

Experiential Learning at Western

Western University recognizes the best student experience includes access to high-quality experiential learning opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students. The university defines experiential learning as follows:

Experiential learning (EL) is an approach that educators use to intentionally connect learners with practical experiences that include authentic and focused reflection. EL allows learners to: increase and apply disciplinary knowledge, develop transferable skills, clarify interests and values, strengthen employability, and collaborate meaningfully with communities.

Principles of Experiential Learning

In 2017, the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) released a checklist of six principles to help educators determine if a course or activity is a form of experiential learning. To support faculty, staff, and students at Western in applying the MTCU principles at our institution, and to promote the delivery of high-quality experiential learning, Western’s Experiential Learning Taskforce has developed the following considerations:

MINISTRY OF TRAINING, COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES PRINCIPLES OF EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING	CONSIDERATIONS AT WESTERN
The student is in a workplace or simulated workplace.	The experience is designed to enable the application of knowledge and skills in a workplace, or realistic workplace scenario.
The student is exposed to authentic demands that improve their employability, interpersonal skills, and transition to the workforce.	The experience is designed to strengthen students’ transferable skills, career competencies, and citizenship.
The experience is structured with purposeful and meaningful activities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The experience emphasizes ethical approaches to partnership and student engagement. • The experience includes learning outcomes agreed upon by the student and institution (and partner, where applicable). • The experience includes active, continuous supervision and mentorship (as appropriate) by the institution (and partner, where applicable).
The student applies university or college program knowledge and/or essential employability skills.	The experience is designed to facilitate connections between theory and practice.
The experience includes student self-assessment and evaluation of the student’s performance and learning outcomes by the employer and/or university/college.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The student engages in authentic and focused reflection. • The experiences includes formal evaluation of learning outcomes by the institution (and partner, where applicable).
The experience counts toward course credit or credential completion OR is formally recognized by the college or university as meeting the five criteria above.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The student receives recognition for the experience on the academic transcript. <p>OR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The student receives recognition for the experience on a co-curricular record.

Rationale for Defining Experiential Learning Opportunities

Western's Experiential Learning Taskforce has developed definitions for the curricular and co-curricular experiential learning opportunities available to Western students, which will:

- Allow for consistency of language among stakeholders, and alignment with Western's Degree Outcomes
- Improve institutional tracking and reporting, as well as sector-wide data collection
- Increase consistency with respect to the awarding of academic credit for experiential learning
- Help students make decisions about their participation in experiential learning opportunities
- Create pathways for the development of new experiential learning opportunities
- Support the development of resources that advance experiential learning

Experiential Learning Opportunities

CURRICULAR (FOR CREDIT) EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES (must meet the EL principles and be recognized on the academic transcript)	
Short-term internship	A supervised work experience during a single academic term. May be paid or unpaid.
Long-term internship	A supervised, paid, full-time work experience extending beyond a single academic term.
Co-op	Alternating academic study with paid, supervised work terms. The total amount of a co-op is normally at least 30% of the time spent in academic study.
Practicum (or Placement)	A mandatory, supervised work experience in a discipline in which practice-based experience may be required for professional licensure or certification.
Community engaged learning	An educational approach that integrates community engagement with reflective learning. Students engage in a project, developed collaboratively with a community partner, that has mutually beneficial outcomes.
Independent study abroad*	A program of study which enables students to register and study at a host institution with credit transferred back to the home institution. Program duration is one or two semesters, a summer or short-term study period.
Exchange*	A program of study whereby partner institutions establish a reciprocal agreement which enables students to register and study at the host partner institution with credit transferred back to the home institution. Program duration is one or two semesters, a summer or short-term study period.
Faculty-led study abroad*	A structured group learning activity under the supervision of a home-institution faculty member comprised of credit course(s). Educational activities are centered on a portion of learning taking place abroad, outside of the classroom.
Research	A supervised project extending over at least a term, during which the student engages in primary research to address a research question.**
Lab	A distinct course component that includes the self-directed hands-on application of course concepts in a controlled setting.
Field experience	An individual or group excursion that requires the student(s) to observe or engage in activities outside the traditional classroom (e.g. field trip, field school).

Simulation	A learning exercise that mimics/simulates a real-world process or system (e.g. mock UN, virtual stock exchange, moot court).
Creative, performance, physical practice	An experience that enables skill development through intensive practice or performance (e.g. studio course, activity credit).
Industry project	A course that involves students working with an external partner on a specific project to propose strategies that address an organizational challenge or idea (e.g. consulting project).
Entrepreneurship	A course that requires a student(s) to create and manage the development of a product or business idea.

**Not currently recognized by Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities as an EL activity.*

***Only projects involving an external partner are recognized by the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities as experiential learning.*

CO-CURRICULAR (NON-CREDIT) EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES (must meet the EL principles and be recognized on a co-curricular record)	
Work study	Paid part-time work experiences offered by the university for eligible students who demonstrate financial need.
On-campus work experience	Paid part-time work experiences offered by a Faculty or administrative unit.
Teaching assistantships	Paid work experiences offered by the university through which students provide teaching support.
Research assistantships	Paid work experiences offered by the university through which students provide research support.
Student clubs and associations	Approved or recognized student-led groups based on a shared interest or goal (e.g., Autism Awareness Western, Athletic Clubs).
Student leadership	University-sanctioned opportunities for students to develop their skills while contributing to the Western community (e.g., Orientation Soph, Residence Advisor, Leadership & Academic Mentorship Program).
Student government	Representative bodies of elected students who advocate for constituents, provide leadership and service, facilitate programs, and may potentially oversee student fees (e.g. University Student's Council, Society of Graduate Students, Faculty Councils).
Community engaged learning	Students engage in a non-credit project, developed collaboratively with a (local, national or global) community partner, that has mutually beneficial outcomes (e.g., Alternative Spring Break, Western Serves Network).
Entrepreneurship	Engagement in organized activities related to entrepreneurship and innovation (e.g., hack-a-thon, incubator, pitch competition).
Career preparation/Professional development	Intensive work undertaken to explore career interests and develop professional skills (e.g., job shadow, networking, workshop series).

Note: Individual student volunteerism, while valued by the university, is not included as it is not formally recognized on the co-curricular record.