



# VCU Relevant, Experiential and Applied Learning

## Enrolling in REAL 399

A guide for students, their advisors and mentors

Enrollment in REAL 399 requires sophomore standing and the approval of the REAL office. This guide is intended to give you the information you need to successfully apply for enrollment. Please review the information carefully and when you are ready, proceed to the [online application](#).

For consideration, applications must be submitted by noon on the first Friday of the academic semester during which the project/experience will occur.

At this time, students may not use REAL 399 to retroactively document an experience that has occurred in a prior semester.

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## About REAL 399

REAL 399 is a student-directed, pass/fail course that can be taken for variable credit (0-3 cr.hrs.). REAL 399 helps undergraduate students document advanced experiential learning activities on their academic transcripts without adding financial cost. It's a great way to bring visibility to something you may have already planned to do on your own and to engage in that experience with the power and support of a VCU mentor

behind you. Two examples of experiences might be a good fit for REAL 399 are an internship you have coordinated on your own or a volunteer research experience.

## REAL experiences are about making connections

Integrative learning is the process where a learner develops their capacity to connect knowledge, skills, and abilities across the curriculum and co-curriculum, from making simple connections among ideas and experiences to synthesizing and transferring learning to new, complex situations beyond campus. (AAC&U Integrative Learning VALUE Rubric).

## Required Student Activities

Required activities include engaging in an applied or “hands-on” learning project, working with a VCU faculty/staff mentor, completing short online modules, and submitting written reflections that document the experience and demonstrate your developing competence in Integrative Learning.

- Engagement in an approved experiential learning, beyond-the-classroom project that connects and extends the student’s understanding of an academic discipline, skills or knowledge to one or more of the following areas:
  - Professional identity and career preparation
  - Community or civic identity
  - Diversity and inclusion
  - Global knowledge
- Weekly online course assignments: Students are automatically enrolled in the REAL 399 Canvas course, which includes weekly self-paced modules on professionalism, reflection, and getting the most from your mentoring experience. The Canvas modules are designed to be completed at your own pace and should take no more than 1-2 hours/week.
- Reflections: While the specific goals you identify for your experience will depend on your major, as well as the kind and type of experience you are proposing, **all** students enrolled in REAL 399 are required to submit via the online REAL 399 Canvas course reflections that focus on *integrative learning*. These reflections will document the ways you are doing some (or all) of the following over the course of your experience:
  - Linking disciplinary content to the real world

- Applying disciplinary content and knowledge gained from the experience, including self-knowledge, in different contexts
- Developing a sense of connection to a community (local, international, cultural, and/or professional)
- Reorganizing content (academic knowledge) in creative and personally relevant ways
- Using the experience to explore issues that are personally meaningful
- Reflecting on your performance in different contexts
- Mini reflections are due within the first two weeks of the course, with longer, assessed reflections submitted at mid-term and at the conclusion of the project. The longer reflections are evaluated by the student's mentor and are one basis for mentor's Pass/Fail evaluation.
- Minimum expectations regarding length, content and format are provided via the REAL 399 course modules.
- Working with a VCU mentor: A student taking this course must identify a VCU faculty or staff member qualified to serve as their/her/his REAL 399 course supervisor and mentor. This supervisor will assign the final course grade (i.e., Pass or Fail) and will provide feedback on your reflections and progress. **All mentors must complete the [REAL Mentor Agreement form](#). Please forward this link to your mentor as soon as they have agreed to work with you so that we can ensure timely approval of your application.** If you need help finding a mentor, contact the [REAL office](#): we are here to help!

## Getting REAL credit

REAL 399 is a [REAL Level 2 experience](#) and can be used to fulfill the REAL graduation requirement.

Please note: At this time, students may not use REAL 399 to retroactively document an experience that occurred in a prior semester.

The course may be taken for variable credit, meaning you can register for 0-3 credits. You must choose a credit option at the time of registration, and should consult with your academic advisor or the REAL office to discuss your options.

## How many academic credits should I take? Is zero-credit right for me?

There are several reasons you might choose to take this course for 0-credit, including a lower-cost way to have a volunteer, research, or career experience appear on your academic transcript. However, there may be financial implications and you should carefully consider the following:

- A section taken for 0 credits will not be counted into your enrollment or time status and therefore will have no bearing on enrollment verification, financial aid, loan deferment, etc.
- Grades of F--even for zero-credit courses--are included in the calculation of the GPA, and could therefore impact your financial aid eligibility. Visit <https://provost.vcu.edu/academics/passfailfaq/> for a listing of frequently asked questions regarding pass/fail options.

Please note: Students who register for the 0-credit option are still required to complete the online modules, written reflections, and engage in a minimum of 15 contact hours in the completion of the applied or "hands-on" learning project.

If the course is taken for academic credit, it will be assessed for tuition and fees accordingly.

### General guidance for selecting number of credits

Below are the minimum number of hours expected of hands-on learning for each of the credit hour options. Time spent on reflection and completion of the online modules may be accounted for in the calculation.

0 credits

Requires a minimum  
**45 hours** of hands-on  
learning per 15 week semester

1 credit

Requires a minimum  
**45 hours** of hands-on  
learning per 15 week semester

2 credits

Requires a minimum  
**90 hours** of hands-on  
learning per 15-week semester

3 credits

Requires a minimum  
**135 hours** of hands-on  
learning per 15-week semester

Before submitting your application, you should discuss your credit hour options with your academic advisor(s).

# Enrolling

The activity/project idea must be approved by the REAL Office before a student can enroll in the course. In addition, a student taking this course must identify a VCU faculty or staff member qualified to serve as their/her/his REAL 399 course supervisor and mentor. This supervisor will assign the final course grade (i.e., Pass or Fail).

To ensure timely approval, students are encouraged to plan ahead and apply for enrollment well in advance of the beginning of the academic semester during which their project will take place.

To enroll in REAL 399, students must apply and submit an [Integrated Learning Plan \(ILP\)](#) for approval to the REAL office using the [online application](#) portal.

The online application requires:

1. Identification of a VCU faculty/staff mentor who agrees to evaluate your progress. The REAL Office can provide assistance in identifying a mentor in cases where a student cannot find one on their own.
2. In cases where the student is working with an external partner, such as a community organization or employer,
  - the name and contact information of the person who will serve as your supervisor at the placement site and
  - documentation (an email, for example) that they have agreed to host your experience.
3. Identification of the number of credits for which you wish to register (0-3).
4. A 30-character title of the project to be used on the academic transcript.
5. A completed Integrated Learning Plan, or ILP:
  - [Integrated Learning Plan worksheet](#)

## Registration deadline

Applications must be submitted by noon on the first Friday of the first week of the academic semester to ensure registration during the regular add/drop period of the academic semester.

*At this time, students may not use REAL 399 to retroactively document an experience that has occurred in a prior semester.*