



**A Case for Change  
Experiential Education Integration at York University**

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# **A Case for Change:**

## **Experiential Education Integration at York University**

### **Introduction**

Experiential Education (EE) can be defined as a pedagogical approach that affords students the opportunity to apply theory to a concrete experience in a manner that advances the learning objectives of a course or program. These learning experiences can occur either within a classroom or within the community and serve as a means by which students can reflect upon their learning, and potentially acquire a deeper understanding of their subject matter.

Students tell us that they would like to be more engaged with their learning, to know their instructors, and to understand how to apply their learning to the world-at-large. Course directors want students to be attentive and actively involved in the learning process. Parents tell us they want their children to graduate with opportunities for securing worthwhile jobs. Employers hope for graduates who are able to adapt to the workplace with strong writing, problem-solving and interpersonal skills. Community partners tell us they would like to establish respectful and beneficial relationships with York and its students. Experiential education has the potential to fulfill all of these stakeholder expectations.

Some faculty and students believe that EE only takes place in the community without understanding the rich contributions that EE can also make in classroom settings. The purpose of this paper is to encourage informed discussion about experiential education and its integration at York.

### **Experiential Education Work Group**

The Experiential Education Pan-University Work Group established in June 2013, has been mandated by the Provost to develop a high level strategy to assist the University leadership in making decisions about embedding experiential approaches in degree programs. Guided by the principles set out by the University Academic Plan (2010-2015), the Work Group seeks to enhance the quality of teaching and learning and the overall academic experience of York's students and to build strong relationships between York University and the community.

This discussion paper is a work in progress. It will be used by the EE Work Group as a common base of key information to guide and frame its deliberations. New information, research and data will be added as deemed appropriate. The paper will serve as a tool for consultation to encourage informed discussion about the use of EE as a pedagogical approach to enhance learning.

The current work of the EE Work Group will take into consideration the recommendations that were made previously as part of the White Paper process. In 2010, a working group was established by the former Academic Vice-President & Provost with the goal of developing an EE business case to guide the implementation of directives from the White Paper. A document entitled "Business Case – Revised: Expanding Experiential Education" (June 2010) was produced. This business case has provided valuable direction for the current deliberations.

The EE Work Group also understands that any comprehensive EE approach must be understood and embraced by Faculties as a whole, as well as by individual faculty members. Informed decisions will need to be made about the ‘fit’ between the degree program and the integration of EE strategies. Appropriate support must be provided through the provision of professional development, administrative tools and dedicated resources to assist with the coordination of community contacts. To that end, a comprehensive, systematic and learner-centered perspective will guide the deliberations of the Work Group in its recommendation formulation.

## Experiential Education as an Institutional Priority at York

The University’s Academic Plan (2010-15) and the Provostial White Paper (2010) both cite the need for growth in experiential education.

The pursuit of academic quality has been consistently identified as being one of the highest academic goals across a number of university academic plans (e.g., UAP, 2005 - 2010, UAP 2010 - 2015). In the UAP, the enhancement of teaching and learning is seen to be an essential component in terms of advancing academic quality and ultimately, student success. It identifies three priority areas: (i) enhancing teaching and learning, (ii) enriching the student experience and (iii) building community and extending our global reach. Across each of these broad priority areas, experiential education can be seen as a vehicle to facilitate learning.

The White Paper “Building an Engaged University: Strategic Directions for York University 2010-2020” (April, 2010), identified that “there will be a significant increase in opportunities for students to participate in an experiential education activity, both domestically and internationally, as a component of their degree program”<sup>1</sup>. The advancement of experiential education was further explained in the White Paper Companion (2010) in terms of the following objective<sup>2</sup>:

Objective 1: Support deeper student learning through the integration of theory and practice within all degree programs by providing students with opportunities to apply what they are learning.

Experiential education also affords students the opportunity to apply their theoretical knowledge in a manner that not only supports deeper learning, but can also potentially be a vehicle for community engagement.

As described in the President’s Task Force Report on Community Engagement (February, 2010) the definition of community engagement is as follows.

“[Community engagement is] the collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national and global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity.” (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2008)

In conventional terms, education and community engagement are often seen as distinct concepts. However, we believe that there is a powerful intersection between some forms of EE and community engagement.

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<sup>1</sup> Benchmark #7 in the White Paper Overview.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter 4: Promoting Quality in Student Learning in the White Paper Companion.

