

Report to Senate

Information Item

TOPIC: Experiential Education

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Introduction:

This document has been prepared to provide a context for institutional discussions about experiential education at Brock University, and to highlight the collaborative and consultative process that has been undertaken in order to develop a common set of experiential education categories for the institution.

Experiential education is defined as the philosophical process that guides the development of structural and functional learning experiences. Experiential learning is defined as the specific techniques or mechanisms that an individual can implement to acquire or meet learning goals (Roberts, 2012).

For the purpose of this report, “experiential education” is the term employed from the broader philosophical and institutional perspective, and “experiential learning” will be used when referring to learning-specific categories (Refer to attached Experiential Education Document).

Rationale: Why define experiential education categories and for what purpose?

Establishing experiential education categories through a campus wide consultation process will allow the University to:

1. Effectively and accurately measure, track and report on experiential education.
2. Support the work that occurs at departmental levels regarding curriculum review and renewal.
3. Support faculty efforts to develop and redesign course offerings to integrate experiential learning.

4. Enhance the University's understanding of the wide range of curricular experiential learning opportunities in order to support recruitment and retention efforts.

Provincial Context:

Experiential education has gained renewed attention in the higher education public discourse in Canada. Although the philosophy of learning grounded in experience has been in the education literature for decades (Dewey, 1938; Kolb & Kolb, 2005), economic globalization, demographic change and the emergence of a knowledge-based economy has placed colleges and universities at the centre of government attention with regard to the quality of the undergraduate learning experience, learning outcomes, and work preparation. In Ontario, the government has narrowly focused its attention on co-operative education and work-integrated learning (Sattler, 2011; Stirling et al., 2016), and has identified experiential learning as a key theme toward the development of the province's highly skilled workforce (Conway et al., 2016). Government-defined examples of experiential learning in the report, *Building the Workforce of Tomorrow: A Shared Responsibility*, include: co-op education, work-placement, mentorships, industry-recognized in-class projects, internships, summer jobs, volunteer positions and apprenticeships. This list of experiential learning examples, however, presents a challenge for post-secondary institutions seeking to define experiential learning beyond the narrow purview of work-integrated learning. As well, this view does not reflect the position taken by the Ontario Council of Academic Vice-Presidents,¹ which argue that experiential learning should be more broadly defined and may include many high-impact practices that have repeatedly and compellingly shown to be associated with effective learning. Although co-op and other work experiences fall within the spectrum of experiential learning, there are other experiential learning opportunities offered by post secondary institutions that are also critically important in the development of 21st century learning competencies.

Brock University and Strategic Mandate Agreement:

In 2013, Brock University's Strategic Mandate Agreement (SMA) committed to an increase in experiential education as a priority objective for the 21st Century

¹ See, Task Force on Quality Indicators of the Undergraduate Learning Experience, Ontario Council of Academic Vice-Presidents (draft memorandum, October 4, 2016). This document identifies high impact practices such as service/community learning, first year seminars, learning communities, research experiences, semesters abroad, capstone projects, internships, and global learning. They argue that many of these practices qualify as experiential learning as long as the term is not too narrowly defined as strictly workplace-based activities.

learner. Targeted areas for enrolment growth identified “co-op,” “service-learning,” “international field courses” and “experiential capstone courses.”²

As the University considers the next version of the SMA, experiential learning will be a critical area of discussion. If the University seeks to continue to support experiential learning across the full spectrum of course, research, and community-based contexts, the university must first: a) clearly define the various forms of *for credit* experiential learning that occurs on the campus; and b) establish a method to accurately collect this information.

