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End of Summer Report
FURSCA, summer 2024

The primary aim of this project was to enhance the communication between Albion College and the Albion community. The goal was to establish more efficient and strategic communication channels to foster partnerships beneficial to both the college and the local community. By improving these connections, the project sought to facilitate increased opportunities for experiential learning that would enrich student education and contribute positively to community development. This initiative aimed to align the interests and resources of Albion College with the needs and aspirations of the broader Albion community, thereby promoting mutual growth.

I conducted interviews with 13 individuals throughout the summer, including both Albion College faculty and community members, which provided valuable insights. I discovered that approximately 520 students at Albion College are actively involved in experiential learning opportunities across various disciplines. This insight was gleaned from interviews conducted with representatives from 10 different departments and programs within the college. These departments are deeply committed to providing hands-on learning experiences that enhance students' academic journeys and prepare them for future careers.

The main challenge, according to a community member, lies in a fractured trust stemming from past issues, compounded by the current polarized atmosphere within the community. These factors contribute to a reluctance or unpreparedness among community members to embrace some of the experiential learning initiatives proposed by the college. The lack of unity and prevailing divisions within the community further hinder openness towards collaborative educational endeavors, posing a significant obstacle to the implementation of these learning experiences.

From the faculty perspective, while departments harbor innovative ideas for experiential learning, building and sustaining productive relationships with community partners proves challenging. Issues such as the disparate operational schedules of local businesses, management styles, or sometimes a lack of mutual interest impede the realization of promising college projects. Despite the enthusiasm and support from energetic faculty and undergraduate students who are eager to contribute as mentors, these practical barriers prevent many initiatives from coming to reality.

Moreover, both the college and the community face economic hardships, compounding the challenges. While the college possesses abundant human capital and enthusiastic stakeholders willing to contribute their expertise, the community's primary need often revolves around financial resources, which the college cannot readily provide. This disparity in needs exacerbates the difficulty in forging sustainable partnerships that could otherwise facilitate meaningful experiential learning opportunities beneficial to both sides.

In light of these challenges, the most prudent strategy moving forward appears to be patiently waiting for the community to express its needs and desires for collaboration rather than imposing initiatives prematurely. Building a strategic framework that facilitates open communication and solicits community input will be crucial. Suggestions such as establishing quarterly meetings with community stakeholders, revitalizing a college newspaper with wide

community distribution, or implementing an accessible email or form for community members to submit requests are promising avenues to foster dialogue and mutual understanding.

By nurturing these channels of communication and engagement, the college can cultivate a more receptive environment where collaborative projects can organically emerge based on genuine community interests and needs. This approach not only respects the autonomy and current challenges faced by community partners but also lays the groundwork for sustainable partnerships built on trust and mutual benefit. As the college explores these strategic pathways, it can better position itself to effectively leverage its resources and expertise in ways that align with and support the broader community's goals and aspirations.

These insights, gathered from departments and programs across the institution, will be shared with the Academic Visioning Committee to inform strategic planning and curriculum development. Additionally, they will be included in the final report submitted to the Arthur Vining Davis Foundations, highlighting the impact and effectiveness of experiential learning initiatives supported by their funding. Looking ahead to fall 2024, and spring 2025 there are plans to convene with Cabinet-level members to discuss the knowledge gained from projects such as FURSCA and AC3-AVD, emphasizing the practical outcomes and educational advancements resulting from these efforts, and a presentation on Elkin Issac's symposium.

This project has been incredibly meaningful to me because it allowed me to deeply connect with the community of Albion. Since arriving here almost a year ago, I quickly developed a tenderness for this city and its welcoming atmosphere. I was driven by a strong desire to contribute positively to the place that has embraced me so warmly. My goal was to undertake research that would benefit both the community and the college, and I am thrilled with the outcomes. Throughout this journey, I have discovered numerous insights about Albion and the college, forged meaningful connections with remarkable individuals, and gained invaluable experiences that I believe will shape my years ahead here. This project has not only deepened my understanding of the local dynamics but has also affirmed my commitment to making a meaningful impact in this community that I now consider home.