Guiding Principles for Online Course Adaptations, Fall 2020 | Area of Focus

This document forms part of the University of British Columbia's Guiding Principles for Online Course Adaptations, first published in 2020. Learn more about the guiding principles and access the full document at keepteaching.ubc.ca.

Experiential Education Online: Orienting Questions, Themes, Principles, and Recommendations

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Experiential education[1] is a philosophy and methodology in which "educators purposely engage learners in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develop skills and clarify values" (Association for Experiential Education, as cited in Grain & Gerhard, 2020). Experiential education at UBC is inclusive of a number of discrete activity types covering a broad range of examples, from research capstone seminars, to problem-based learning, to community engaged learning, to international educational experiences. The Experiential Education Appendix illustrates a (non-exhaustive) overview of different clusters of experiential education at UBC. To situate this work at UBC, in a 2019 survey of fourth-year UBC students, 36% reported participation in a research-intensive experience while at UBC; 23% reported participation in work-learn; 22% in community service learning; and 19% in an international educational experience (UES 2019). While other working groups are focussing on specific forms of experiential education such as practicums and labs in the Recommendations for Laboratory Education (PDF) area of focus document, this working group has been tasked with covering experiential education more broadly.

As we consider the current adaptation to online experiential education, various opportunities emerge in how we conceptualize, design, and deliver these experiences such as greater access for learners to engage in both domestic and international partnerships; expanded learning outcomes; collaborative learning spaces for faculty, students, and community/industry partners; and innovative programming. Just as we can imagine these opportunities, at the same time, many students will lose access to situated experiences, on campus and in the

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[1] Experiential education is used here (as opposed to experiential learning) to describe our broad campus practice. Experiential education can be distinguished from experiential learning because it is teleological and is carried out with a purpose, a learning outcome, or an end in mind (see Biesta, 2013). Experiential learning happens throughout one's life, irrespective of an institution's role. Additionally, at a provincial level, the British Columbia Council on Admissions and Transfer (BCCAT) use the language of EE, citing that that EE programs "have experience at their core, and are intentionally linked to the learner's academic and professional goals, and are directed and monitored by the institutions so as to develop the learner's knowledge, skills, and values" (Johnston & Sator, 2017, p. 1).

surrounding communities that lean heavily into embodied experiences including personal interaction, observation, and real-time application.

Although the loss cannot be fully overcome, there are many opportunities for online experiential education that do emerge including a few listed here: virtual tours aided by multimedia increase site/location access, the UBC q̓əq̓ən house posts and the Vancouver Art Gallery Virtual Walking Tour are two examples; the "Choose your own adventure" simulations in Labster's virtual reality platform; analyzing local community issues and visually mapping community-based resources; developing surveys and analyzing data to inform or evaluate programming; discussion rooms in Collaborate Ultra; and others. Experiential education for online courses may happen through the computer, or may include guided activities in which learners engage beyond the computer — with space, place, embodiment, and their unique local contexts.

In recognition of both the challenges and the opportunities, what follows are orienting questions, themes, principles, and recommendations that serve as a guide for faculties, faculty members, educators, and staff to understand and make decisions about how to reimagine and support experiential pedagogy and practice online that results in meaningful learning and inclusive practice. As the circumstances of every course and program are context specific, we offer these ideas as ones to consider and implement if appropriate and helpful to do so.

Key principles and recommendations

The following principles were collaboratively generated in an effort to guide decision makers and educators to effectively navigate the challenge of experiential education through online delivery.

1. Reimagining experiential education involves clarifying the desirable and achievable learning outcomes and building experiences around those outcomes.

Core questions to consider:

- What is your motivation for using experiential education as a pedagogy?

- What outcomes are achievable given this transition to online/remote teaching and learning? What activities are best suited to help students achieve the desired outcomes?

- What is not possible? What may cause more harm or risk to learners or learning partners (e.g., community partners, employers, other stakeholders)?

Recommendations for practice:

Be explicit: Clearly communicate with students the learning outcomes, the approach you are taking to achieve them, and expectations around digital etiquette. Consider how students can be brought into the conversation about meaningful learning experiences in a remote environment.

Identify methods of learner engagement: Identify which learning outcomes require face-to-face interaction between students; students and external partners; students and instructors/TAs. Consider also providing the

students with project prompts, including the outputs expected, and set aside time during the synchronous course delivery for students to self-organize.

Articulate expectations for online engagement: Communicate with students before the class or program, introduce self, clarify expectations, and begin building community; host interactive welcome sessions clarifying expectations and facilitating connections between students; build expectations together to increase peer-to-peer connections and accountability to one another; leverage support from staff leading co-curricular programs familiar with creating group norms.

Redesign conventional 'in person' placements: Consider how outcomes (and thereby curricula) can be redesigned in the absence of a conventional internship, practica, or applied learning format. This may require rethinking and re-conceptualizing expectations with faculty/unit leadership, community partners, employers, and/or accreditation boards. For example, could you include a case study focused on similar issues to those the placement would have highlighted, but decouples the work from an organization?

Engage in discussions with key decision makers: Critical consideration of the learning outcomes associated with an experiential education opportunity may result in the realization that some outcomes are easily shifted to a virtual environment, some are doable with creativity/re-working, and others may not be ideally suited to our current context. Having these conversations early with key decision makers will enable course/program designers to most effectively prepare for the fall term.

2. Appropriately scope the experiential education opportunity/activities in recognition of possible constraints for students and partners (e.g., workload, equity and access to critical technology, family obligations).

Core questions to consider:

- What is the expected commitment for students (i.e., time, duration, frequency)?

- How can you articulate the skill-based, technological, temporal, and other prerequisites for students to effectively participate in an experiential learning opportunity?

