Course-Integrated Experiential Learning

A Guide to Validating your EL Classroom Activity

What is experiential Learning?

Experiential learning (EL) is learning by doing. It bridges the gap between theory and practice. This is an active, hands-on process where students apply the knowledge they have gained through their course or academic program to a real-world situation, reflect upon it and demonstrate what they have learned. Reflection is crucial to the learning process as learners engage more deeply with their learning, getting them closer to mastery of the subject.

At Concordia University, students can obtain EL through activities that are course-integrated, research-based, international, community-based, work-integrated, or part of student life. Learn more.

What is course-integrated experiential learning?

Course-integrated EL are classes that include labs, simulations, capstone projects, studio work, games and roleplaying, performances or exhibits, case studies, industry projects, workshops or practica.

Is your classroom activity an experiential learning activity?

Use this checklist to help you verify the activity.

☐ **The active application of theory** Students apply what they know to carry out an action or sequence (doing): sketch, analyze, model, discover, examine, illustrate, investigate, modify, predict, project, perform, use, solve, respond, practice, construct, role-play, simulate, test, demonstrate, conduct, execute, implement, complete, dramatize, integrate, see more actions.

"The learner is actively engaged in posing questions, investigating, experimenting, being curious, solving problems, assuming responsibility, being creative, and constructing meaning (AEE)."

☐ **A high degree of realism** The activity is rooted in an authentic, real-world context.

"Learners are engaged intellectually, emotionally, socially, soulfully and/or physically. This involvement produces a perception that the learning task is authentic (AEE)."

☐ **Facilitated reflection** Students reflect on the experience to engage with what they have learned (see reflection template and guidelines). The student tests their assumptions and incorporates the outcomes into their future actions. Through this process, the experience (doing) becomes new knowledge (knowing).

☐ **The identification of skills** Students will develop specific technical or soft skills through the activity: time management, communication, active listening, coordination, self-awareness, initiative, teamwork, empathy, global and cultural awareness, judgment and decision-making, job search and interview skills, active listening, conflict resolution, see more skills.

☐ **Connection to life after graduation** Students engage in self-discovery, career exploration, career validation, professional development, and networking activities.

NOTE: These activities are not EL in and of themselves. Learn more.

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Types of course-integrated EL.

Artistic performances/exhibits

Students showcase artistic work or the creative process in drama, dance, music or visual arts by presenting in events, exhibitions or performances.

Capstone project

Students put theory into practice in an applied project during a final-year course (sometimes called a thesis project/senior thesis). It is a semester-long (or year-long) applied project where students synthesize the cumulative knowledge gained through their academic program through a demonstration. This may be through a portfolio of their work, a design proposal, a show or exhibit, or a real-world study.

Case studies

Students put learning into action by applying theory to real-world or simulated cases. They analyze real data to make decisions that will impact the stakeholders involved and actively create a new series of events. In a group setting, students consider different scenarios and perspectives, make projections, and negotiate with their team mates to find a solution. Because there is not a clear "right answer", students directly learn about a cause and its effect.

NOTE: a case that is used to teach course content is not EL.

Real-world project/assignment

Students work on a real-world problem through an in-class project based in the Concordia community, public sector or in industry. A representative(s) from the partner organization is invited to provide a project, data, access to a facility, materials, tools, platforms, etc. for the students to use. The representative is also engaged in the activity by reviewing the student's work or proposal and providing feedback. The student's skill level informs how the activity is carried out: students in higher levels usually engage directly with the representative or else the instructor acts as the intermediary for students in lower-level courses.

Games/Role-playing

Students take part in active learning in courses by playing educational games or engaging in role-playing.

Hands-on workshops

Students gain direct experience with a new skill, tool, or technology by learning in action. Workshops are usually shorter than courses, but they can be integrated during class time or as part of the student's study hours. For example, Humanities+ is a program that integrates a series of workshops over the course of the semester during class time.

Laboratory/Clinics

Students apply concepts through observation, measurement, testing and experimentation. Labs and clinics can be scientific or non-scientific and may take place in research labs and facilities.

Practica

Students participate in practical training in the field for course credit. A practicum differs from an internship as a student's primary task is observation to develop their knowledge. The student may also participate in the work (doing) in a limited way under the supervision of practitioners and professors.

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Practica are often mandatory and tied to a licensing or certification process. Of all the types of course-integrated EL, this allows for the highest degree of contextual realism.

Simulations

Students engage interactively with computer-based or other simulations where they actively experiment to solve realistic problems. Within a virtual or imagined world that may incorporate aspects of role-playing, they make decisions that generate a new series of events to respond to.

What's the difference between experiential learning and professional development?

Some activities provide rich opportunities for career exploration, self-discovery, and networking, and these are considered as professional development rather than experiential learning. For example, asking students to attend a discipline-specific conference or a professional networking event, or inviting a guest speaker to a classroom lecture, are not considered to be experiential learning activities.

Furthermore, a problem-based assignment where students theorize about how they would solve the problem is also not considered to be experiential learning.

How could these activities become experiential?

Attending a conference	Presenting at a conference
Listening to a guest speaker in a class	Engaging the guest in providing: - An industry project - Feedback on student's presented work Asking students to plan and execute the event: - recruit speakers - facilitate a preparation activity where they identify their classmates career interests and needs - design a follow-up assignment that builds on a key topic covered in the lecture
Problem-based learning or case studies used to teach course content	Including role-playing (like pitching proposal to a panel), or providing additional contextual details (like simulated constraints or a cause as a result of a decision made or an action taken by the student that they must now respond to)