longer-term and more abstract challenges. We face a changed fiscal environment, one that will likely be marked by significant austerity that will make it hard to make the kinds of changes that LTE requires. Meanwhile, widespread systemic failures to meet the challenges of the pandemic have increased already widespread skepticism of institutions. In this climate of mistrust, our efforts must be authentic and palpable, despite the financial and institutional challenges. Bringing LTE to every student will require real changes and new investments, not existing efforts wrapped up in new marketing.

At the same time, and although we are always mindful of the tremendous cost in human health and wealth that COVID-19 has caused and the disparities it has revealed, we nevertheless recognize certain opportunities that are available to us in the changed environment. In a crisis, we turn to the things we value most. We are more aware of *generosity* in our community and we seek to be more generous ourselves. We see more clearly who is left out and act in the interest of increasing *inclusion*. Among the faculty and staff there is an increased awareness of the importance of student *care*. Online and elsewhere we have seen an amazing flourishing of creativity and *agency* among students, faculty, and staff in delivering and scaling teaching and learning—a creativity that we can capture and build upon. Likewise, the crisis has forced institutional creativity as we have had to pioneer new ties between units, people, and programs to meet the many challenges of the closure. Similarly, absence has made the heart grow fonder. Having had it abruptly taken away, we realize what we love about UConn and why we want to sustain it as a *legacy* for the future. This sentiment was made clear during our *Cultivate* workshop. Nearly all of the participants made note of their pride and emotional connection to the University. Finally, the current nationwide struggle to defend Black life and end white supremacy has reminded us that diversity, equity, and inclusion are the bedrock of a campus-wide program of LTE and has underscored what really must be transformative about education in order for Black life to matter. With every decision we make and initiative we undertake, we must ask, how are income challenged students, underrepresented students and students of color affected by our decisions?

Never has the importance of life-transformative education been clearer than now, when we are acutely aware of our shared humanity and the imperative to nurture each and every mind. We welcome UConn's commitment to offering LTE to all students and look forward to finding effective solutions in the coming year.

# Appendix A. Task Force and Working Group Membership, Fall 2019 – Fall 2020

## Task Force

Michael Bradford, *Vice Provost for Faculty, Staff and Student Development*

Sandra Bushmich, *Associate Dean for Academic Programs, College of Agriculture, Health, and Natural Resources*

Janine Caira, *Professor, Ecology and Evolutionary Biology*

Milagros Castillo-Montoya, *Assistant Professor of Higher Education and Student Affairs*

Jason Oliver Chang, *Associate Professor of History and Asian American Studies*

Xinnian Chen, *Professor-in-Residence and Associate Department Head*

Maria Chrysochoou, *Professor and Department Head, Civil and Environmental Engineering*

Sarah Croucher, *Director of Academic Policy and Faculty Affairs*

Peter Diplock, *Associate Vice Provost for Excellence in Teaching & Learning*

Cameron Faustman, *Professor, Department of Animal Science*

Patricia Fazio, *Associate Vice President for Creative Strategy & Brand Management*

Jill Fitzgerald, *Director of Experiential Learning Continuing Professional Development, Associate Clinical Professor*

Michael Gilbert, *Vice President for Student Affairs*

Tamika La Salle, *Associate Professor, School Psychology Program*

Anne Langley, *Dean of UConn Library*

Jennifer Lease Butts, *Associate Vice Provost for Enrichment Programs, Director of the Honors Program*

David Ouimette, *Executive Director, First Year Programs, Learning Communities, Academic Achievement Center*

Amanda Pitts, *Academic Engagement Coordinator*

Amit Savkar, *Associate Professor, Department of Math*

Tom Scheinfeldt, *Associate Professor of History*

Priyanka Thakkar, *President, Undergraduate Student Government*

John Volin, *Professor & Vice Provost, Natural Resources & the Environment*

Manuela Wagner, *Associate Professor, German Studies and Applied Linguistics and Discourse Studies*

# Working Groups

## Best Practices Working Group

Co-Chairs: Amit Savkar and Sarah Croucher

Members: Dan Burkey, Jaclyn Chancey, Nisali Fernando, Jill Fitzgerald, Melissa Foreman, Kia Huggan, Jamie Kleinman, Caroline McGuire, Jon Moore, Mansour Ndiaye, Yuhang Rong, Tom Van Hoof

## Cultural Change Working Group

Tri-Chairs: Peter Diplock, Xinnian Chen and Tom Scheinfeldt

Members: Ama Appiah, Jason Chang, Patti Fazio, Anne Langley, Amanda Pitts, Jonelle Reynolds

## Authentic and Inclusive Learning Working Group

Co-Chairs: Marisa Chrysochoou and Manuela Wagner

Members: Michael Bradford, Milagros Castillo-Montoya, Becky Feldman, Rachael Gabriel, Brendan Kane, Luz Burgos Lopez, Glenn Mitoma, Joanna Rivera-Davis, Martina Rosenberg, Kevin Thompson, Xioahan Zhang

## Assessment Working Group

Co-Chairs: Tamika La Salle and Lauren Jorgensen

Members: Mohamad Alkadry, Dan Doerr, Jesslynn Rocha-Neves, Suli Serrano-Haynes.

## Advising and Mentoring Working Group

Tri-Chairs: Sandy Bushmich, Cameron Faustman and Jen Lease Butts

Members: Chris Blesso, Janine Caira, Dwight Codr, Micah Heuman, Jim Lowe, Jeanne McCaffrey, Joel Nebres, Tony Omega, Suzanne Onorato, David Ouimette, Sharyn Rusch, Jasmine Smith, Ellen Tripp

# Appendix B. LTE Working Group Structure, 2021