## Why We Need to Pay Attention to Experiential Education

### ***EE increases student engagement in learning.***

Research has shown that the integration of quality EE strategies into curriculum increases student engagement and, in doing so, improves learning. Over the last 15 years a growing body of research has documented various benefits to students who participate in experiential education programs and activities. The impact of embedding EE in a degree program can be realized in three distinct but intersecting categories: (i) academic performance and aspiration – which includes skills and attributes such as engaged learning, improved oral and written skills, higher grade point averages and increased likelihood of attending graduate school; (ii) citizenship – which includes attributes such as awareness of social justice issues, understanding the importance of the public good, working in teams, and exhibiting multicultural competence; and finally (iii) employability – which includes building skills and attributes that enhance students' chances of becoming employed – such as more defined career plans, professional networking opportunities etc. See Table 1 for a summary of the research.

*"I think it [EE] engages the students more. I think their learning is deeper with experiential education, they are more interested in the topic. I think there's more of a discovery element so it's not just ingesting knowledge and spitting it out. But actually they learn through the process of conducting experiential exercises or tasks making it more rich than it could be otherwise."*

*-York Professor*

### ***When students are more engaged, teaching is more enjoyable.***

Course directors have been increasingly challenged over the years to find ways to actively involve students in their own learning. Many that have been successful in doing so have employed various EE strategies, both in the classroom and in the community. The opportunity for the course director to link theory to 'real world activities' through, for example, case studies, guest speakers or community placements brings relevance to the subject matter for the students and often a deeper level of learning. The teaching experience for the course director is enriched by this higher level of student engagement, increasing the sense of enjoyment and satisfaction for both the students and faculty members.

*"It's [EE] personally rewarding, it's because I feel like it has a more immediate impact on students.....even if 2 or 3 students every year come out of it [the course] thinking...I'll remember this forever...."*

*-York Professor*

### ***EE strategies lead to the development of transferable skills.***

Experiential education represents a vehicle within which it is possible for students to have opportunities to apply what they learn and to recognize and develop their transferable skills such as self-management, team work and learning skills (Haigh & Kilmartin, 1999). Research



by Leckey & McGuigan (1997) showed that employers preferred soft skills in teamwork, communication, self-management over content knowledge and problem solving.

A study by HEQCO (2012), the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, indicated that 33% of employers who hosted programs such as placements, internships and co-ops hired individuals who participated in their programs and consistently offered them higher starting salaries.

***The further integration of EE strategies into degree programs will have a positive impact on York's reputation.***

In recent years, York University has faced significant enrolment challenges. This may stem, in part, from the perceived reputation of York University by prospective applicants. Research by the Strategic Counsel (2012) revealed that grade 10 and 11 students in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) made choices about their future education based on their perceptions of: the quality of university teaching, the quality of jobs obtained by graduates; the availability of career oriented, and professionally relevant degrees and the academic reputation of the university. This report affirmed that if York University wishes to avoid fiscal consequences, it needs to enhance the public perception of its academic reputation and show how it is preparing its graduates to be productive members of society.

Further, the six month employment rate for York University graduates has dropped since 2010<sup>3</sup> and the two year employment rate for graduates is trending downwards. These rates are similar to other institutions in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area<sup>4</sup> and suggest that graduates are indeed facing an increasingly challenging and competitive job market. The standard model of obtaining a university degree and then obtaining meaningful employment is being questioned, given the reality of students' experiences.

**Examples of recent media headlines addressing student employment after graduation.**

*"Class of 2013 demands more from universities: Help us find jobs."* Globe & Mail (May 2013).

*"The university myth of good employment: The transition from school to work can be less stressful with more realistic expectations and more preparation."* Toronto Star (July 2013)

*"Is the BA a ticket to nowhere? 'No. Employers want independent, critical thinking workers."* Hamilton Spectator (July 2013)

Becoming a leader in experiential education would provide York with an opportunity to create a destination for students who value opportunities to link theory with practice in ways that will enhance their learning and better prepare them for making valuable contributions to society. In pursuing this path, it will be important that the change process we embrace be consistent with York's values, that it focus on quality and uphold academic standards. By investing in experiential education we invest in ourselves – because the benefits of systematically

<sup>3</sup> The six month employment rates for 2010, 2011 and 2012 were 92.2%, 89.6%, 87.5% respectively. The two year employment rates for 2010, 2011 and 2012 were, 95.0%, 91.9%, 91.7%. OIRA (2010-12)

<sup>4</sup> See <http://www.mcmaster.ca/avpira/kpi.html>; <http://www.ryerson.ca/upo/statistics/KPI.html>, <http://www.provost.utoronto.ca/link/students/osap.htm>

embedding EE strategies into our degree programs extend not only to students, but also to faculty members, community partners and ultimately to the institution.

