

It Takes a Village (and A University) to Raise a Workforce

Experiential Learning as the Missing Link in Regional Economic Development

Autumn Strebel
August 2026

UEDA

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This paper reflects not only my experiences in experiential learning, but also the mentorship and support of the individuals and organizations that have shaped my academic and professional journey.

I am deeply grateful to my team at the Center for Economic Competitiveness (CREC), Allison Ulaky, Jennie Allison, and Marty Romitti, for their guidance, encouragement, and willingness to invest in my growth. Their mentorship provided meaningful opportunities to contribute to projects that strengthened my understanding of economic and workforce development, including work on the Cost of Living Index (COLI) and initiatives supporting higher education.

I would also like to thank the team at Build & Elevate Northern Kentucky (BE NKY), whose mentorship first sparked my interest in economic development during my previous internship. Their passion for building stronger communities inspired me to pursue a career focused on creating opportunities through thoughtful public policy.

Finally, I am grateful to the University Economic Development Association (UEDA) for its continued commitment to helping colleges and universities become thriving, inclusive economic ecosystems. As a university student, it has been especially meaningful to contribute to an organization whose mission aligns so closely with my own aspirations. UEDA's work has reinforced my belief that higher education institutions play a vital role in fostering innovation, workforce development, and economic opportunity for the communities they serve.

To everyone who has encouraged me to ask questions, embrace new challenges, and grow through experiential learning, thank you. Your mentorship has shaped not only this paper but also the direction of my career, and I look forward to continuing this work as I pursue public policy initiatives that expand opportunities for the next generation of young professionals.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary 4

How to Succeed 5

Introduction 6

Literature Review 8

Universities as Regional Economic Development Partners 11

Internships as Talent Integration 14

Emerging Challenges 16

Conclusion 18

References 20

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Universities have increasingly expanded beyond their traditional role as institutions of higher education to become critical partners in regional economic development. Through research, innovation, entrepreneurship, and workforce preparation, universities and colleges contribute to the economic competitiveness of their surrounding communities. However, the long-term impact of universities depends on how effectively they connect students with professional opportunities and regional workforce needs. **As artificial intelligence, automation, and changing workplace structures reshape the nature of employment, universities and economic development organizations must develop more intentional strategies for integrating students and early-career professionals into evolving labor markets.**

Experiential learning serves as a key mechanism for connecting academic preparation with professional workforce development. Examples of experiential learning include internships, cooperative education, undergraduate research, service learning, and mentorship-based programs, which all allow students to apply classroom knowledge while developing the communication, problem-solving, and relationship-building skills increasingly valued by employers. These experiences also create benefits for organizations by providing access to emerging talent, supporting project-based work, and strengthening long-term talent pipelines. Expanding sustainable, paid experiential learning models requires alignment between student needs, employer priorities, and available funding resources.

The changing nature of work introduces additional challenges for workforce integration. Artificial intelligence shifts entry-level expectations away from routine task completion and toward adaptability, critical thinking, and collaboration. Similarly, remote and hybrid work models have reduced many informal learning opportunities that historically helped early-career employees develop workplace knowledge and professional networks. These changes increase the importance of structured mentorship, intentional workplace learning, and stronger collaboration between universities and employers.

HOW TO SUCCEED

Successful workforce integration requires regional ecosystems where universities, employers, economic development organizations, and workforce development partners coordinate their efforts. Examples such as the University of Cincinnati's cooperative education model, the Iowa State University Research Park, and Old Dominion University's Monarch Internship and Co-op Office demonstrate how institutions can embed employer engagement directly into academic pathways.

At the regional level, organizations such as the OneNKY Alliance demonstrate the importance of collaboration between universities, economic development organizations, employers, and workforce programs to support talent development across multiple career stages. These partnerships illustrate that workforce preparation is not limited to producing graduates but involves creating continuous pathways for professional growth and regional economic resilience.

Moving forward, universities should view experiential learning not simply as a student development initiative, but as a regional economic development strategy. Expanding paid experiential learning opportunities, strengthening employer partnerships, formalizing mentorship, and leveraging grant-supported workforce initiatives can improve access for students while providing measurable value to organizations. By intentionally connecting academic institutions with regional workforce systems, universities can play a larger role in developing the talent networks, professional relationships, and adaptive skills needed for the future economy.



