



**Arts & Sciences**

Experiential Learning Connector

## *REPORT ON A&S CONNECTOR ACTIVITIES: DECEMBER 2022-JUNE 2023*

Prepared by Erin Salius, Director  
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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Overview

The A&S Connector launched on December 1, 2022, with the appointment of its inaugural Director. This report covers the first six months of activities, through June 30, 2022.

### Mission

To expand the reach and accessibility of experiential learning (EL) opportunities for CAS undergraduates, empowering all students to discover the real-world applications of the ideas, methods, and questions that inspire a liberal arts education.

### Challenges Identified

The following barriers to experiential learning were noted during a series of focus groups with students and conversations with University partners:

- Lack of familiarity with the term “experiential learning”
- Lack of awareness about the value of EL
- Difficulty knowing how to find EL courses and opportunities
- Trouble establishing networks and making connections with peers and mentors
- Not enough time in their schedules for internships during the school year
- Not enough support for unpaid or low-paying internships during the summer

### Accomplishments

The following initiatives and programs were piloted in spring 2023 to address the challenges identified by students and University partners.

Initiative/Program	Description	Impact
Website launch	Curated list of EL resources, EL courses, and EL opportunities by interest area	- 5,106 total views - 3,956 unique users
Social media campaign	Posts created by interns publicizing EL opportunities and student testimonials	- 22,980 total impressions - 16,637 users reached - 750 engagements
Newsletter updates	Information about EL opportunities listed in CAS undergraduate student newsletter	- 7500 students reached bi-weekly
EL Mentorship Program	First-year undergraduates are matched with upper-class students for EL mentoring and network-building	- 32 participants in pilot year: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 14 mentors/18 mentees</li> </ul> - 93% would recommend program
Careers for Humanities Majors Events	Panel series featuring CAS humanities alumni who share information about career pathways and network building	- First panel held in April 2023 - 3 to 4 additional panels planned for AY 2023-2024



Initiative/Program	Description	Impact
Credit-bearing Internship Course	CAS's first College-wide, credit-bearing internship course, CAS IN 299, has been approved to be offered, beginning in spring 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Expected to serve 35 students per semester</li> <li>- Expected to be offered every fall and spring semester</li> </ul>
Summer Internship Support Program	Provides scholarships to cover summer housing and dining costs for undergraduates with unpaid or low-paying internships in the Boston area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 6 participants with demonstrated financial need selected for pilot</li> <li>- Student internships represent STEM, humanities, and social science fields of study</li> </ul>

### Future Programming

The following activities are planned for academic year 2023-2024:

1. To increase awareness about our resource and its visibility on campus, the office will be re-branded as **CAS Experiential Learning Connector**, based on feedback from students.
2. To assist students in finding and accessing EL opportunities, a series of **website upgrades and enhancements** will allow undergraduates to search for experiences based on categories such as academic interest, skills developed, and/or Hub unit.
3. To help students find and land high-quality internships, a **workshop series** will be offered on fall 2024, in partnership with the Center for Career Development and International Students & Scholars Office.
4. To expand the Connector's reach across campus, the **Experiential Learning Peer Ambassador Program** will promote peer-to-peer information sharing. Highly trained CAS undergraduates assist fellow students in finding opportunities through consultations. They will also share information about EL with student groups and offices representing students from historically underrepresented backgrounds. The Provost's Office recently approved a new full-time Program Manager position, and the person who assumes this role will train and oversee the Ambassadors.

### Boston University Partners & Collaborators

Along with 40+ academic departments and programs within the College of Arts & Sciences that have contributed to the Connector's programming efforts, the following University resources are also frequent collaborators:

BU Hub  
 BU Spark!  
 CAS Academic Advising  
 CAS Communications Office  
 CAS Student Programs & Leadership  
 Center for Career Development  
 Center for Teaching & Learning

Community Service Center  
 Initiative on Cities  
 Innovate@BU  
 International Students & Scholars Office  
 Newbury Center  
 Study Abroad  
 University Research Opportunity Program (UROP)



## INTRODUCTION

The A&S Connector is a new resource in the College of Arts & Sciences. Its mission is to expand the reach and accessibility of experiential learning (EL) opportunities for CAS undergraduates, empowering all students to discover the real-world applications of the ideas, methods, and questions that inspire a liberal arts education. This report covers the first seven months of Connector activities, from its launch through the spring 2023 semester, and looks ahead to plans for future programming initiatives.

