



Experiential Learning at the University of Saskatchewan

About

The University of Saskatchewan has long prioritized experientially based learning opportunities for undergraduate students. The desire to increase our activity in this area has been articulated in institutional foundational and strategy documents for over a decade. Growth in opportunity has matched these aspirations. The last integrated plan (2012) focused particularly on growing experiential learning opportunities in (1) undergraduate research, (2) field-based instruction, (3) community-engaged learning, (4) clinical placements, practicum, internship or coop opportunities, and (5) study abroad. Experiential learning remains a significant priority for the institution in 2018 and beyond.

Definition

Experiential Learning is a philosophy and methodology which educators utilize to engage learners purposefully in direct experience, focused reflection, and authentic assessment in order to increase knowledge, develop skills and strategies, clarify values, and apply prior learning. (Adapted from the Association of Experiential Education)

The three essential elements, defined below, are intended to ensure the results of the experience are meaningful and form the basis for future experience and learning. For experiential learning to be effective, these three elements need to be thought about and planned together so that the experience, the prompts to facilitate reflection, and the means and location of assessment are aligned.

Direct Experience

We define direct experiences as those that are structured to actively engage students in learning by doing. The experience may, for example, involve posing questions, investigating, experimenting, solving problems and creating artifacts. The experience will be at a specified level appropriate for the student(s) ranging from those prescribed by the instructor to student determined and led activities.

Focused Reflection

A process of thinking about the experience in an effort to make sense of it, in the context of what is already known by the student and what they want to do next.

In most cases the process of thinking will be guided by the instructor through, for example, questions or facilitated discussion.



Authentic Assessment

A process of assessment, including provision of feedback, in which students demonstrate the specific gains (e.g. knowledge, skills, values) anticipated from the experience. If the experience, for example, was focused on application of knowledge and skills, authentic assessment will allow students to meaningfully demonstrate that application. Authentic assessment will resemble the direct experience intended to facilitate learning in: the assessment task, the physical and social context in which it takes place, and the assessment result or form (Gulikers, Bastiaens, & Kirschner, 2004). The assessment may contribute toward the student's grade in the course (summative) or may be done to facilitate student learning with no marks given (formative).

Priority Areas

Specific types of experiential opportunities have been identified as priority for growth to ensure that our experiential learning activities reflect the unique disciplinary offer of the University and align with our institutional priorities. These are:

Undergraduate Research

Where students have the opportunity to conduct authentic research within a credit course.

Field-Based Instruction

Where the learning takes place outside of the classroom or laboratory and is an opportunity to apply and develop practical skill or conduct discipline related research.

Community-Engaged Learning

As a method to engage students with community partners in a mutually beneficial and negotiated curricular experience.

Clinical Placement, Practicum, Internship, or Coop Opportunity

As a structured educational strategy that provides for the integration of theory and practice.

Study Abroad

As an inclusive category for student exchange programming or for credit instructional activity delivered in an international environment.



Experiential learning opportunities for undergraduates in 2016/17

The institution is continually improving its processes for identifying and tracking experiential learning opportunities for undergraduate students. Tracking helps us promote opportunities to students, provide appropriate support, and monitor achievement of our goals in this area.

In the 2016/17 academic year in the colleges of Agriculture and Bioresources, Arts and Science, Education, Edwards School of Business, Engineering, Kinesiology and Law, there were 7517 student experiential learning opportunities provided in 310 classes. The number of unique students engaging was just under 5700¹ as some students engaged in more than one of these opportunities.

Additionally, students in the colleges of Dentistry, Medicine, Nursing, Pharmacy and Nutrition and Veterinary Medicine engage in clinical placements throughout their program. In 2016/17 approximately 2,300 unique students in these colleges engaged in one or more clinical placements.

In sum, just over 8,000 University of Saskatchewan students undertook an experiential learning opportunity in the 2016/17 academic year. Community engaged learning, undergraduate research, and clinical placements were the experiential learning types with the highest number of student participants.

Reference

Gulikers, J. T. M., Bastiaens, T. J., & Kirschner, P. A. (2004). A five-dimensional framework for authentic assessment. *Educational Technology Research and Development*, 52(3), 67.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02504676>

¹ This number is a conservative estimate as some colleges are in an early stage of adopting the tracking process for their experiential learning opportunities.