INTRODUCTION

Four-year universities have long been recognized as institutions of higher education, but their role has expanded beyond educating students. Today, universities serve as anchor institutions that drive regional economic development through research, innovation, entrepreneurship, and workforce preparation so that communities remain economically competitive. Across the country, partnerships between universities and local economic development organizations have become increasingly important as regions compete to attract businesses and retain talent. Rather than operating independently, universities contribute directly to the economic vitality of their surrounding communities.

The success of these partnerships, however, depends on more than simply producing college graduates. A university's economic impact is measured not only by the number of degrees it awards, but also by how effectively it connects students to professional opportunities. Experiential learning such as internships, undergraduate research, cooperative education, and leadership programs, provides students with opportunities to apply classroom knowledge while developing the professional relationships and workplace competencies that cannot be fully replicated in traditional academic settings. These experiences benefit students by strengthening career readiness while simultaneously providing employers with a pipeline of talent that understands the needs of the regional economy.

At the same time, the nature of the workplace is changing. Artificial intelligence is automating many routine tasks, allowing employees to focus on higher-value work that requires communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and adaptability. Recent research on AI readiness suggests that employers increasingly value graduates who can work effectively alongside AI by applying judgment, problem-solving, and interpersonal skills rather than technical expertise alone ("AI Readiness," 2026). Likewise, the growth of remote and hybrid work has transformed how organizations train early-career professionals. While these changes offer greater flexibility and efficiency, they may also reduce opportunities for informal mentorship and workplace observation that have traditionally helped recent graduates transition into professional careers. And so, the question arises: How do universities and regional economic development organizations collaborate to integrate students into regional labor markets, and how can experiential learning and mentorship better support this process in the context of AI-driven and evolving workplace structures?

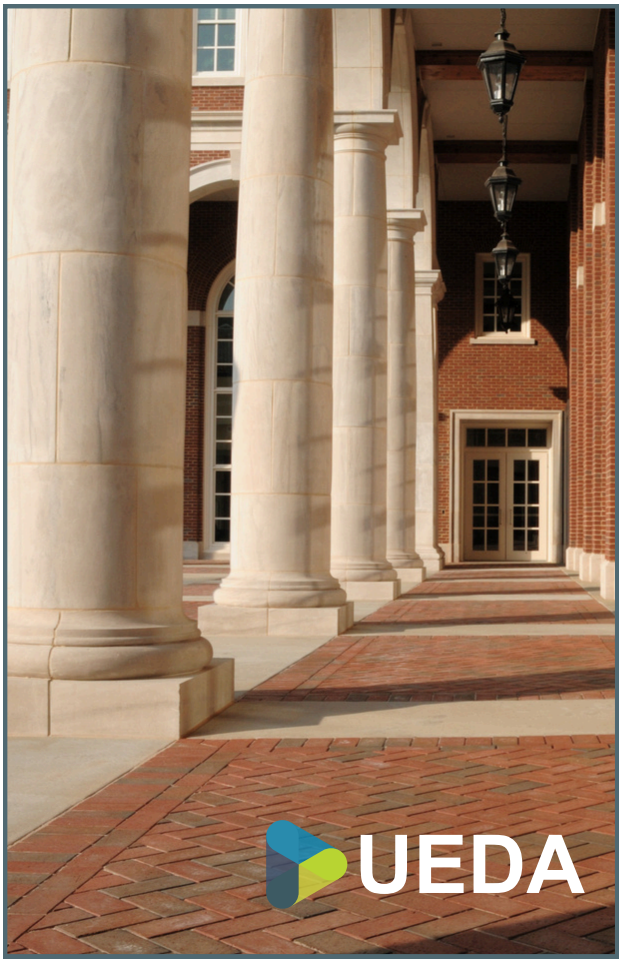
The University Economic Development Association (UEDA), among others, have strived to document the value of universities and highlight their contributions. Less attention, however, has been given to how universities connect students to professional communities through experiential learning with regional employers. As workforce expectations evolve, these relationships become increasingly important to ensure graduates remain connected to the regions that invested in their education while helping employers cultivate the next generation of leaders.

Four-year universities have become essential regional economic development partners, but maximizing their impact requires a renewed focus on experiential learning, mentorship, and employer collaboration. As artificial intelligence and evolving workplace models reshape professional development, universities and economic development organizations must work together to intentionally integrate graduates into regional economies.



