

ASU launches Work-Integrated Learning Accelerator with donor support

National initiative embeds real-world projects and employer experiences in academic programs to better prepare grads for today's workforce

By Michelle Stermole, ASU News
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Imagine a college student named Ava. She balances part-time jobs, keeps up with her classes and dreams of building a meaningful career.

But like many students, Ava struggles to gain the kind of real-world experience that turns academic learning into market-ready skills. The gap between what students learn and what employers need remains one of the most urgent challenges in higher education across the country.

Arizona State University's new [Work-Integrated Learning Accelerator](#) institute is designed to close that gap.

This bold national initiative joins the university's efforts at equipping students for the job market. It connects classroom learning with the realities of today's workforce by embedding real-world projects, employer partnerships and practical experiences directly into academic programs. It gives students like Ava a clearer pathway from college to career and supports faculty in bringing industry-relevant experiences into their classroom.

This national initiative is backed by a \$1.75 million investment from JPMorganChase and a \$280,000 investment from Strada Education Foundation. The accelerator aims to bring together higher education institutions, employers and education-technology startups to codesign and pilot innovative work-integrated learning models.

"JPMorganChase is proud to support Arizona State University's innovative Work-Integrated Learning Accelerator," said Matt Muench, executive director of global philanthropy at JPMorganChase.

“By leveraging innovative work-integrated learning solutions to provide hands-on industry experience, this program is setting a new standard for workforce readiness. We believe such innovative efforts are key to encouraging economic growth and expanding opportunities for future generations.”

Scott Lewis, JPMorganChase regional director for consumer and community banking and chair of the firm’s Arizona market leadership team, said: “This program will foster economic mobility and prepare students for successful careers. In collaborating with ASU, we are not only investing in the future of our workforce but also in the prosperity of our community here in Arizona.”

ASU will partner with four to five other colleges and universities, along with five to six education-technology startups and five to six workforce partners, to develop scalable models that embed real-world projects into coursework, as well as other types of work-integrated learning solutions, increasing student access to practical learning and easing faculty workload.

The goal is to develop scalable work-integrated learning models tailored to the needs and structures of each participating institution.

“The future of higher education depends on our ability to connect learning with real opportunity,” said [Sukhwant Jhaj](#), vice provost for academic innovation and student achievement and dean of [University College](#) at ASU.

“This accelerator is a national demonstration of what’s possible when universities, employers and innovators come together to reimagine the student experience. We are designing models that make hands-on learning part of every student’s journey — not just for a few, but at scale. It’s how we prepare students not just to get jobs, but to lead in a rapidly changing world.”

The Work-Integrated Learning Accelerator will measure success through increased student participation, enhanced learning experiences, stronger employer engagement and improved post-graduation employment outcomes. This initiative empowers institutions to develop and test work-based learning models that connect classroom learning with career readiness, addressing the specific needs of their student populations.

A robust evaluation strategy will track student outcomes like skill development and career preparedness, alongside institutional outcomes such as expanding work-integrated learning tools adoption. The initiative aims to inform national policy and institutional decision-making, moving from isolated pilots to scalable models of work-integrated learning. By fostering collaboration among universities, employers and education-technology startups, the accelerator seeks to make hands-on learning a core feature of the student experience.

The accelerator will establish a digital resource hub with publicly accessible tools, research and best practices derived from the accelerator’s findings for universities to implement work-integrated learning programs.

“Post-graduation success must become the defining measure of student success,” said [Nancy Gonzales](#), executive vice president and university provost. “At ASU, we are committed to ensuring

Apply here

Universities, education-technology companies and employers interested in collaborating with ASU on developing and piloting work-integrated learning models should [apply here](#).

The deadline for colleges and universities is May 23.

that every student not only has access to a world-class education, but also graduates with the skills, experience and confidence to thrive in the workforce.

"This initiative makes work-integrated learning a core feature of the undergraduate experience, bridging the gap between classroom and career in ways that are scalable and transformative."

Changing Futures campaign

This investment is part of ASU's Changing Futures campaign.

ASU is committed to providing inclusive educational access and innovative solutions to the complexities of modern life. Fueled by philanthropic investment and unique partnerships, the university's [Changing Futures campaign](#) is committed to raising resources to have a direct and significant impact on the communities we serve.

The campaign focuses on six key areas: enhancing education access, developing leaders, promoting sustainability, strengthening communities, advancing health and developing impactful technology.

[ASU is one of only 21 Research 1 universities](#) recognized for providing broad access and opportunities for all qualified students and strong paths to competitive wages for their graduates, according to new classifications by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and the American Council on Education.

This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).

Main image



Keith Look, vice president of education solutions at Territorium, shares ideas at a Work-Integrated Learning Accelerator design session, which includes participants from an advisory network of leaders from universities, education-technology startups and industry partners. Courtesy photo