- What accommodations might you be able to make for students coming into this opportunity with varying access to these resources?

- To what extent can students be afforded autonomy in shaping their experiential education?

Recommendations for practice:

Clearly communicate expectations: Proactively communicate to students the intended outcomes; key attributes expected of students; length, time, and frequency of the experiential component; technology required; prerequisite skills required; the extent to which students can build their networks; and the proportion of synchronous to asynchronous activity.

Make a contingency plan: Proactively consider the alternatives available to students participating in your course/program. What elements of your course/program are non-negotiable in order to ensure a meaningful, safe, productive educational experience? Where can you be flexible and adapt to mitigate students' specific constraints and limitations?

Highlight learner autonomy: Consider allowing students to take responsibility, and thus drive the agenda of their own learning by articulating for themselves a learning outcome that honours their current constraints. Additionally, learner autonomy can be fostered through appropriately designed self-assessments and peer-assessments as a means to reflect on learning outcomes.

Simulate place-based and contextual understanding: Students who do not reside in Vancouver lose immediate access to the place-based contexts vitally important for some experiential education. Consider providing context at the start of the course through first personal narrative accounts; augmented reality; virtual reality; videos; etc. Place based education can also expand to include the 'places' where students are situated globally (e.g., asking students to create virtual maps of meaningful locations in their region).

Leverage students' contexts: Many engaging forms of experiential education are carried out in spaces beyond the classroom.[2] Educators can consider how space, time, and place might enhance student learning beyond the computer, in the physical and temporal location in which they find themselves. What can students learn about a given subject/topic in the physical environment that they are currently in? What can students learn about a given subject/topic from the people with whom they share physical or social spaces?

3. Recognizing the need for more flexibility, align appropriate assessment strategies to achievable outcomes.

Core questions to consider:

- What types of assessment strategies are best suited to each individual learning outcome?

- When/how/how often will students be assessed?

- To what extent is it possible for students to be more involved in determining assessment criteria?

Recommendations for practice:

Integrate choice into learning plans: Consider allowing students to 'choose their own adventure' based on their personal circumstance. For example, if you choose to integrate experiential education into the course or program, you might opt to create multiple course streams: a community research stream and a traditional research stream. In this example the final assignment could be either an action project or a traditional academic paper.

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[2] For more information, additional questions, and specific examples of experiential education beyond the computer, see module 4 of the CTLT's Online Teaching Program.

Allow students to participate in determining the criteria by which their work will be evaluated: Consider the critical outcomes you require of all participants and whether flexibility is possible in the path students take to demonstrate those outcomes. Consider creating some latitude, within parameters of the learning outcomes, for students to identify and shape appropriate indicators/measures of academic success within an experiential education experience.

Focus on the process rather than (only) the product: Consider a process-oriented assessment framework that evaluates student progress and performance at various stages of the experiential education experience, where emphasis is balanced between learning process, product, and outcomes.

Nurture a culture of learning: Consider how best to guide students toward deep learning. Leverage online workshops focused on preparing students for experiential education and reflective practice; create and provide students with clear rubrics at first-year level to standardize expectations and enhance self-regulated learning; online video conferencing sessions for students to connect on different issues around teaching and learning; host sessions on the protocols of online communication.

4. Cultivate a strong, inclusive, online learning community that attends to the circumstances of all participants.

Core questions to consider:

- How will the students engage in dialogue, discussion, community building, and collaborative learning with each other? Community/industry partners?

- When/how will students engage in meaningful critical reflection? How with those reflection questions advance student learning about self, and/or discipline?

- How can we mitigate the danger of leaving certain students behind based on our pedagogical choices?

Recommendations for practice:

Leverage institutional learning supports: Draw upon university-wide resources to support instructional design, partnership identification and sustainment, and the integration of experiential education into courses or programs.

Facilitate collaboration and co-creation: Craft assignments that provide an opportunity for students to contribute and co-create knowledge with external partners, to connect students to one another, to lessen the absence of physical connections, and to contribute meaningful to a collective regional, national, international, and societal efforts.

Set up third spaces for learning: Consider creating online structures that can be made available outside of dedicated course/program times, for the student to access when they are needed. These can serve as informal spaces otherwise missing through virtual engagement and may include peer groups; digital group work 'rooms'; TA-led conversations; tutorials; etc.

Be flexible: Students may require more accommodations and/or flexibility in participating in these types of experiential learning opportunities. Considerations for alternate criteria for student participation may need to be discussed with the appropriate departmental/faculty/unit leaders and/or external partners prior to student participation.

5. Given the reduced human resource capacity, funding, and staffing that may affect external partners, take action to ensure strong and reciprocal relationships.

Core questions to consider:

- What are the operational and technological needs of external partners that support this opportunity?

- How do UBC's commitments to equity and community engagement inform what reciprocal relationships look like with external partners?

- What are the ways to guide external partners in supporting student learning, considering the context and circumstance of each student?

- How can you continue to maintain and sustain a quality relationship and effective communication with your external partners? How can you facilitate effective connection points between partners and students?

Recommendations for practice:

Allocate resources and funding: Consider leveraging programs like the Partnership Recognition Fund to help offset costs incurred by external partners working with UBC.

Begin with an offer: Consider how to frame the discussion so that the partner needs can drive the collaboration. Try to be flexible and adaptive to those needs by modifying assignments, student projects, and the agreed upon outputs resulting.

Steward relationships: Given the time and resources required to develop strong and sustained relationships, consider how to honor existing relationships even if those organizations are unable to partner due to current limitations. Consider how to maintain communication and be ready for a return to in-person engagement in the future.

For further information, see the Experiential Education Appendix.