Following a competitive search process that began in summer 2022, the inaugural Director of the Connector was appointed on December 1, 2022, and the resource was formally announced to students later that month. The initial phase of the Connector was devoted to operational planning, a process driven by coordination with University offices and academic departments that support experiential learning, as well as by feedback provided by current CAS students in a series of focus groups. Five student focus groups were held from December 2022 through January 2023, with each session drawing between 7 and 20 participants. These focus groups, as well as earlier feedback gathered from students during the Strategic Planning process and detailed conversations with University collaborators, enabled the Director to identify the main challenges that undergraduates experience in trying to find and access EL opportunities on campus and off. Programming for the spring 2023 semester was then designed in response to the three main themes emerging from those discussions, each of which is detailed below.

## PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

### Theme 1: EL awareness and information

*Insights:* One of the central themes that emerged from the focus groups was the need for more awareness about EL. Although CAS students were familiar with the term “experiential learning,” they could not always say what it meant, how it could benefit them, or where to access resources. Multiple students pointed out that not having a “centralized” list of EL opportunities made it difficult to know what was available to them and that, as a result, they often found out about opportunities too late to take advantage. Moreover, some students said that the lack of available information about EL contributed to the sense that the best opportunities were open only to students with established networks, who learned about them by word-of-mouth.

*Related Activities:* To address the need for more awareness, the Connector launched a social media campaign, in partnership with the College’s Communications Office. CAS undergraduate interns developed posts that not only created visibility for “experiential learning” as a concept but also featured stories about their peers engaged in EL alongside information about how to get involved. The interns’ posts, all using the hashtag #artsandsciencesinaction, generated 22,980 total impressions and 750 engagements (i.e., interactions with the posts, including likes, comments, and shares) during the spring 2023 semester. Many of the posts – and calls to participate – were also shared on digital signs around campus as well as in the new CAS

undergraduate newsletter, which reaches 7500 students in bi-weekly installments. In addition, the Connector website launched in January 2023, with pages that [explain EL](#) in student-friendly language; list [CAS courses with EL components](#); and catalog the many [EL opportunities](#) available to CAS students, along with the contact information for the relevant administrative offices. From January through May 2023, the webpages resulted in 5,106 views, 3,956 of them from unique users. These web-based initiatives were complemented and expanded by the Connector's presence at a variety of on-campus events and resource fairs, including Open Houses for prospective students, during which the Connector resources and relevant EL opportunities for students were highlighted.



Examples of social media posts using the hashtag #artsandsciencesinaction

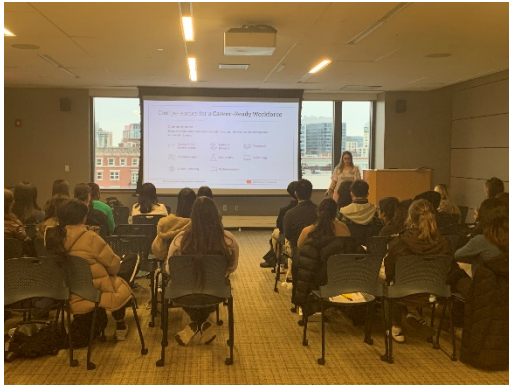
## Theme 2: Mentorship and connection

**Insights:** Another theme emerging from the focus groups was how unconnected new students can feel in a place as big as BU. Many of the undergraduates – some who were about to graduate, others who were still first-year students themselves – said it was not until they developed relationships with older students and/or advisors that they felt knowledgeable or confident enough to explore the many EL opportunities available to them. Focus group participants clearly understood that networking is important for accessing resources of all kinds and developing future career prospects. However, most students described being unsure about where to establish those connections early on – especially before declaring a major and when most of their classes are in a large, lecture-style format that might not promote one-on-one interactions.