Institutional Context

- 1. Data Collection to Support Current SMA:** The 2013 SMA identified a commitment to increase experiential learning in four specific fields: co-op, service learning, international field courses and capstone courses. However, since 2013, collecting information about experiential learning has been difficult. Although data on co-op enrolment are collected institutionally, data collection via a program survey in order to track other aspects of course-based, research-based and community-based experiential learning has not been effective. If the University wishes to continue to commit to experiential learning in the next SMA, a more accurate way to define and collect these data is essential.
- 2. Linking to Current Brock Processes for Tracking Experiential Education:** If the campus can agree upon a spectrum of experiential education categories, and if the associated definitions can be used with common understanding, then existing protocols for tracking may be modified to include information about experiential learning (e.g., the course composition of final grade process). Each instructor could identify the type of experiential learning present in the course, community and/or research activity, and this information could be collected centrally through this proposed process. Once collected, if the instructor anticipates that this pedagogy will be consistently offered in the course, this description could be included (through the approved APC process) in the calendar. In short, an enhanced data collection function related to course composition and timetable submission could lead to greater accuracy in the course calendar. Students would then be able to make informed decisions when selecting courses with experiential learning opportunities offered by academic programs.

² Brock University, SMA, 2013, p. 4-5. Specific targets for experiential learning included: an increase in service learning student placements of 400 in 2013-14, with subsequent incremental increases of 200 student placements for 2014-15, 2015-16 and 2016-17; and an increase in experiential capstone courses of 200 upper-year students from 2013 to 2016.

3. **Curricular and Co-Curricular Experiential Education:** Finally, the purpose of this consultative exercise focused upon *curricular* experiential learning. At Brock, students also have the opportunity to engage in experiential learning through co-curricular offerings. Indeed, Brock University has a particularly robust system in place that provides: a) an online engagement portal from which students can learn about events and opportunities on and off campus (ExperienceBU);³ b) an interactive roadmap that allows students to select from ten co-curricular learning domains (known as the CWC or Campus Wide Co-curriculum) designed to help students understand the links between learning outcomes and career preparation; c) the ability to track participation in these learning domains, and d) the provision of a co-curricular transcript that documents these co-curricular learning experiences. To this end, it is essential that we are able to also highlight the exceptional curricular work that is done in Brock courses where students gain credit for their engagement in experiential learning activities.

Consultation Process:

In order to develop a common understanding of the various forms of experiential learning that occurs across the campus, and to build consensus on terminology and descriptions, an extensive nine-month consultation was undertaken (March, 2016 - November 2016).⁴ This consultation consisted of a series of focused discussions with the following key stakeholder groups:

1. Committee of Academic Deans
2. Senior Administrative Council
3. Associate Deans and Faculty representatives
4. Experiential Staff and Academic Advisors
5. An open in person session and email feedback method for the Brock community
6. A student-focused consultation (undergraduate and graduate)
7. Graduate Studies
8. Service-Learning Advisory Committee
9. Senate Undergraduate Student Affairs
10. Graduate Program Directors

³ See, <https://experiencebu.brocku.ca>

⁴ We would like to acknowledge staff members at the University of Victoria who were consulted early in this process and who shared their campus-wide definitions of experiential learning. The University of Victoria has been a leader in the development of a common typology for experiential learning in the province of British Columbia.

11. Senate Teaching and Learning Policy Committee

Next Steps:

1. The Office of the Registrar and Information Technology Services will convert the current, paper-based “composition of final grade form” to a fillable online form that will include experiential education categories.
2. The Faculty of Applied Health Sciences and Faculty of Math and Sciences have agreed to pilot this online process in March 2017.
3. Brock has consulted with Orbis Communications (who currently provides CareerZone and our co-op management system) regarding the development of a tracking and management system for experiential courses.
4. This initiative will complement the Brock marketing and communications strategy focused on Experience.Brock.