LITERATURE REVIEW

A foundational theme in economic development literature is the role of universities as economic anchors within regional systems. Ken Poole, Director of the University Economic Development Association, introduces a framework for understanding how universities can be more intentionally leveraged as tools for regional economic development (Poole, 2026). Rather than viewing universities solely as educational institutions, Poole argues that they function as capacity-building organizations that can directly support regional economic outcomes when properly coordinated with federal economic development agencies and regional partners. This perspective shifts the common focus on isolated educational outcomes toward system-level collaboration, where universities, employers, and regional organizations jointly shape workforce pipelines. Importantly, this framework also emphasizes that institutional capacity alone is not sufficient; structured coordination is necessary to ensure university activity leads to measurable regional impact.



Similarly, research by Stephen Barkanic (2016), with the Business-Higher Education Forum, highlights how postsecondary institutions contribute to regional workforce outcomes by aligning academic programming with labor market needs, particularly through partnerships with employers and local organizations. However, Barkanic also notes that alignment is uneven across regions, with some states developing more structured pipelines between education and employment than others. Furthermore, Belfield (2012) emphasizes that successful industry-university partnerships require intentional structures that align institutional priorities with industry needs, including clear objectives, sustained communication, and mechanisms for translating academic expertise into practical outcomes. This suggests that while universities are broadly recognized as workforce contributors, the mechanisms for translating education into regional labor market success remain inconsistent and highly dependent on the three p's: partners, policy, people. Together, these findings suggest that regional workforce success depends on collaborative relationships, supportive policy environments, and institutional leadership capable of adapting workforce preparation to changing economic demands.

While institutional alignment between universities and employers remains essential, the nature of the workforce itself is rapidly evolving. Emerging technologies, particularly artificial intelligence (AI), are reshaping the skills employers expect from new graduates and requiring universities to prepare students for a changing labor market. Experiential learning emerges as a key mechanism for connecting higher education to workforce outcomes in the evolving labor market. According to Ana Elena Azpúrua's (2026) analysis, artificial intelligence will likely "enhance or eliminate" certain job functions and shift entry-level labor expectations. Zahidi and Brown (2026), with The World Economic Forum and PwC, similarly argue that AI is transforming not only the skills expected of new graduates but also the structure of early-career employment itself. Its framework suggests that as AI automates many routine entry-level tasks, organizations must intentionally redesign early-career pathways through mentorship, work-integrated learning, and employer partnerships to ensure workers continue developing professional judgment, collaboration, and industry-specific knowledge. This perspective expands Azpúrua's discussion of changing skill demands by emphasizing that workforce preparation increasingly depends on coordinated institutional systems rather than classroom instruction alone. As AI increasingly automates routine tasks, early-career roles are becoming more focused on critical thinking, communication, and adaptive problem-solving rather than task-based execution. This shift suggests that traditional models of workforce preparation, particularly those focused primarily on technical or procedural training, may no longer be sufficient. Instead, students must develop skills that are more relational and analytical, both skills that can be studied, but ultimately become perfected through practice.

Together, these sources point to a growing need for more intentional integration between universities and regional workforce systems. While existing research emphasizes the importance of alignment between education and labor markets, it also reveals persistent gaps in how students transition from academic environments into professional settings. Much of the literature focuses on outcomes such as employment rates or innovation outputs, but less attention is given to the specific processes through which students are embedded into regional professional communities.



A key gap across this body of literature is the limited attention given to how universities, employers, and regional economic development organizations intentionally work together to support students' transition into the workforce. Poole argues that universities contribute most effectively when they are intentionally coordinated with regional economic development agencies and other partners to build institutional capacity. Barkanic emphasizes aligning academic programs with labor market needs through partnerships between higher education institutions and employers, while Belfield focuses on the organizational structures, such as shared goals, sustained communication, and clear governance, that make industry-university partnerships successful. More recently, Azpúrua explains that AI is changing the skills employers expect from graduates, and Zahidi and Brown argue that these changes require redesigned early-career pathways built around mentorship, experiential learning, and employer collaboration. Collectively, these studies explain why collaboration matters and identify many of its components, but they stop short of explaining how these relationships function as an integrated system that intentionally connects students to regional professional networks and workforce opportunities. As AI continues to reshape workforce entry, understanding these mechanisms becomes increasingly important because students need structured opportunities to develop professional judgment, adaptability, and interpersonal skills through authentic workplace experiences.

