The “UC Forward” Program

Spotlight on the Live Well Collaborative
The University of Cincinnati has a long history of innovative approaches to experiential learning. This history dates back to 1906, when UC launched the first co-op program, a program that has served as a model concept that has been copied in 43 countries and has impacted multiple generations of students in their academic pursuits and career opportunities.

UC continues to build highly valued experiential learning programs. Since 2003, professors collaborating from industrial design, architecture, business, medicine, nursing, planning, engineering, anthropology, journalism and other fields have run inquiry-based active learning interdisciplinary studios, tackling wicked problems ranging from cyber security, new medical instrument design, and food insecurity, to the future of transportation and how to build future audiences for the performing arts. All these courses share a common goal: to teach students how to work in high-performing teams and to ideate and innovate collaboratively.

This approach has now been formalized into the UC Forward Initiative. This exciting teaching and learning initiative is structured around trans-disciplinary collaboration and offers a unique approach to developing tomorrow’s workforce. To date, more than 150 UC Forward courses have been developed in which students and faculty from different disciplines work together to analyze and design solutions to problems posed by industry or community partners. In UC Forward courses, the problems are tackled by using design thinking, systems thinking, scenario planning, and other processes that take students from the beginning of inquiry to the innovation outcomes. Over 600 students per year are now getting UC Forward experience. At the same time, community partners get much needed help to solve their problems. This also strengthens ties between the university and employers, increases our visibility and adds value in the region.

The Live Well Collaborative, (LWC) one of the first UC Forward partnerships formed, demonstrates the impact that this approach can produce. Founded in 2007, it was established as a non-profit 501c6 that specializes in research and development of products and services for the 50+ market place. It is a one-of-a-kind academic-industry innovation center where organizations collaborate on their knowledge of the baby boomer market, which are over 78 million people strong with buying power in the excess of 2.3 trillion dollars. The Live Well Collaborative was formed as a response to change the way corporations think about how they design products and services to meet the needs of America’s aging population.

It is a partnership with industry sponsors that brings together faculty and students from a range of disciplines to work on real, industry-posed problems requiring problem analysis and design solutions. Funding for projects can range from $30,000 to $100,000 per semester depending on the deliverables that the sponsoring company specifies. The Live Well Collaborative works with global companies, such as Boeing, Procter and Gamble, Pfizer, Kraft Foods, Citi Group, General Mills, Cincinnati Children’s Hospital and the Duchossois Group. In short 15-week projects, students, faculty and experts come together to develop innovative product and service solutions using a Design Thinking process. The Live Well Collaborative resolves IP rights issues at project initiation, serves as the interface between industry and academia and makes it easy for companies to partner with the university around a highly focused market.
The Live Well Collaborative is a highly outcome-driven program. Companies value the creativity and fresh perspectives students bring, while also benefitting from access to UC faculty expertise in disciplines unavailable within their organizations. In a time of decreased budgets, this public-private partnership has brought in $3 million in new funding to support novel educational approaches that would have been difficult without the partnership. To date, 37 projects have been funded, 9 company partners have participated, and 5 patent applications have been filed. Since inception, over 500 students and 30 faculty members have been exposed through this program to interdisciplinary thinking and shared methodology to find actionable solutions to real world corporate and social problems. For students, working on real problems for real employers gives them vital skills for 21st century jobs, such as the ability to function in high-performance teams and the ability to represent their discipline or skill-set in a diverse interdisciplinary setting. Students leave with a tool-kit for problem solving that includes brainstorming and ideation techniques and mastery of at least one innovation process from beginning to end.

Following are several of the innovative projects developed through the Live Well Collaborative.

- A patent application was filed for the “Take me there Chair” collaboration between LWC and Boeing focusing on improving the airport experience for the older traveler. Students developed personas for different types of future travelers, researched consumer trends, interviewed experts from many fields, held stakeholder interviews, and charted air traveler experience from packing bags to take off, before designing new products and processes for the future airport and airplane. http://livewellcollaborative.org/case-studies/

- Another LWC project sponsored by Hill-Rom involved redesigning the much-dreaded hospital gown. The end-of-term fashion show with student models wearing their designs delighted nurses and patients at the University hospital. http://livewellcollaborative.org/portfolio/hospital-gown-redesign/

- In a LWC studio partnering with Procter and Gamble, students analyzed the way consumers open, use, and close packages, and examined how people with different hand sizes and physical abilities manipulate packaging. Students then designed and prototyped innovative biomechanical assistive devices. http://bit.ly/YQL7AG

The work students have produced through eleven UC Forward Collaboratives continues to impress industries who value the contributions of new ideas and talent. Projects across collaboratives have ranged from designing mobility devices and vehicles for the future, reimagining convenience stores, solving regional transportation and infrastructure issues,
designing medical instruments to improve patient outcomes, and building a medical clinic in Tanzania that uses solar power. The Live Well Collaborative has demonstrated significant success and is a replicable model for stimulating innovation, developing a workforce relevant to society needs, and creating economic impact.


Tags: Innovation, Talent, Place

Sub-categories: novel program or activity designed to impact innovation/economy; particularly productive collaboration with industry; novel new courses designed to spur innovation, creativity, or entrepreneurship among students.