

# Examples of Experiential Learning Activities and Associated Pedagogical Approaches to Ensure they are High-Impact

Karen Velasquez, Ph.D.  
Director, Office of Experiential Learning

Experiential learning (EL) at UD takes many forms. Programs and activities such as education abroad, faculty mentored research, co-ops and on-campus employment, internships, leadership positions, faith immersions, and community-engaged learning, among others, are all considered forms of EL. However, EL is more than just the program or activity. It is a pedagogical approach that includes several key components. Across all forms of EL there are some common best practices that can be identified, including **P**reparation, **I**mmersion, **R**eflection/**A**pplication, **A**ssessment or PIRAA (Velasquez, 2018).

Below, two examples of EL activities - project-based learning and student employment are highlighted using the PIRAA model, to help EL educators identify ways to implement high-impact EL in their courses and programs.

## **Project-based learning**

- Examples: a research project; a design or prototyping project; a science project or experiment; preparing a proposal/grant/presentation for a campus partner or client; etc.
- \*some forms of community-engaged learning can be project-based, and in cases where instructors and students are working with a community partner, additional guidelines around reciprocity, equity, and community building are to be taken into consideration for the experience to be considered impactful community-engaged learning (i.e. principles of UD's definition of community-engaged learning should be incorporated into the various components of the experience)

## **Project-based learning and experiential learning pedagogy: connecting characteristics of high impact EL to PBL**

### **Preparation**

- Examples: instructor discusses learning goals and objectives of the project students will be working on; provides necessary information and context for students to understand the nature of the problem and its relevance to the course, to the field, and/or broader connections (other themes such as the common good, social justice, sustainability, i.e. themes relevant to the project/problem being addressed); ideally instructor will make connections between the project and institutional learning goal(s) and engage students in a conversation about these connections.

### **Immersion**

- Examples: Students engage in self-guided learning by devising solutions to problems, working independently and/or in teams to devise new approaches to meeting the challenges presented by the project and the problems it presents; students will conduct any necessary research and/or experiment/explore options and alternatives related to

the project assignment (i.e. creating new designs or prototypes, proposals, presentations, etc.) and apply course concepts and ideas in the process; they will exercise agency and demonstrate initiative in the learning process.

### **Reflection/Application**

- Examples: Instructors engage students in reflection through conversations/dialogue, through assignments such as reflective papers or prompts that ask students to make sense of their immersion experiences; reflections should help students make meaning of the experience and explore the value and impact of the experience for their own personal, academic, professional and vocational goals and development. Educators should help students make connections between the immersion and the learning goals set forth in the “preparation” aspect outlined above; students should ideally also be asked about how the skills and lessons learned from the experience connect to other educational experiences both inside and outside the classroom. Instructors engage in their own reflection on the project-based learning and consider the impact of the experience on their own teaching and learning, and their own vocational discernment as educators.

### **Assessment**

- Examples: Instructors engage in an exploration of how and to what extent the learning goals set forth for the project were met, utilizing information based on student reflections and assignments related to the project; instructors evaluate student learning and as well as assess the success of the project and make any adjustments according to their findings. Ideally, assessment and evaluation will take place longitudinally and in concert with university efforts to support student learning, and will share best-practices with the university community when presented the opportunity.

### ***When is project-based learning not experiential?***

- When an instructor introduces/implements a project-based learning assignment that does not have clearly defined learning goals that would help frame the project as a learning experience through which students will gain hands-on experience; when the project does not include opportunities for students to experiment, problem solve, or take the lead in their own learning process either independently or in groups; when the instructor does not help students make meaning of their experience engaging in the project-based learning through intentional reflection to help students connect and apply their learning.

### **Student employment**

- Examples: on campus student employment positions, employment off-campus that students acquire on Handshake
- \* Student employment is not only a form of experiential learning but also its own field with recognized best practices such as those outlined by the Office of Career Services and professional organizations such as NACE. Employers offering student employment opportunities for UD students should not only use the following principles of high-impact experiential learning to inform the work experiences they create for students, they should

also seek to integrate guidelines and best practices that are specific to student employment. (*Link to resources and additional guides developed for employers*).

## **Student employment and experiential learning pedagogy: connecting characteristics of high impact EL to student employment**

### **Preparation**

- Examples: Employer provides student employee with training, discusses skills that will be learned on the job, has a conversation with student about what they would like to learn from the experience; employer discusses the relevance of the work experience and provides student with appropriate information that will help the student understand their responsibilities and the importance of the work; ideally employer will connect the work experience to UD's institutional learning goal(s) and explain this connection with student employee(s).

### **Immersion**

- Examples: students are offered opportunities to engage in self-guided learning. Problem solving, teamwork, independent work, etc. through which the student exercises agency and takes initiative to address responsibilities and tasks related to the work. Self-guided learning opportunities will vary according to the nature of the work and roles associated with the experience.

### **Reflection/Application**

- Employers engage students in reflection and meaning making around the experience through conversation, dialogue, other assignments. Employers help students make connections with and make sense of the skills they are learning through the work experience. Employers serve as guides and mentors to students as they develop professionally and learn new skills. Employers can engage students in conversation about connections between the work experience and students' personal, academic, professional, and vocational goals. The employer ideally reflects on their own experience supervising and mentoring students, and explores their own learning and vocational discernment through the process.

### **Assessment**

- Employer engages in an evaluation of student learning and how/the extent to which students have met the learning goals of the work experience, and offers students feedback to improve their learning; they evaluate the nature of the work experience to make continuous improvements and make adjustments as necessary; employers are encouraged to share lessons learned around successful student learning through employment with broader university community when presented the opportunity.

### ***When is student employment not experiential?***

- When employment opportunities do not intentionally frame work as a learning experience (when students are not provided with goals for their work, or they are not

offered training or asked to engage in conversations around the nature of their work responsibilities, roles, or skill development, for example); when employers do not engage students in purposeful conversation to help them make sense of their learning; when student employees are not provided opportunities to engage in self-guided learning or exercise agency (i.e. they are not asked to solve problems and challenges, they are not encouraged to identify new approaches and solutions; when the nature of their tasks does not not provide opportunities for growth and development).