References:

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Experiential Education Categories

Brock University

Experiential Education:

“Experiential education is a philosophy that informs many methodologies in which educators purposefully engage with learners in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develop skills, clarify values, and develop people's capacity to contribute to their communities.” *Association for Experiential Education.*

TYPE	CATEGORIES
CURRICULAR – All of the following activities are part of a course requirements where students will receive a grade for the activity.	
Conference Participation	Develop, plan, coordinate, attend or present an original work at a conference or exhibition.
Consulting Project	Work with a client to identify issues or opportunities and develop and/or implement solutions and/or strategies.
Co-op	Alternate academic study with paid work terms to gain relevant knowledge of the industry or workplace.
Creative or Physical Practice	Develop artistic, physical, technical, management or production skills through intensive embodied and/or practice-based experiences.
Creative Performance or Exhibit	Produce, manage, curate or participate in a dramatic, artistic, dance or musical performance or exhibit for an audience (virtual, live).
Creative, Entrepreneurship or Design Project	Identify problems and prototype/test solutions to create a final artistic, scientific, business or other project.
Events	Develop, deliver or attend an event in order to network with community partners and present and gather feedback on projects and ideas.
Experiential Research Project (Graduate level)	Develop and complete a research thesis/dissertation through systematic investigation, discovery, synthesis and/or application of information designed to solve a specific problem or answer an original research question.
Experiential Research Project (Undergraduate level)	Develop and complete a major research paper or thesis project through discovery, synthesis, and/or application of information to solve a specific problem or question.
Field Experience (Short Term)	Explore academic content in a purposeful way outside the classroom through short-term field trips and/or field-work (less than 20 hours) in Canada
Field Experience (Long Term)	Intensive and immersive time in the field (21+ hours) to study and apply academic concepts within Canada.
International Field Experience (Short Term)	Explore academic content in a purposeful way outside the classroom through short-term field trips and/or field-work (less than 20 hours) outside of Canada.
International Field Experience (Long Term)	Intensive and immersive time in the field (21+ hours) to study and apply academic concepts outside of Canada.
Internship	Participate in discipline-specific, supervised, full-time work during the study period (400+ hours, paid/unpaid).
Lab	Observe, test and apply course concepts in a controlled setting specialized for small group learning (typically affiliated with specific technology and/or facilities).
Practicum	Supervised, practice based experience in employment related field of study.

Professional Practicum	Supervised, practice-based experience required for professional licensing or certification.
Project Activities	Develop and complete a project as an independent study working individually or in small groups with a faculty member(s).
Simulations & Experimentation	Engage with academic content through content-specific activities such as simulations, demonstrations, archival or design work, role play and/or case studies.
Service-Learning	Address a community need (on campus or beyond) in a reciprocal partnership through the integration of course content, academic theory and assessed critical reflection to produce meaningful outcomes in personal, academic and civic learning.

Additional opportunities to gain meaningful experience as part of broader academic programs or co-curricular opportunities are also part of the Brock experience and outlined below:

Co-Curricular/Additional Opportunities	
Campus Wide Co-Curriculum (CWC)	Develop, enhance, and/or improve your understanding and skills from ten themed domains within the CWC designed to help navigate the many opportunities to engage in activities outside the classroom both on or off campus. (i.e. volunteering, university governance, peer tutoring, learning skills workshops, career development sessions, athletics, etc.)
Entrepreneurship & Innovation	Cultivate, organize and/or manage a business, social enterprise or creative idea from development through implementation.
Student Lead Initiatives	Participate in a club, conference, or competition. (i.e. Business Students' Association, Model UN, etc.)
Publication or Conference Presentation	Present and/or publish an original work or contribute to a publication in an editorial, original author or co-author capacity including open access publishing and the Brock digital repository.
Study Abroad or Exchange	Study internationally for one term, academic credit, and/or additional degree.
Teaching and/or Research Assistantship	Gain experience with teaching and classroom facilitation as part of a graduate or undergraduate programs.
VITAE (<i>Graduate Students Only</i>)	Design, build and participate in essential professional skills training sessions and programs that assist you in developing, translating and expressing your experiences, academic and professional skills.

We would like to acknowledge the University of Victoria for their consultations, as well as the faculty, staff and students who took time to engage in the conversation that has shape our definitions for the future development of experiential education at Brock.

Final version established November 22, 2016. Brock University.