Experiential Learning (ExL)
Purdue University Northwest

Experiential Learning

Experiential learning is the process of learning through experience, and is more specifically defined as "learning through reflection on doing.” Hands-on learning is a form of experiential learning but does not necessarily involve students reflecting on their experiences. Experiential learning is distinct from rote or didactic learning, in which the learner plays a comparatively passive role. It is related to but not synonymous with other forms of active learning such as action learning, adventure learning, and free choice learning.

National Society for Experiential Education

National Society for Experiential Education (NSEE) is a nonprofit membership association of educators, businesses, and community leaders. Founded in 1971, NSEE also serves as a national resource center for the development and improvement of experiential education programs nationwide. NSEE supports the use of learning through experience for:

- intellectual development
- cross-cultural and global awareness
- civic and social responsibility
- ethical development
- career exploration
- personal growth

Types of Experiential Learning

- **Internship** - combining practical experience with a structured learning experience to support academic and career goals
- **Undergraduate Research** - a scholarly or artistic activity that leads to the production of new knowledge
- **Design Project** - a problem solving activity to provide students with a supervised experience within a particular course
- **Cultural Immersion** - a travel experience which involves both academic learning and value added experiences designed to enhance student awareness of cultural differences
- **Practicum** - a supervised clinical lab, work or service experience done by a student to make the connection between theory and practice of a particular discipline
- **Service Learning** refers to a structured experience in the community with specific learning objectives where by the learner will partake in active collaboration that builds on the resources, skills, expertise and knowledge of the campus and community.
- **Cooperative Education** - refers to a formal, structured plan of education in which students alternate periods of full-time classroom study with periods of paid, supervised, and progressively responsible training related to their academic major.
How is Experiential Learning at Purdue University Northwest different from hands-on learning at many other colleges and universities?

Experiential learning has been a graduation requirement for undergraduate students at Purdue Calumet, and has been practiced at Purdue North Central. Students enroll in experiential learning courses while completing their degree. Purdue Calumet has been recognized as a national leader in the field of experiential education and is one of a select few institutions to adopt this approach as a graduation requirement that complies with standards established by the National Society of Experiential Education (NSEE). At Calumet, experiential learning courses must meet a set of measurable guidelines to fulfill the graduation requirement. The University, the student and the community partner must collaborate to ensure success for all parties.

What are the benefits of Experiential Learning?

Experiential Learning brings opportunities and benefits to all the partners involved in the success of this effort: The University and its faculty; our students; and our Community Partners.

What’s in it for students?

Learning is enhanced when students integrate the formal classroom instructional process with experience in the real world. Experiential learning is one more way Purdue University Northwest gives students a competitive advantage. By graduation, each student will have had at least two opportunities to apply what he or she has learned in a chosen field of study. That can lead to job opportunities, interview skills and solid life skills.

What are the benefits to Community Partners (Employers and Partner Organizations)?

The University is working with partners such as businesses of all sizes, research facilities, nonprofit organizations, community service groups, government offices and medical facilities to design structured, supervised programs that benefit the students as well as the community partners. The partners gain a source of highly educated and motivated pre-professionals. With more than 45 majors, Purdue University Northwest can help its partners find talented students and design and develop a specialized program to fit the organization’s needs and time commitments.

What’s in it for Faculty?

The University has formed a strategic partnership with the NSEE to further professional development in the area of experiential education for our own faculty as well as regionally and nationally. Experiential Learning broadens opportunities for faculty, along with their students, to apply research and learning in a particular field of study. ExL also enhances the classroom experience with cutting-edge research, business and technology initiatives. And our faculty has the opportunity to be part of a showcase experiential learning program, as the University is on the leading edge of this important area of development for the future of education.
What are the benefits to the University?

Already an academically comprehensive regional university and part of the internationally respected Purdue system, Purdue University Northwest has been recognized as a national leader in the field of experiential education.
Standards of Practice:

Eight Principles of Good Practice for All Experiential Learning Activities

Regardless of the experiential learning activity, both the experience and the learning are fundamental. In the learning process and in the relationship between the learner and any facilitator(s) of learning, there is a mutual responsibility. All parties are empowered to achieve the principles which follow. Yet, at the same time, the facilitator(s) of learning are expected to take the lead in ensuring both the quality of the learning experience and of the work produced, and in supporting the learner to use the principles, which underlie the pedagogy of experiential education.

1. **Intention**: All parties must be clear from the outset why experience is the chosen approach to the learning that is to take place and to the knowledge that will be demonstrated, applied or result from it. Intention represents the purposefulness that enables experience to become knowledge and, as such, is deeper than the goals, objectives, and activities that define the experience.

2. **Preparedness and Planning**: Participants must ensure that they enter the experience with sufficient foundation to support a successful experience. They must also focus from the earliest stages of the experience/program on the identified intentions, adhering to them as goals, objectives and activities are defined. The resulting plan should include those intentions and be referred to on a regular basis by all parties. At the same time, it should be flexible enough to allow for adaptations as the experience unfolds.

3. **Authenticity**: The experience must have a real world context and/or be useful and meaningful in reference to an applied setting or situation. This means that it should be designed in concert with those who will be affected by or use it, or in response to a real situation.

4. **Reflection**: Reflection is the element that transforms simple experience to a learning experience. For knowledge to be discovered and internalized the learner must test assumptions and hypotheses about the outcomes of decisions and actions taken, then weigh the outcomes against past learning and future implications. This reflective process is integral to all phases of experiential learning, from identifying intention and choosing the experience, to considering preconceptions and observing how they change as the experience unfolds. Reflection is also an essential tool for adjusting the experience and measuring outcomes.

5. **Orientation and Training**: For the full value of the experience to be accessible to both the learner and the learning facilitator(s), and to any involved organizational partners, it is essential that they be prepared with important background information about each other and about the context and environment in which the experience will operate. Once that baseline of knowledge is addressed, ongoing structured development opportunities should also be included to expand the learner’s appreciation of the context and skill requirements of her/his work.

6. **Monitoring and Continuous Improvement**: Any learning activity will be dynamic and changing, and the parties involved all bear responsibility for ensuring that the experience, as it is in process, continues to provide the richest learning possible, while affirming the
learner. It is important that there be a feedback loop related to learning intentions and quality objectives and that the structure of the experience be sufficiently flexible to permit change in response to what that feedback suggests. While reflection provides input for new hypotheses and knowledge based in documented experience, other strategies for observing progress against intentions and objectives should also be in place. Monitoring and continuous improvement represent the formative evaluation tools.

7. **Assessment and Evaluation**: Outcomes and processes should be systematically documented with regard to initial intentions and quality outcomes. Assessment is a means to develop and refine the specific learning goals and quality objectives identified during the planning stages of the experience, while evaluation provides comprehensive data about the experiential process as a whole and whether it has met the intentions which suggested it.

8. **Acknowledgment**: Recognition of learning and impact occur throughout the experience by way of the reflective and monitoring processes and through reporting, documentation and sharing of accomplishments. All parties to the experience should be included in the recognition of progress and accomplishment.