> *Universities and regional partners **must collaborate** to create experiential learning opportunities.*

Overall, the literature suggests broad agreement that universities play a central role in regional economic development, but it also indicates that changing labor market conditions require more intentional, structured approaches to preparing students for workforce entry. Rather than simply aligning academic programs with employer needs, universities and regional partners must collaborate to create experiential learning opportunities that help students develop the professional competencies and workplace experiences increasingly demanded in an AI-influenced economy. This research paper builds on these insights by examining how experiential learning and partnerships between universities and economic development organizations can be leveraged not only to align education with workforce needs, but also to intentionally integrate students into regional professional ecosystems and strengthen early-career pathways.

UNIVERSITIES AS REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS

University economic development has been defined by the University Economic Development Association and the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities as the coordinated ways institutions leverage teaching, research, engagement, and partnerships to advance innovation, workforce development, entrepreneurship, and regional prosperity. Their Principles of Inclusive Engagement framework emphasizes that universities create economic value not only through research commercialization but also through sustained collaboration with communities, employers, and public-sector partners (Paynter et al., 2023). Building on this perspective, university economic development refers to how universities leverage their talent, research capabilities, and institutional resources to support regional workforce development, innovation, business growth, and long-term economic resilience.

A key feature of four-year universities is their hybrid role across academic, research, and civic missions. They operate across multiple sectors of economic development simultaneously, and their impact depends on their ability to leverage research expertise, industry partnerships, and institutional resources. Research universities and institutions maintain sustained engagement in knowledge creation, applied problem-solving, and cross-sector collaboration (Barkanic, 2016).

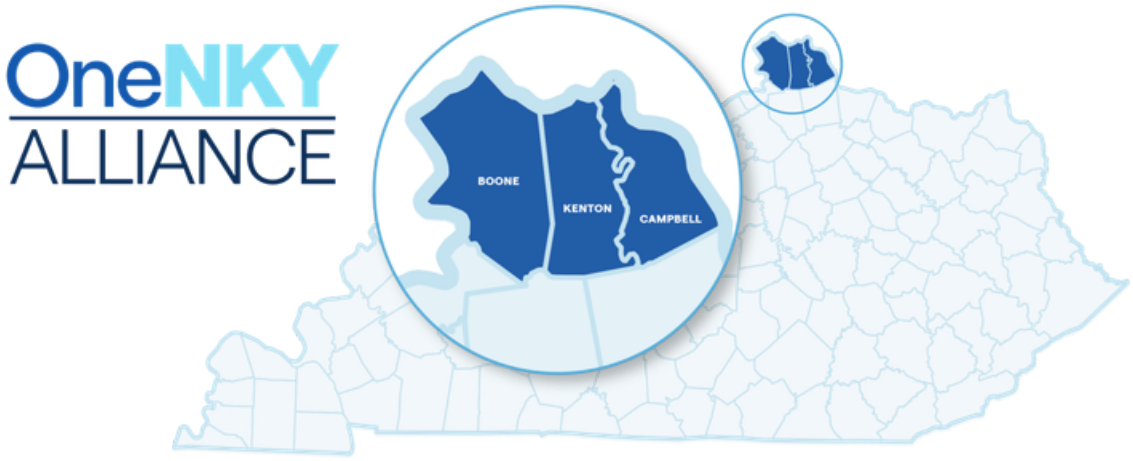
This capacity is most visible in the structure of the research enterprise. Sponsored research connects faculty expertise to external funding, but its economic value extends beyond publication. Industry partners, students, and faculty often collaborate on emerging technologies, policy challenges, and innovation processes, forming early-stage pipelines that link discovery to application. The U.S. Small Business Administration's Office of Advocacy identifies the **Iowa State University Research Park** as a model of this approach, demonstrating how research parks can connect entrepreneurs with university talent, research infrastructure, venture support, and industry partnerships to strengthen regional innovation and job creation (Krenzelok, 2025). The report argues that these ecosystems succeed not simply by providing physical space, but by integrating institutional resources, entrepreneurial networks, and regulatory support into a coordinated system that lowers barriers for startups and regional businesses. Similarly, university-based entrepreneurship ecosystems have expanded beyond isolated startup support. Many institutions now integrate entrepreneurship education, venture support, and regional investment networks into broader systems of opportunity development. Innovation hubs and accelerators increasingly connect students, researchers, alumni, and regional founders, embedding entrepreneurial capacity within the regional economy.