**Related Activities:** The [First-Year Experiential Learning Mentorship Program](#), which launched in February 2023, was created to give students new to CAS a forum for building relationships with undergraduates further along in their studies at BU. Each first-year student (mentee) was matched with an upper-class student (mentor), with matches made according to academic and/or career interests. Through a series of workshops and bi-weekly guided conversations, mentors worked with mentees to assess personal, academic, and professional goals – and then to find EL opportunities that would help them meet those goals. Along the way, participants also had a chance to review the first semester of programming offered by the Connector and



develop team-based presentations of their recommendations for future initiatives. The presentations included proposals for College-wide EL workshops, suggestions for improving the website, ideas for a more effective communication plan, and a pitch to adjust the name of the Connector. (See the next section of this document for more information on the name change.)



Photos from the first workshop of the Mentorship Program, in which students were led through a series of self-assessments of career readiness competencies.

32 CAS undergraduates participated in the first year of the Mentorship Program. According to surveys taken at the conclusion of the program, 93% of participants would recommend the experience to a friend. Mentees noted that through participation in the program they gained a better understanding of what experiential learning is and its many benefits. For example, one mentee said that they learned EL “helps you identify your faults and strengths and gives you the opportunity to work on them.” Mentees also appreciated the insights shared by their mentors regarding “resources that are available” across campus as well as “general life advice.” One first-year student said of her mentor: “She honestly inspired me a lot and helped me see BU and college in general in a better light.” The surveys suggested that mentors, too, benefitted from participation in the program. One mentor put it this way: “the experience is as educational and enriching to a mentor as it is to a mentee.”

To give CAS students the chance to make connections with alumni, the Connector partnered with the office of the Associate Dean for the Humanities to pilot a series of “Careers for Humanities Majors” events, the first of which was offered on April 18, 2023. The events featured a panel of alumni who graduated from Arts & Sciences with degrees in the humanities and have gone on to work in diverse areas, such as social and environmental justice; cultural institutions; policy and law; and public service. The alumni shared information about their career pathways with current students, giving them a sense of the varied opportunities available to them and serving as an entry point for further networking. Four alumni representing three different humanities departments – American & New England Studies, English, and Religion – participated in the first panel. While student attendance was lower than we had hoped (with only seven students joining for the live feed), we plan to share the recording with all undergraduates majoring in the humanities so they can benefit from the information presented. Future events will be offered in person and at times more conducive to



student participation, with invitations extended to undergraduates majoring in the social sciences. With these changes in place for future events, we expect attendance to grow.

### Theme 3: Support for internships

*Insights:* The final theme emerging from the focus groups was a need for more support around off-campus internships. CAS undergraduates recognized internships as essential for career development but said they often struggled to integrate them with their coursework during the academic year. In the summer, when students have more time to intern, unpaid or low-paying internships in Boston were not viable options for most undergraduates, given the high cost of housing in or near the city.

*Related activities:* To provide more support for students seeking internships, the Connector undertook two major initiatives in spring 2023. First was the development of a College-wide, credit-bearing internship course, CAS IN 299, which combines practical training in a workplace setting with seminar-based coursework that builds proficiency in a range of professional skills. The course was approved by the Academic Policy Committee, by CAS Faculty, and then by the General Education Committee. It will be offered for the first time in spring 2024, and the plan is to have it on the schedule every fall and spring semester thereafter.

The second initiative was the development of the Connector's [Summer Internship Support Program](#), the goals of which are 1) to enable CAS undergraduates to take advantage of unpaid or low-paying Boston-based in-person internship opportunities by defraying living expenses; 2) to create a cohort-based community of interns who support and encourage each other while navigating the professional landscape. Applications for summer 2023 opened in April. 21 CAS students applied, and funding levels allowed the Selection



Committee to choose six participants. The selected students, all of whom have demonstrated financial need, are being provided with an air-conditioned room in a Boston University residence hall and a dining plan covered by the program for the entire 12-and-a-half-week Summer Term. While engaged in their internships, program participants will attend four in-person meetings with their cohort; complete a series of short assignments prompting them to reflect on the internship experience; and create a team project and videos at the conclusion of the program that will be shared with the CAS community.