**Table 1: Skills and attributes that students develop through experiential education**

| Skills & Attributes that are strengthened through Experiential Education | Academic Performance & Aspiration | Citizenship | Employability |
|--|-----------------------------------|-------------|---------------|
| Engaged Learning <sup>5</sup>  | X                                 |             |               |
| Deeper understanding of concepts <sup>6</sup>                            | X                                 |             | X             |
| Improved Oral/Written Expression <sup>7</sup>                            | X                                 |             | X             |
| Higher GPA, Better Academic Performance <sup>8</sup>                     | X                                 |             |               |
| More clearly defined career plans <sup>9</sup>                           |                                   |             | X             |
| Increased likelihood of attending graduate school <sup>10</sup>          | X                                 |             | X             |
| Application of knowledge <sup>11</sup>                                   | X                                 |             | X             |
| Knowledge Exchange/<br>Mobilization/Translation <sup>12</sup>            | X                                 |             | X             |
| Team work <sup>13</sup>  | X                                 | X           | X             |
| Interpersonal skills <sup>14</sup>                                       |                                   | X           | X             |
| Professional networking opportunities <sup>15</sup>                      |                                   |             | X             |
| Social responsibility to others <sup>16</sup>                            |                                   | X           | X             |
| Social Justice, Civic Engagement,<br>Broader Public Good <sup>17</sup>   |                                   | X           |               |
| Multicultural Competence <sup>18</sup>                                   |                                   | X           | X             |

<sup>5</sup> Chavan, 2011; Dewey, 2009; Jacoby, 2003; Paul & Mukhopadhyay, 2005

<sup>6</sup> Blank, Simons & Kenyon, 2009; Bristol, Knapp & Fisher, 2010; Estes, 2004; Hamer, 2000; Paul & Mukhopadhyay, 2005; Wright, 2000

<sup>7</sup> Chisholm & Davis, 2007; Feldman, Moss, Chin, Marie, Rai, & Graham, 2006; Katula & Threnhauser, 1999; Sawyer, 2009

<sup>8</sup> Chisholm & Davis, 2007; Chavan, 2011; Hamer, 2000; Katula & Threnhauser, 1999; Mpofu, 2007; Strage. 2000

<sup>9</sup> Owen & Stupans, 2009

<sup>10</sup> Chavan, 2011; Chisholm & Davis, 2007; Wright, 2000;

<sup>11</sup> Cowart, 2010; Gremler, Hoffman, Keaveney & Wright, 2000

<sup>12</sup> Gault, Redington & Schlager, 2000

<sup>13</sup> Gremler Hoffman, Keaveney & Wright, 2000; Bobbit, Inks, Kemp & Mayo, 2000

<sup>14</sup> Gremler Hoffman, Keaveney & Wright, 2000

<sup>15</sup> Jacoby, 2003; Owen & Stupans, 2009

<sup>16</sup> Perry & Katula, 2001; Rubin, 2002

<sup>17</sup> Blank, Simons & Kenyon, 2009; Bristol, Knapp & Fisher, 2010; Dewey, 2009; Einfeld & Collins, 2008; Fredericksen, 2000; Ngai, 2006; Mooney & Edwards, 2001

<sup>18</sup> Blank, Simons & Kenyon, 2009; Einfeld & Collins, 2008; Jacoby, 2003; Knapp & Stubblefield, 2000



## Theoretical Underpinnings of Experiential Education

Experiential education has its philosophical roots in constructivism espoused by theorists such as Dewey (1938), Lewin (1951) and Piaget (1970), where the acquisition of knowledge is seen to occur when the student actively reconstructs their pre-existing understanding(s), conceptual models, or world views, in an effort to reconcile new experiences within an existing framework. In this context, reflection can be seen as the process by which a connection is made between the prior concrete experience and one's current understanding or conceptualization of that experience (c.f. Kolb, 1984). The explicit emphasis on reflection is a distinctive characteristic of experiential education<sup>19</sup>.

### Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle

Kolb's experiential learning cycle (1984) is depicted in Figure 1. The experiential learning cycle represents a model of how students process their experiences through reflection, and come to new interpretation and/or understanding of a particular topic at hand which ultimately informs future experiences and action. The learning cycle can be utilized in a heuristic fashion to describe experiential education whether it is at the level of a single experience (in which case the student may go through a number of iterations of the cycle) or as discussed more fully below, at the level of a course (where learning activities are planned in a sequential fashion corresponding to each of the different phases<sup>20</sup>). As can be seen from Figure 1, the learning cycle consists of four distinct phases.

The **concrete experience phase** represents students' encounter with the actual experience. This can be captured through a range of activities designed to provide opportunities to "apply what they know", deepen student learning, and advance course outcomes. These activities can occur in various contexts (either within a class or within the community) and are described in greater detail in the notes that follow. Examples include: In-course learning activities, within community learning activities, community based learning, academic community service learning, community based research, placements, internships and co-operative education.

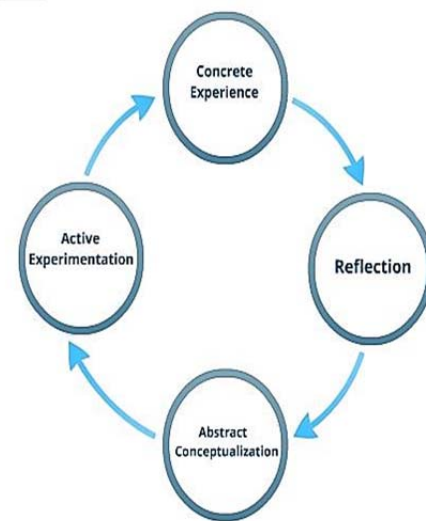


Figure 1. Kolb's Learning Cycle

<sup>19</sup> We are making a distinction between active learning and experiential education, although there are many similarities. According to Bonwell & Edison (1991) active learning "involves students in doing things and thinking about the things they are doing". Although active learning (Braxton, Milem & Sullivan, 2000) can also be traced to constructivism and while many active learning techniques (such as discussion, paired/group learning, debates, role-playing) are similar to some experiential education activities associated with in-class learning activities, the act of reflection is implied in active learning whereas it is a structured and required component of experiential education (i.e., it is a separate step with many techniques for facilitating reflection).

<sup>20</sup> It is important to note that one may begin anywhere in the cycle – for example, in the case of course based research, one may begin with the abstract conceptualization phase by assigning students to do a literature search.

The **reflection phase** occurs when students are asked to refer back to the concrete experience in order to connect the experience with their understanding of that experience in relation to the course content, readings and relevant theory. Reflection can take various forms ranging from activities or assignments that are relatively brief (e.g., a one minute reflection paper) or more involved (e.g., in-class or online guided discussion in response to a specific question and/or assigned readings). A weekly reflection journal can be assigned for on-going concrete experiences. Some theorists (Kember, McKay, Sinclair & Wong, 2008; Rogers, 2001; Wallman, Lindblad, Hall, Lundmark & Ring, 2007) have described the *quality* of reflection ranging from shallow reflection or non-reflection -- where the student simply recounts the concrete experience like a diary of events or a recollection, to deep or critical reflection -- where the student recounts the concrete experience from various points of view, in relation to course material and theory and also considers how the experience has shaped one's beliefs or understandings of a particular concept or topic.

The **abstract conceptualization phase** of the learning cycle allows students to demonstrate and consolidate what they know as a result of their concrete experience(s) and subsequent reflection(s) and asks students to address issues of broader theoretical and/or practical significance. Abstract conceptualization is informed by meta-reflection (that is, a reflection on the reflection phase), course content, relevant theory, and scholarly literature and can be viewed as a way of codifying what has been learned, discovered and understood about a given topic. This phase can be designed to be a summative or final project and take the form of an essay, term paper, research report, presentation and other forms of creation (such as photo or video project).