Universities also function as institutional intermediaries through offices, centers, and engagement units that translate academic capacity into externally usable knowledge. Economic development offices, corporate engagement teams, and research parks reduce transaction costs for external partners and make university resources more accessible to regional stakeholders. A practical example of this intermediary role can be seen in **Old Dominion University's Monarch Internship and Co-op Office**, which serves as a centralized connector between students, employers, faculty, and regional workforce partners. By coordinating internship opportunities, employer engagement, and career preparation, the office reduces barriers for both students seeking experiential learning and employers seeking talent, illustrating how dedicated institutional infrastructure can strengthen regional workforce ecosystems. This style of programming highlights a shift from universities as implementation partners instead of beneficiaries of investment.

The effectiveness of these systems, however, depends on both institutional capacity and how well universities connect internal assets to employers and communities. In the Economic Development Journal (EDJ), researchers argue that development challenges are often problems of sequencing rather than capacity, contending that successful outcomes depend on the order and coordination of institutional actions rather than the accumulation of resources alone (Campbell, 2026).

Although developed in the context of rural economic development, this perspective highlights a broader principle applicable across development settings: institutional resources create value only when they are effectively organized and connected. While institutional partnerships are often strong, connections between students and internships are more uneven, creating a gap between university-level economic development and individual workforce entry experiences. This gap highlights a limitation in how university economic development is often framed. While institutional outputs such as innovation and research impact are well documented, less attention is given to how universities operationalize their role in shaping early career pathways. As a result, universities occupy a dual position: they are both macro-level economic actors and micro-level developers of individual talent. This creates a measurement challenge: while universities can track institutional outcomes such as research funding, innovation activity, and economic impact, fewer frameworks exist for assessing how effectively they develop individual talent and connect students to regional workforce opportunities. Understanding this dual role requires attention not only to institutional outcomes, but also to the mechanisms, such as experiential learning, through which students are connected to professional networks and regional labor markets.

Northern Kentucky provides a practical example of this coordinated approach through the **OneNKY Alliance**, which brings together economic development organizations, educational institutions, employers, and workforce development initiatives under a shared regional strategy. Through partnerships with BE NKY Growth Partnership, Northern Kentucky University, Thomas More University, Gateway Community and Technical College, and workforce initiatives such as EducateNKY and LaunchNKY, the Alliance seeks to strengthen the region's talent pipeline across multiple career stages. Rather than treating higher education, economic development, and workforce training as separate functions, this model emphasizes coordinated talent development from postsecondary education through mid-career workforce advancement. Such regional collaboration illustrates how universities can serve not only as educational institutions but also as integral partners within broader workforce ecosystems.





INTERNSHIPS AS TALENT INTEGRATION

Experiential learning plays a central role in connecting students to the workforce by turning academic knowledge into applied, real-world experience. Beyond traditional internships, experiential learning includes cooperative education, undergraduate research, service learning, and leadership programs. These opportunities allow students to apply classroom concepts in professional settings while also developing a clearer understanding of workplace expectations and career pathways.

One important aspect of experiential learning is its role in shaping professional identity. Through direct engagement with employers and real projects, students gain insight into how they fit into broader organizational and industry contexts. This process helps build knowledge, strengthen communication skills, and improve the ability to collaborate effectively, skills that are increasingly valued in modern, team-based workplaces (Amico et al., 2024).

Experiential learning also contributes to both human capital and social capital development. Human capital is built through the skills and knowledge students gain from applied work, while social capital develops through mentorship, professional relationships, and exposure to workplace networks (LeClair, 2018). **The University of Cincinnati's nationally recognized cooperative education (co-op) program** illustrates how universities can institutionalize these benefits. By integrating alternating semesters of paid professional employment into degree programs, the university embeds employer engagement within the academic experience rather than treating internships as optional extracurricular activities. This model strengthens employer relationships, expands students' professional networks, and creates continuous talent pipelines that benefit both regional industries and graduates. These connections often play a major role in early career opportunities and long-term career mobility.

However, access to experiential learning is not equal for all students (Green et al., 2022). Many college students carry significant financial responsibilities, making it difficult to participate in unpaid or low-paying internships that often serve as entry-level stepping stones. This creates uneven access, as students who cannot afford unpaid work may be excluded from valuable professional development opportunities. For this reason, it is important that internships are designed in a way that benefits both students and employers.

