

Committee for 125: Chapter II
Student Success and Experience Task Force Report (DRAFT)

Scenario: As we move into the third decade of the twenty-first century, ETSU faces an array of threats from external environments, not the least of which are the erosion of public trust in higher education, strong concerns over higher education costs, and an increasingly prominent view among citizens that higher education is simply one among very many pathways into adulthood. Imagine, however, in the coming decade ETSU works to overturn these viewpoints by continuing to focus not only on “how” to recruit, retain, and graduate a diverse body of students but also on helping families, prospective students, enrolled students, and other stakeholder better understand the “why” of higher education, generally, and the “why” of ETSU, specifically. In other words, ETSU creates a culture of excellence that continually leads students and families to an awareness and understanding of the fact that, to put it bluntly, “Yes, we’re worth it,” that students will not only find a strong sense of belonging at ETSU but also will find a clear sense of vocational and professional purpose that keeps them engaged, fulfilled, and absolutely certain why they came to this institution.

Picture a student coming to ETSU in the upcoming decade who has opportunities to engage with the institution after its re-envisioning of student success and experience. This student, William Moore, comes to ETSU from Unicoi County and earns a modest \$2,000 per year academic scholarship based on his GPA and ACT score. Like many students in our region, William, however, is not entirely certain why he’s attending college, nor does he have specific career goals or plans. He chooses to major in biology because he’s heard anecdotally from family and friends that biology is a good pathway to medical school and, despite not knowing or caring much about medicine, William believes that becoming a doctor means having a prestigious career.

Before William arrives at ETSU, he learns that his academic scholarship provides him a chance to become engaged with the institution in one of several ways. That is, his scholarship asks him to dedicate a handful of hours per week in a high-impact activity of his choice: campus or community service (with a professional development angle), an undergraduate research “discovery” program, a civic engagement program, or a peer mentor program. Each option provides William a way to meet other students, staff, and/or faculty members, and each offers him ways to connect with the institution in meaningful ways. Whichever option William chooses, this is to say, his scholarship award allows him to participate in a program with outcomes related to skills and competencies development. At ETSU’s Preview Event in August, William learns more about each of these program choices and decides to participate in the community service program where ETSU provides him the chance to spend his first year volunteering a few hours per week at a food pantry in Johnson City. As part of this work, William collaborates with several other ETSU students from diverse majors and backgrounds as well as staff and other volunteers at the food pantry. In doing so, William takes part in a new community of individuals while simultaneously coming to a better understanding of how non-profits deal with food scarcity in the region. Just a few years earlier, William might have been selected as an APS student worker who, instead, answered phones for an ETSU office, completed some light filing or photocopying tasks, or, perhaps, even just stared at his phone as a means to complete his ETSU scholarship requirements.

At this same time during William’s first year at ETSU, he also has opportunities to build relationships with students, staff, and faculty in his residence hall. As a member of a STEM-focused living-learning community with a faculty-in-residence director in a STEM field, William has opportunities to take part in structured study sessions, learn about academic support programs, create bonds with other students, and, most importantly, develop a mentoring relationship with the faculty-in-residence. In informal conversations with this mentor, William learns that attending medical school and becoming a doctor is merely one of hundreds of career possibilities related to his burgeoning interest in health and health disparities. Until then, William understood career choices in overly simplistic ways: one became a doctor, lawyer, teacher, or business person. While he does not immediately put aside the idea of medical school, he begins to recognize a larger landscape of

professional possibilities, thanks to the faculty-in-residence mentor and his network of other peers and staff members whom he sees and converses with regularly each week.

Additionally, in multiple courses during his first two years, William has instructors who embed readings and assignments that help him and other students explore and understand vocational, or professional, purpose. These courses, that is, ensure that students have opportunities to reflect on how their interests, strengths, and workplace values align (or don't align) with their current career trajectories. Students like William learn about the value of internships, education abroad, undergraduate research, and community engagement, for instance. Students in these courses also develop *realistic* expectations about career goals and plans and are taught about quality of life outcomes tied to a college degree, including general well-being, health, and happiness.

In these courses and elsewhere, William begins to recognize that a medical profession does not suit him; however, he does realize that he has strengths and interests in research. This combined with his concern about the scarcity of quality food and education about food for many families in the region leads to a change of major from biology to nutrition with a minor in public health. He wants a career that can create positive health impacts in the region and is focused on specific subject that interest him most. Unlike many pre-med students who “washout” after struggling with pre-med courses, left sitting in the ashes of their medical school plans, William has been able to make a deliberate and intentional decision to shift gears to a career field that truly aligns with his values and interests.

