Golden Opportunity through Active Learning (GOAL)

The Golden Opportunity through Active Learning (GOAL) mission is simple: to incorporate life-skills, field experiences, and career-oriented experiential learning opportunities that engage students in such a way that learning becomes both thought provoking and meaningful. Thus, we strive to empower scholars to take “ownership” of their path to academic and professional success through cooperative education, cultural immersion, institutional projects/initiatives, internships, practicums, service-learning and student research activities. Many of these components of experiential learning are currently being performed through academic and institutional support departments on campus today. The departments that engage students through active learning have laid the groundwork for the development of an experiential learning collaborative at Southern Miss that is desperately needed. Strengthening a student’s knowledge and providing opportunities for building “field-experience” will be necessary for scholars to excel in their professional careers.

We propose to support an efficient mechanism of producing competent and readily deployable graduates through realigning USM’s internal resources and leveraging external constituents. The proposed mechanism will positively impact various facets of students’ lives in a systemic way. We will clarify and improve the existing pathways, implement new pathways, and expand opportunities with the goal of retaining and graduating competent graduates to meet our growing employment need in the Gulf South region and beyond. We believe that individual departments and colleges know the best about what makes their graduates the most competitive and competent in their respective fields. Our proposed mechanism will guide each department to select critical student learning components, identify internal and external resources, and implement and monitor programs. We do not anticipate accomplishing program changes through major restructuring of any programs or addition of any major resources, but through effective and efficient uses of resources and applying best practices. Most of the improvements can be embedded through program requirements, course requirements, capstone projects, and extracurricular activities. The proposed mechanism will address at least the top four tenets of the QEP survey results: retention, graduation and student success; experiential learning student research, service learning, internships, etc.); critical thinking and problem solving; career preparation and professionalism leverage. Teams will provide resources and support for faculty to teach individuals or groups of students. Resources that exist today in separate “bubbles” will come together to create an edu-sphere. This edu-sphere will function as a multidisciplinary learning environment within which students can experience education through guided action and problem solving.

Generations of graduates, instilled with a new sense of personal accomplishment, academic success and community connection, will rise to the top of their fields because of their participation in the Golden Opportunity and Active Learning initiative. At The University of Southern Mississippi, our strong history is evident by the commitment to quality programs, facilities, research, activities and most importantly our scholars. Every student that enrolls and graduates from Southern Miss becomes part of our history, our family and our commitment to academic success.