



Giant Steps

on the Road to Discovery

A young woman reaches her junior year in high school and begins thinking about the next stage of her life: college. Around her, friends are planning their futures with great confidence. One is destined to be a marine biologist. Another surely will command a surgical suite. But this young woman — let's call her Audrey — just doesn't know. She applies to Aurora University because she has a vague idea that a career in social work might be interesting. She and AU accept each other.



Audrey and her parents arrive for AU4U Registration and Orientation in early summer. She knows it should be time to discover what matters and begin building her life around it. But still, her mind is filled more with doubt than decision.

Fortunately for Audrey, this summer she will begin taking part in a new First Year Experience (FYE) at AU. Many schools offer a version of FYE that revolves around guiding students into a career choice. But for AU, there is something more vital on the other side of an education than a career ladder. Here, it's about vocation. It's about

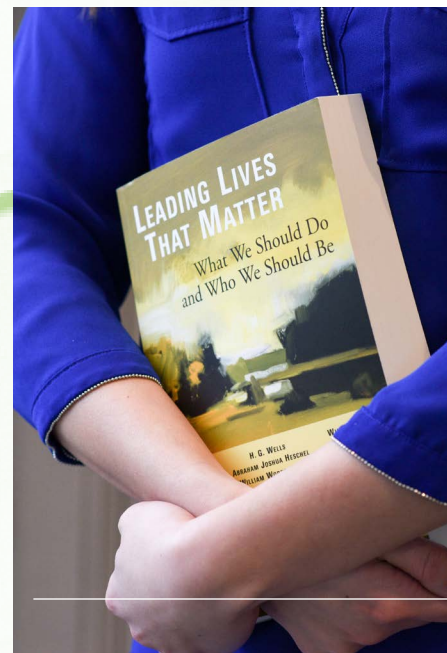
taking the time to ask and answer relevant questions that get to the heart of not just students' aptitudes but also their values, passions and life experiences. It's about pinpointing that calling that will fill them with excitement, fulfill them long into adulthood and motivate them to serve in the community.

During AU4U, students and their parents head to campus to register for classes and generally get to know the surroundings. This year, however, the students will be part of a brief discussion about what the idea of vocation means. They will also learn they will be taking an interactive career

assessment called Focus 2 over the summer. This online tool matches results with AU's academic opportunities.

A summerlong component is one of the factors that make AU's FYE program unique. Most colleges and universities schedule a day like AU4U — but they would also leave Audrey and other incoming freshmen to play or work the summer away. Over the summer, the students will not only complete the assessment but also undertake assignments such as writing journal entries — all meant to stimulate a conversation not only within themselves but also with their loved ones.

"It was intentional for us to start this in the summer," said Amir St. Clair, executive director of AU's Wackerlin Center for Faith and Action. "Beginning at AU4U lays an important foundation so that each student can start exploring what vocation is and determining what the important questions are before the fall. The summer also presents a valuable opportunity for parents and other family members to become involved in this discussion using the language of vocation. Discovering what matters often can be best supported through reflection and engagement with others."





Lakeside Life Choices

During Welcome Weekend 2018, the students will meet their facilitator, who will then spend the entire fall semester guiding them and their fellow cohort (of about 30 students each) through a host of classroom-free activities — some mandatory, such as writing an essay and participating in online forums, and some voluntary. (Another unique aspect of AU's FYE: it is required for all freshman students as part of their general education course work.) For students like Audrey, whose direction in life is undecided, these exercises are intended to stimulate thoughtful discussions about a meaningful career.

“We’re asking them to consider not just *which* academic major they would pursue but also *why* they would pursue a major. What do they really care about? Questions like that are new to FYE this year,” said Matt Kneller, director of general education.

At the same time, the students will be given opportunities to grow skills they will need to succeed in college, such as managing their time, accessing campus resources and interacting with others.

FYE (which is partially supported this coming year by a grant from the NetVUE Foundation) is the beginning of

a process to develop students who will explore, reflect and think critically in all they do for the rest of their lives. On the other end of that process is the Junior Mentoring program, which will be in its third year this fall. If FYE is an entrance into college life, Junior Mentoring — when juniors begin working with a faculty member to learn skills such as writing a résumé and looking for a job — is an entrance into a career.

At the end of FYE and after much inquiry about what is important to her, our young friend Audrey decides to pursue that career in social work. She becomes a testament to the power of Aurora University to transform lives.



As will be the case with FYE at the Aurora campus, incoming George Williams College students are required to devote time to learning essential college skills and reflecting on their career choices. But their experiences look different.

The mandatory GWC Experience course is an already established program that relies on firsthand activities — from sailing and horseback riding to visiting a food pantry and homeless shelter — to engage students in learning opportunities that complement lectures, discussions and writing assignments. All activities help students interact with each other and discover what they need to know for future success in college.

GWC Experience participants also are assigned a Common Read book that serves as a jumping-off point for related activities and events on campus.

“The experiences we had in labs and lessons we learned from the Common Read truly opened my eyes to the world around me,” one student said on a course evaluation.