At this point, William sees the value of an undergraduate research project tied to his new career interests (research, he learns, solves problems that matter to him), he sees the value of continuing to volunteer at the food pantry to expand his network of regional stakeholders in these issues, and he sees the value of a summer study abroad program in Belize that will allow him to study similar issues from a cross-cultural perspective. In other words, William's strong understanding of a purposeful vocation has allowed him to recognize how other high-impact practices (such as undergraduate research, study abroad, and community service) are not merely just “add-ons” to his undergraduate career. They are central experiences needed to move him toward his now clearly articulated and strategic career plans and goals. These experiences become understood as natural steps on the pathway he is already headed on.

As William begins wrapping up his undergraduate education and thinking about next steps—either an entry-level position with a local non-profit or a graduate program in public health—ETSU provides him a leg up on other applicants through an ETSU Experience Transcript, which is, in short, a co-curricular transcript that documents and credentializes all the high-impact and experiential-learning activities William participated in at ETSU: his service at the food pantry, his participation in a living-learning community, his research endeavors, his study abroad program, and more (such as the year he served as a peer mentor to new students in his major). In addition to his academic transcript, that is, William can submit his ETSU Experience Transcript to employers and graduate programs, verifying his participation in activities that enhanced his professional skills and workplace competencies.

In conclusion, after an initial misstep of starting college with a non-strategic goal of going to medical school, William quickly adjusted and found a realistic career plan that coherently aligned with his interests, his strengths, and the things that he values doing in workplaces. In short, his new career path allows him to work on the problems that matter most to him. However, it was ETSU's robust student success and experience programs that helped lead William toward a timely graduation and down the right career path. It provided him the chance to complete community service activities and be exposed to problems he didn't know existed, to live and learn amongst students and faculty and gain strong mentorship along the way, to have structured time in courses to engage in intentional reflection on vocation as a means to make sure he found the right career, and, finally, to demonstrate through an official ETSU credential a diverse array of impactful experiences

he had outside the classroom in addition to all those inside the classroom. All these kept William engaged and fulfilled at ETSU, kept him from floundering around through courses in non-purposeful, happenstance ways, kept him persisting at the institution, and kept him on track to graduate in four years. William early on may have questioned his major but not his decision to attend and pay for college. ETSU's student success and experience programs helped William navigate the "how" of the institution while simultaneously always reinforcing to William the "why" of ETSU as part of his future personal and professional trajectory.

Student Success and Experience Strategic Academic Vision: East Tennessee State University leads all Tennessee universities in making progress toward Complete College Tennessee Act (CCTA) outcomes-based funding objectives. It does so in part by offering distinctive and impactful student success and experience programs that provide all ETSU students with opportunities to build a constellation of rich relationships with faculty, staff, and student peers in diverse spaces and communities; to explore and find a clear sense of vocational purpose as well as navigate the institution with a strong sense of purpose; and to recognize the value of high-impact practices, experiential learning, and co-curricular activities through enhanced tracking and transcribing processes that celebrate and credentialize an array of student experiences and achievements beyond course grades.

Outcomes & Accomplishments: The following four "Big Dream" outcomes help carry out the Student Success and Experience strategic academic vision above. Each is tied to three implementation phases over the next decade that detail accomplishments over time:

Outcome 1: East Tennessee State University's Scholarship Programs provide scholarship recipients opportunities to engage in meaningful activities that facilitate student success and fulfillment. To achieve this outcome, ETSU Academic Performance Scholarships (APS) are reconceived and revised as experiential-learning, or student-engagement, scholarships that de-emphasize the concept of "student worker" and emphasize instead opportunities for scholarship recipients to participate in high-impact practices such as undergraduate research, campus or community service, civic engagement, leadership programs, and/or peer-mentor programs, among others.

- **Accomplishments by 2024:** ETSU will have evaluated the value added of current APS student workers to departments and units across campus; evaluated the fiscal impact of repositioning some scholarship recipients in non-campus service roles; devised programs and logistics that allow for ETSU scholarship recipients to participate in high-impact practices and experiential-learning activities as a condition of their ETSU scholarship award; begin pilot programs of select programs.
- **Accomplishments by 2026:** ETSU will have finalized a portfolio of well-functioning, measurable, high-impact programs that ETSU scholarship recipients may self-select into, including but not limited to campus and community service programs, civic engagement programs, leadership programs, undergraduate research, and/or mentoring programs; begin yearly assessments of programs and impact on CCTA outcomes-based funding.
- **Accomplishments by 2031:** ETSU will have been recognized nationally for its innovative scholarship programs that marry financial support for students with experiential learning and high-impact practices; reviewed five-year data sets to assess the longitudinal quality of this scholarship program's model in order to ensure there is value added to both the student experience and to ETSU's strategic goals and position in the Complete College Tennessee Act's outcomes-based funding model; embarked upon continuous improvement efforts based on assessment results.