2023 participants in the Summer Internship Support Program are interning at the following locations:

- Boston City Council
- Boston Preservation Alliance
- Concord Prison Outreach
- Generation Teach



- Harvard TH Chan School of Public Health
- Massachusetts General Hospital (in a neurology lab)

## NEXT STEPS: AY 2023-2024 & BEYOND

### New Programming and Initiatives

All of the programs and initiatives offered by the Connector in spring 2023 are slated to continue in AY 2023-2024, with some adjustments driven by feedback received from participants. One significant adjustment we will be making is to the official name of this resource. Beginning in summer 2023, we will be known as the **CAS Experiential Learning Connector**. Participants in the Mentorship Program advocated for this change, citing the importance of having the purpose and mission of the resource (i.e., experiential learning) in its title as well as the “CAS” acronym that most undergraduate students use to identify their College. The Connector is currently engaged in a rebranding process, with new logos and other design-work in development for release before the start of the fall 2023 semester.

In addition to the rebranding work, the Connector website is being updated and enhanced, with a new filter feature that will allow students to find EL opportunities using a variety of search criteria relevant to their own interests and experience. New programming is also being planned for next academic year, including a workshop series on finding and landing high-quality internships that the Connector will offer in partnership with the Center for Career Development (CCD) and International Students & Scholars Office (ISSO) in fall 2023. Aimed at preparing all CAS undergraduates for their internship search, the workshops will also provide information about our new credit-bearing internship course and lead students through the registration process.

A second major initiative for AY 2023-2024 is the Experiential Learning Peer Ambassador Program, which will significantly expand the reach of the Connector’s services through peer-to-peer information sharing. EL Ambassadors are CAS undergraduates who receive specialized training to help fellow students find an access EL opportunities. In addition to representing the Connector at various events on campus, they will be responsible for responding to student inquiries, meeting with students as needed, and also holding regular “drop in” office hours. Furthermore, under the direction of senior staff, Ambassadors will collaborate with the Newbury Center for first-generation students, the CAS Diversity & Inclusion Office, and various identity-centered student organizations to ensure that information about EL resources reaches all CAS undergraduates, especially those from historically underrepresented backgrounds.

Each of these new initiatives is aimed at bringing our programming to scale in order to serve our entire population of 7500 undergraduate students. As the Connector grows, we will continue to assess our programming and solicit feedback from the students using the resource – as well as from those who have not yet engaged with it. In this way, the Connector will remain responsive to the needs of CAS undergraduates, even as those needs change and develop over time.





### Success Metrics

The metrics we will use to measure the Connector's impact in the next phase of programming include:

- Tracking the number of students served by graduation year, major, race/ethnicity, and first-generation status
- General population surveys that gauge student awareness of “experiential learning” as a concept and perceived accessibility of EL opportunities
- Website traffic reports and data from Sprout Social on the social media campaigns
- Assessments from participants in the following activities:
  - EL Mentorship Program
  - EL Workshops
  - Career Panels
  - Drop-in and scheduled consultations with EL Ambassadors

### Operations and Staffing

To accommodate the growth of Connector programming, the office will be moving into new temporary space ahead of the spring 2024 semester. The new space, still centrally located in the main CAS building, has capacity for EL Peer Ambassadors to hold walk-in hours for students as well as meeting space for small-group conversations.

The Office of the University Provost recently approved a new full-time Program Manager position in the Connector office. Once appointed, the Program Manager will oversee the Experiential Learning Mentorship Program and the Peer Ambassador Program as well as work with the Director to create new programming as needs arise. The Program Manager will also lead workshops and meet individually with students seeking guidance on experiential learning pathways. The addition of this new position will have direct positive impact on the number of students served by the Connector and contribute significantly to its growth as a resource.