Effective experiential learning programs should combine meaningful projects that organizations need to complete, alongside structured learning opportunities for students. This approach ensures that employers receive real value while also justifying compensation. Well-designed internships can create mutual benefit, making paid experiential learning both practical and sustainable across industries. For example, many government-funded workforce development and innovation programs require significant research, technical expertise, and collaboration between academia and industry. University students and industry partners who are pursuing similar fields could work together on development grants like the **U.S. Economic Development Administration's (EDA) AI Upskill Accelerator Pilot Program**, which grants funding for the development of workforce programs taking advantage of AI. Overall, aligning student experiential learning with funded, industry-relevant projects and grant-supported initiatives could strengthen employer participation while ensuring internships remain a feasible opportunity for all students.



EMERGING CHALLENGES

The process of integrating students and early-career professionals into the workforce is becoming increasingly complex due to shifts in technology and workplace structures. While universities and employers continue to emphasize experiential learning, several emerging challenges are reshaping how students are prepared and transitioned into labor markets. At the same time, these challenges point toward clear areas for institutional and policy innovation.

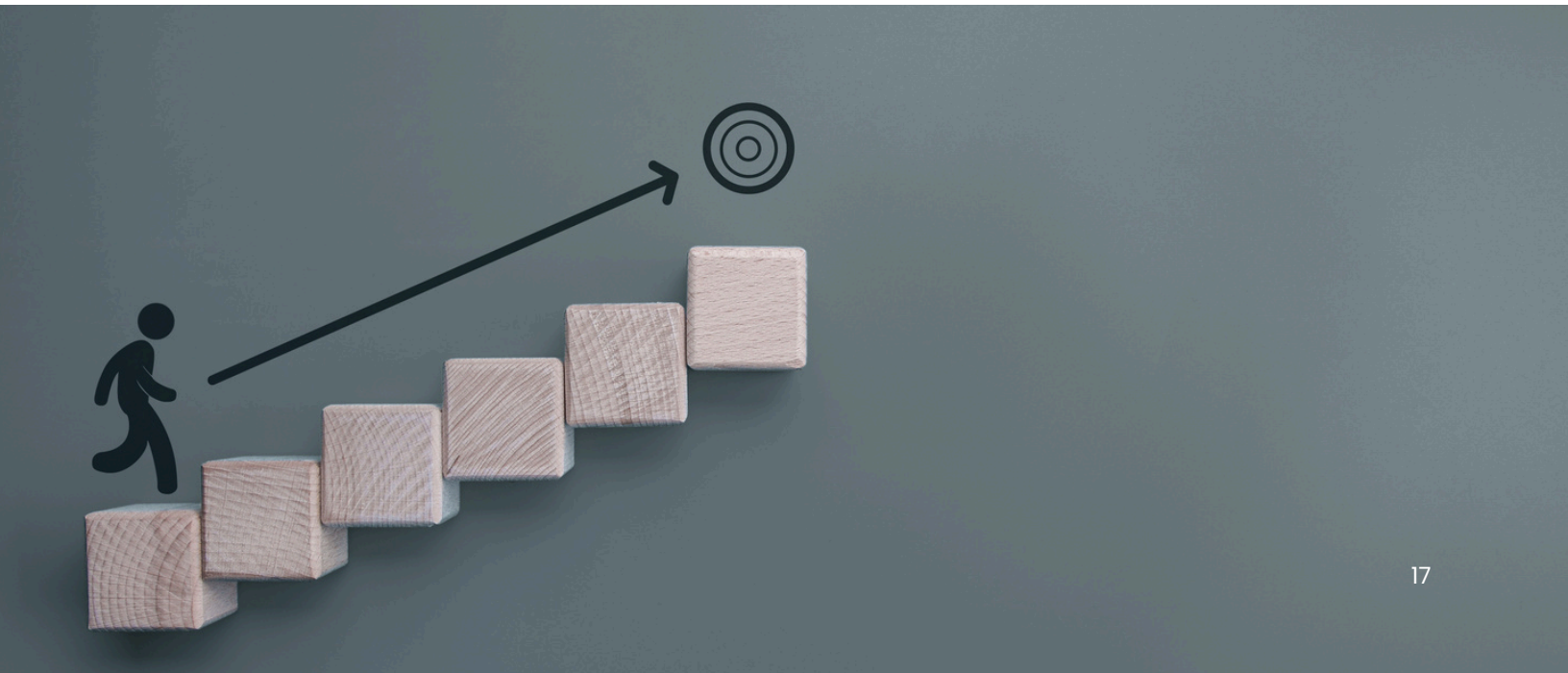


One of the most significant changes is the rise of AI and automation in the workplace. AI is increasingly handling routine and repetitive tasks, shifting entry-level expectations toward stronger critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and problem-solving skills (Zahidi & Brown, 2026). This raises the importance of experiential learning environments that go beyond technical exposure and intentionally develop professional judgment, adaptability, and relationship-building skills. In response, universities must design learning experiences that emphasize applied problem-solving rather than only theoretical knowledge.