Outcome 2: East Tennessee State University requires all first-year students (with some exceptions) to live in campus residence halls that provide world-class experiences and activities to create a strong sense of belonging at ETSU and in the region. To accomplish this outcome, ETSU academic colleges and departments collaborate with Housing and Residence Life to develop “residential colleges” that embed academic support structures and faculty leaders into residence halls, thereby facilitating living-learning communities, high-impact practices, academic study sessions, “house” competitions among residence halls and/or living-learning communities, and increased visibility of student services and academic support, among many other possibilities.

- **Accomplishments by 2024:** ETSU has completed an analysis of resources and current partnerships between ETSU academic units and Housing and Residence Life; developed a strategic plan to create a “residential college” model that provides measurable, mutually beneficial experiences and outcomes for ETSU students, staff, and faculty in ways that help promote intellectual growth, community building, high-impact practices, self-discovery, and cultural awareness and inclusion.
- **Accomplishments by 2026:** ETSU has implemented a “residential college” model that provides a nationally recognized residential experience to half of ETSU’s first-year students; developed incentives for faculty and staff to be heavily engaged in residential college life, including both financial incentives as well as professional ones (for example, recognition of this work in tenure and promotion decisions); started yearly assessments of residential programs and impact on CCTA outcomes-based funding.
- **Accomplishments by 2031:** ETSU has an fully developed “residential college” model that provides a nationally recognized residential experience to all ETSU first-year students (with a few exceptions) as well as provides high-quality residential experiences to second-year students; ETSU has completed a five-year review of data sets to continue assessing ETSU residential experience programs and their role in facilitating both student and institutional success, including success in CCTA outcomes funding; embarked upon continuous improvement efforts based on assessment results.

Outcome 3: East Tennessee State University has a nationally recognized institutional culture that enables students to explore and find purposeful work as well as navigate the institution with purpose and ease. To achieve this outcome, ETSU creates a Center for Purposeful Work that collaborates with diverse units across campus to help students develop a growth mindset, develop an understanding of how and why learning is more impactful when undertaken with a strong sense of purpose, and develop explorations of purposeful work and vocation that align with their interests, values, and strengths.

- **Accomplishments by 2024:** ETSU will have created a strategic plan and staffing plan for a Center for Purposeful Work at ETSU that collaborates with various campus units (such as Career Services and the Center for Teaching Excellence, among others) to help students develop a growth mindset and help them explore their individual vocational purposes and goals in both curricular and co-curricular spaces.
- **Accomplishments by 2026:** ETSU will have a fully functioning Center for Purposeful Work that includes, among other things, a robust faculty training program that teaches faculty how to help students explore and think about vocational purpose in the context of ETSU courses (though especially in general education courses that students often see as things to “get out of the way”); aligned institutional language and concepts related to academic achievement, purposeful work, and workforce development so ETSU faculty, staff, and students share a common language that resonates with employers; ETSU will have begun assessing impact of the Center.

- ***Accomplishments by 2031:*** ETSU has become a destination campus where prospective students clearly understand that ETSU not only ensures they graduate in a timely fashion with a quality degree but also graduate with a clear plan and pathway into the future that leads to professional success and personal well-being; that is, ETSU is the premier institution that provides graduates with the “how” as well as the “why” when it comes to their professional goals and development; ETSU has a robust assessment protocol that has reviewed five-year data sets to continue assessing the role and value of the Center and ways to embark upon continuous improvement.

Outcome 4: East Tennessee State University captures a vast array of meaningful data about student success and engagement as well as provides students credentials that relate to their experiential-learning and co-curricular activities (study abroad, internships, field experiences, research, leadership, and service, for example). To accomplish this outcome, ETSU implements an integrated software platform that tracks the quantity and quality of student engagement activities and their correlation to Complete College Tennessee Act objectives as well as creates a system to provide alternative, or experience-centered, transcripts that document and celebrate student experiences beyond coursework.

- ***Accomplishments by 2024:*** ETSU will have completed an evaluation of current data-management processes related to student engagement activities and discovered alternative methods and software platforms that provide an improved means to meet the outcome; completed an assessment of possibilities to offer ETSU students alternative, or experience-centered, transcripts that document a portfolio of experiential-learning and co-curricular activities valued by employers and graduate programs.
- ***Accomplishments by 2026:*** ETSU has a fully functioning data-management process that captures and tracks student engagement activities, one that can be accessed by many stakeholders across campus in order to improve advising and mentoring; developed a fully functioning ETSU Experience Transcript (EE Transcript) that validates students’ experiential learning and co-curricular activities, allowing students to demonstrate skills and competencies that make them more competitive for employment and graduate programs.
- ***Accomplishments by 2031:*** ETSU has become a destination campus known for the way it provides, celebrates, and credits experiential-learning and co-curricular activities; ETSU is recognized as national model among public regional institutions for embedding and documenting experiential-learning and co-curricular activities in the student life cycle; ETSU has a robust and effective process for continued assessment of its data-management processes and the ETSU Experience Transcripts to ensure their value in assisting with student success goals.

Outcome 5: