

The Experiential, Project-based, Interdisciplinary Curriculum (EPIC) Program

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The EPIC program came out of a “Moonshot Committee” established by Provost Risa Palm in 2018 to explore how GSU needed to adapt to the rapidly changing career landscape. We received a \$25,000 planning grant from the Teagle Foundation in summer 2019 and then a 3-year, \$300,000 implementation grant in fall 2019. The implementation grant was extended to 4 years because of the pandemic. During the first 4 years of the project, we have worked with over 125 faculty from 30 disciplines. In order to institutionalize our efforts, we are currently working to integrate our initiatives into GSU’s strategic plan. We also submitted a \$150,000 proposal to the NEH Humanities Connections grant to expand our PERS 2003: Understanding Atlanta course over 2 years by including 4 more faculty from different disciplines to teach new sections and funding faculty development efforts to bring in 20 faculty to create interdisciplinary modules for the course. Further, EPIC is connected to a grant submission to the Spencer Foundation for \$490,407 to assess the effect of walking tours on undergraduate student learning.

Following are more detailed explanations of several of our initiatives:

Project Labs

Project Labs allow students to earn course credit over multiple semesters while working on faculty-led, interdisciplinary, public-facing projects. Through Project Labs, students have opportunities to:

1. Develop and demonstrate 21st-century skills like digital literacies, complex problem solving, and teamwork
2. Apply knowledge from classes to real-world projects with impact
3. Build networks with faculty, community groups, non-profits, and businesses
4. Build a portfolio to show what they know.

Project Labs allow faculty to build an experienced, interdisciplinary team of students to further their research agenda, community outreach, or passion project. Students and faculty earn course credit over multiple semesters while engaging in public-facing work. Georgia State's Project Labs are based on the Vertically Integrated Projects (VIP) concept and are a part of the [VIP Consortium](#).

Wicked Problems Project

Wicked problems are real world issues that are complex and have no clear or easy solutions. Engaging in these issues allows students to work on unstructured problems, unlike more traditional assignments where the goal is to find the "correct" answer. Students must apply skills and knowledge from multiple disciplines and synthesize different and sometimes contradictory points of view. Developing these skills is increasingly necessary in careers and even navigating everyday life. The EPIC Wicked Problems Project at GSU is creating interdisciplinary iCollege modules and in-person forums around these issues to provide opportunities for learning communities to connect around common intellectual experiences. Our inaugural series over fall 2023 focused on two wicked problems: 1) Climate Change and Environmental Impacts, and 2) Housing Affordability and Precarity.

For each of these issues, we put together a group of eight faculty from different departments to discuss these wicked problems through the lens of their respective disciplines. These faculty participated in roundtable events and created video content focused on the following:

What questions does your discipline ask about this issue? How does your discipline approach research in this area? What types of solutions does your discipline offer?

Do you have a specific research project connected to this issue?
Are there specific examples in the metro Atlanta area connected to this issue?
How does this issue currently affect our students and how might it affect their future careers?
What practical advice do you have for individual students, the University, and surrounding communities to make a positive impact on this issue?

Video content has been packaged with discussion prompts, assignments, readings, and other course material as modules on the Online Interdisciplinary Library.

[Online Interdisciplinary Library](#)

The Online Interdisciplinary Library is a growing collection of course materials that make connections across the core curriculum. These materials are housed online on GSU's Learning Management System, iCollege, and are searchable by discipline, type of material, and content focus. The site allows instructors to easily find material and upload it into their own iCollege courses. The purpose of the Library is to provide resources for faculty to more clearly show connections between core classes, allowing students to better understand and discover relevance in the core courses they are required to take. Underlying the development of the Online Interdisciplinary Library is providing opportunities for faculty, who are typically siloed away from one another by campuses and disciplines, to better understand what is taught in other core courses and build relationships with faculty across the curriculum.

Course materials created for the Online Interdisciplinary Library include:

- to make it clear to students at the beginning of the semester how the course connects with other disciplines
- that challenge students to apply what they are learning across disciplines
- that deliberately connect material from multiple disciplines
- from readings to multimedia content collected, curated, and created by instructors to show how content overlaps between core courses
- to discussion boards, in-class exercises, and experiential learning that are meant to develop interdisciplinary understanding
- that package these materials together and can be imported into iCollege

An early version of the Library is online, with 15 assignments and 27 syllabus statements from 16 departments. Materials currently in development include a series of modules on logic created by faculty in Philosophy and Computer Science and a test

Assessment has been a part of the EPIC program from the planning stages. We have a team of faculty and grad students designing assessments, creating surveys, submitting IRB approvals, analyzing data, and presenting our findings. Following is a list and then description of several of our major assessment efforts:

- 4-Year Retention Study of 2019 EPIC Cohort
- Walking Tour Surveys
- GSU 1010 Interdisciplinary Discussion Assessment Research

Assessment Design and Results from 4-Year Retention Study of 2019 EPIC Cohort

The 2019 cohort received the EPIC treatment only in their first semester. The treatment included the following High Impact Practices, which are pedagogies that have been shown to be beneficial for students from historically underserved groups: Learning Communities, Writing-Intensive Courses, Collaborative

Projects, Common Intellectual Experiences, Community-Based Learning, and First-Year Seminars.

The 2019 EPIC cohort was matched with a control group using indicators of gender, race, ethnicity, first-generation status, AP or IB participation and Pell eligibility.

Honors students and students who did not complete their first semester were removed from the analysis.

Compared to the average 2019 incoming GSU student, EPIC FLC students were disproportionately eligible for Pell Grants.

By the end of year 4, EPIC retention is over 30% higher than the 2019 incoming class on the whole, and 60% higher than the rate of the matched control group.

Walking Tour Assessments

We piloted a walking tour survey in our PERS 2003: Understanding Atlanta course in fall 2022 and will run the survey again in late fall 2023. We are attempting to measure how walking tours affect understanding and retention of course material compared to content from readings, affinity toward our campus and the city of Atlanta, and interdisciplinary thinking.

Students were given questions from a class reading, walking tour, and overlapping material from both. The survey was given 2 months after the course content.

Several months later, in spring of 2023, we created 3 cohorts to survey:

Students in all groups were asked a series of questions about how the content and skills they were learning in their courses were connected. In likert scale questions, there was no distinction across the groups. In general, all groups reported that the material in their courses at least sometimes connected. However, when asked to provide specific examples of how their courses connected, the EPIC cohort were significantly more likely to provide examples:

Further, the responses from Cohorts B and C tended to be more vague:

EPIC Research Dissemination

We are currently working on an article about EPIC's 4-year retention data, and we have presented at multiple conferences on our assessment projects:

International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, Utrecht (fall 2023). "Walking Tours as Engaged, Location-Based Pedagogy"
SOTL Summit, virtual (fall 2023). "Developing Interdisciplinary Thinking Among College Freshmen: Evaluating the Impact of Classroom Intervention."
National Higher Education Teaching Conference, New York City (summer 2023). "Bridging the Gap Between Course and Career: Designing Learning Opportunities That Develop Students as Professionals."
USG Teaching and Learning Conference, Athens (spring 2023). 2 workshops- "Location Based Approaches: Writing, Walking, and Project-Based Learning" and "Location Based Approaches: Building an Interdisciplinary Project-Based Course from Scratch."
SOTL Summit, Kennesaw/Virtual (spring 2022). Walking Tours Innovative Teaching Talk.
SOTL Commons Conference, Savannah (spring 2022). Panel, "Connecting High Impact Practices and Student Success Measures."
International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, Virtual (fall 2021). "Using Student Success Measures to Implement, Sustain, and Research Effective Classroom Practices."

EPIC Highlights

EPIC showcases the achievements of our program, faculty, and students on our [highlights page](#), our [YouTube Channel](#), and on our social media feeds ([Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#), and [LinkedIn](#)). Following are some examples:

	<p>EPIC undergrad and grad students and faculty from Project Labs were showcased at the Society for the Study of Southern Literature conference in summer 2022. The Rap Map, Krog Street Tunnel, and Locating South-Asian Food Culture of Atlanta projects were featured. Attendees of the conference were able to interact with EPIC student exhibits, leading to an enjoyable and enriching experience.</p>
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<p>EPIC's Project Labs are about undergrad and grad students collaborating with faculty to create research that stands out. Part of this research process, like any other research, is publishing and presenting work. GSU hosts an undergraduate research conference (GSURC) every spring to exhibit projects from all areas of study. In 2022, a student in the Pollitik lab, Iman Hoque, presented his research on executive approval ratings in response to the Russia-Ukraine conflict and came in second place in the category of Social and Behavioral Sciences. Check out his presentation.</p>	
	<p>EPIC Project Lab researchers Curt Jackson and Brennan Collins and their students were recently profiled on 11 Alive, one of Atlanta's leading local news programs. Jackson described his process for documenting the changing nature of the tunnel, the hot-spots for painting and messaging, and the ways that current events change the look and feel of one of Atlanta's most recognized landmarks.</p>
<p><i>Finding Francis</i> is the product of years of research on the part of Elizabeth West, English professor at GSU's Downtown campus, along with her students working in the Mapping Atlanta project lab. Working together, they combed U.S. Census records and slave schedules from the 19th century to learn more about Francis Sistrunk, a distant ancestor. Then, they combined the information they learned with mapping technologies like GIS to give an exhaustive look at the land on which Francis lived in Harris County, Georgia. The book gives a unique insight into the life of an enslaved woman, as well as those of her children.</p>	

Marina Fishman from Kathryn Crowther's [Disability, Access, and Inclusion](#) Project Lab has won the 2023 Perimeter College STAR Award, in the category of "Student Scholar for Outstanding Research." Marina spent two semesters planning and carrying out her research interviewing individuals with autism and their family members. She was helped along the way by a group of other students from her Project Lab.

On April 22, 2022, students from the Georgia State Prison Education Project Project Lab traveled with lab directors Dr. Owen Cantrell and Dr. Katherine Perry to Montgomery, Alabama to the Equal Justice Initiative's National Memorial for Peace and Justice and the Legacy Museum. Both sites serve to memorialize the Black o zä o ! t