Remote and hybrid work models present another major challenge. Traditionally, interns and early-career employees often learned informally through observation, casual interaction, and immersion in workplace culture. These informal learning opportunities are significantly reduced in distributed work settings, where communication is more structured. Research on work-from-home service-learning internships found that interns generally preferred in-person experiences because they perceived remote internships as providing fewer opportunities for interpersonal interaction and informal learning (Wong et al., 2021). As a result, mentorship becomes even more essential, serving as a primary mechanism for transmitting institutional knowledge and career guidance. This creates an opportunity for universities and employers to formalize mentorship as a core component of experiential learning rather than treating it as optional.

A related challenge is how organizations evaluate the value of interns compared to other entry-level labor options. While internships are intended to support both learning and workforce development, employers must still see clear returns to justify the investment. Interns often require more structured supervision and training than experienced contractors or temporary workers, which can lead employers to prioritize short-term labor that delivers immediate productivity. To address this, internships should be designed to create mutual value: employers receive meaningful, project-based contributions while students gain structured skill development, mentorship, and professional experience.

Beyond the immediate value of completed projects, internships also serve as an important talent pipeline. Students who have already worked within an organization are familiar with its culture, systems, and expectations, allowing them to transition more quickly into permanent roles if hired after graduation. Organizations increasingly view internships as a strategic recruiting tool because successful interns are more likely to accept full-time offers and remain with the organization over the long term than individuals hired without prior internship experience (Gray, 2026). This approach is particularly beneficial for medium and large organizations with established entry-level career pathways, such as associate, analyst, engineer, or paralegal positions, where return offers following internships are a common recruitment strategy. By converting successful interns into full-time employees, organizations can reduce recruitment and onboarding costs, improve retention, and strengthen long-term workforce planning. Smaller organizations, however, may not hire enough entry-level employees for internships to function as a consistent recruitment pipeline. For these employers, the value of experiential learning often lies in completing specialized projects, accessing emerging talent and new perspectives, and building relationships with universities that can support future workforce needs.



CONCLUSION

Universities have increasingly become recognized as regional economic development partners through their contributions to research, innovation, and entrepreneurship. However, these contributions are often evaluated primarily through institutional-level outcomes, such as research commercialization, business partnerships, and regional investment. While these functions remain essential, they do not fully capture how universities translate economic development goals into individual workforce outcomes. Experiential learning serves as the critical mechanism that connects institutional capacity to student opportunity by creating direct pathways between academic knowledge, employer needs, and regional workforce integration.

As artificial intelligence and evolving workplace structures reshape entry-level employment, this connection becomes increasingly important. Employers are placing greater value on adaptive, relational, and analytical skills that cannot be developed through classroom instruction alone. Experiential learning opportunities, including internships, cooperative education, undergraduate research, and mentorship-based programs, provide students with the environments needed to navigate complex workplace challenges. In this way, experiential learning is not simply a student development strategy; it is a regional economic development tool that strengthens talent pipelines, supports long-term workforce resilience, and generates measurable evidence of student career readiness.

Despite growing recognition of the importance of university-industry partnerships, existing research has given less attention to how experiential learning functions as the bridge between institutional economic strategies and individual career pathways. Universities may possess significant research capacity, employer relationships, and regional influence, but these assets create workforce impact only when students are intentionally connected to them. As institutions face increasing expectations to demonstrate workforce and earnings outcomes through outcomes-based accountability initiatives, **experiential learning provides a tangible mechanism for documenting how higher education creates value for both graduates and regional economies.**

The future of university-led economic development will depend not only on building institutional capacity, but on how effectively that capacity is translated into opportunities for individuals. By positioning experiential learning as the connective mechanism between universities and regional economies, institutions can strengthen talent pipelines while providing measurable evidence of their impact on workforce development, graduate success, and long-term regional prosperity.



Autumn Strebel
Research & Association Intern
CREC

Autumn Strebel was a Research & Association Intern at the Center for Economic Competitiveness (CREC), where she supported the University Economic Development Association (UEDA) and contributed to the organization's Cost of Living Index (COLI) during the summer of 2026. This fall, she is returning to The Ohio State University to complete her Master of Public Administration degree. Drawing on her experience in workforce and economic development, she is interested in advancing public policy that strengthens experiential learning opportunities and supports young professionals as they transition into the workforce.

REFERENCES

AI Readiness: Building the Bridge from Higher Education to Work. (2026, April). Retrieved August 3, 2026, from Pearson.com website: https://www.pearson.com/power-of-learning/ai-readiness.html

Amico, B., Ivory, K., & Lipker, S. (2024). The Professional Skills and Values of an Internship - Workplace Options. In Workplace Options. Retrieved from https://www.workplaceoptions.com/blog/the-professional-skills-and-values-of-an-internship/

Azpúrua, A. E. (2026, February 20). Enhance or eliminate? How AI will likely change these jobs. Retrieved from Harvard business school website: https://www.library.hbs.edu/working-knowledge/enhance-or-eliminate-how-ai-will-likely-change-these-jobs

Barkanic, S. (2016). Aligning postsecondary education with regional workforce needs: A tale of two states. In Business-Higher Education Forum. Retrieved from https://www.bhef.com/sites/default/files/BHEF_2016_A_Tale_of_Two_States.pdf

Belfield, H. (2012). Making Industry-University partnerships work. Retrieved June 29, 2026, from Science business website: https://sciencebusiness.net/sites/default/files/archive/Assets/94fe6d15-5432-4cf9-a656-633248e63541.pdf?__cf_chl_f_tk=8jp7Pv9H09PdS5m7upuccGB67_GJn6u3az_kdrBiMbM-1782759001-1.0.1.1-UkCUIBam_IJ3JHVTPTkUKQI6BqIU3f2cVJpqtys9fpU

Campbell, S. (2026). When Capacity Isn't the Problem (2026 Economic Development Journal). In Iedconline.org (pp. 13–35). International Economic Development Council (IEDC). Retrieved from International Economic Development Council (IEDC) website: https://www.iedconline.org/pages/economic-development-journal/

Gray, K. (2026, May 14). Internship Program Retention Rates Underscore Long-term ROI. Retrieved July 30, 2026, from National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) website: https://naceweb.org/talent-acquisition/internships/internship-program-retention-rates-underscore-long-term-roi?

Green, P., Castor, T., Leyburn, D., & Jamie, A. (2022). Advocating for Experiential learning programs as change agents in Higher education: Imagining a justice orientation that centers students and partners while enriching practice. Retrieved June 30, 2026, from ERIC - education resources information center website: https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1422728.pdf

Krenzelok, J. (2025, November 6). Innovation in Action: Iowa state university research park shows the power of partnerships. Retrieved July 28, 2026, from Office of Advocacy website: https://advocacy.sba.gov/2025/11/06/innovation-in-action-iowa-state-university-research-park-shows-the-power-of-partnerships/

LeClair, D. (2018). Connecting through experiential learning | AACSB. In The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business. Retrieved from https://www.aacsb.edu/insights/articles/2018/10/the-connective-power-of-experiential-learning

Paynter, S, et al. (2023, March). Principals of Practice for Higher Education's Engagement in Inclusive Economic Engagement Strategies. Retrieved August 3, 2026, from The Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU) website: https://www.aplu.org/wp-content/uploads/10.23-Revision_Principles-of-Inclusive-Engagement.pdf

Poole, K. (2026, March 13). Using university capacity to deliver regional economic results: A new framework for EDA – university economic development association. Retrieved June 30, 2026, from University economic development association website: https://www.universityeda.org/2026/03/using-university-capacity-to-deliver-regional-economic-results-a-new-framework-for-eda/

Wong, M. M. L., Lau, K. H., & Chan, C. W. F. (2021). The impacts and success factors of a work-from-home service-learning internship during COVID-19. Journal of Work-Applied Management. https://doi.org/10.1108/jwam-01-2021-0003

Zahidi, S., & Brown, P. (2026, June). Artificial intelligence and the future of Entry-Level work: A framework for Safeguarding and reinventing early career pathways. Retrieved July 15, 2026, from https://reports.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Artificial_Intelligence_and_the_Future_of_Entry_Level_Work_2026.pdf