The **active experimentation phase** is sometimes referred to as the "knowledge mobilization" phase or "planning" phase. This phase represents how future action can be informed as a result of the abstract conceptualization phase. From the student perspective one can ask "Based on your experience(s), how would you plan to do things in the future?" Active experimentation could take the form of a class discussion at the end of a course; students are asked to summarize what has been learned in the course as a result of the experiences and to consider future implications. Alternatively, this phase can be part of the beginning or middle of a course where students are assigned a research proposal, following an extensive period of abstract conceptualization (i.e., in the form a literature review, in the case of course-based research). Another possibility is to blend this phase with a learning activity associated with the abstract conceptualization phase (as described above) in the form of a final project that encapsulates reflection on future implications.

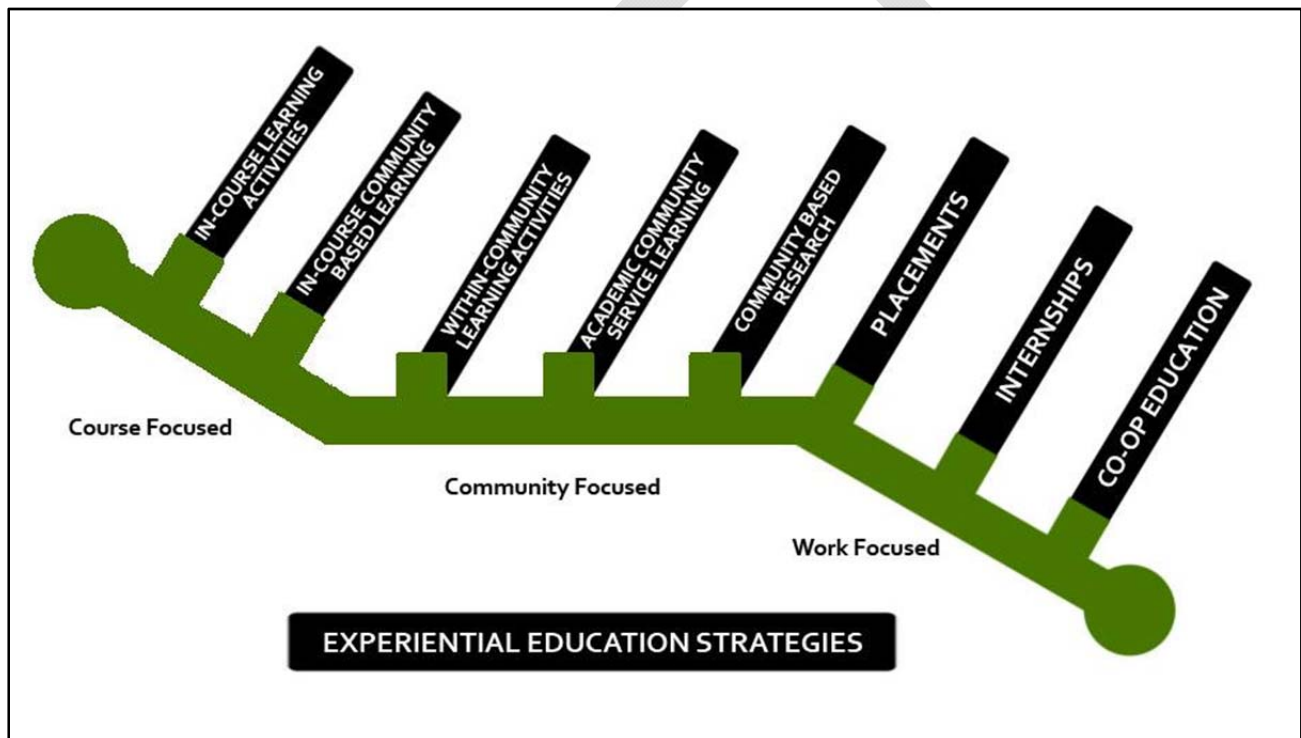
*"I have always been interested in social work and rehabilitation and those kinds of fields so I always wanted to know how we could actually apply psychology to community resources."*

-4<sup>th</sup> Year Student

## Establishing a Common Language for Experiential Education

Using a common language to flag the various types of experiential education is important for faculty, students, administrators and community partners so that the various stakeholder groups can talk to each other and understand the range of possibilities that EE can provide to enhance student learning. The following operational definitions have been utilized to facilitate the reading of this discussion paper.

The range of EE strategies have been displayed on a continuum which spans those learning approaches that can be used in the classroom to EE strategies that take place in the community. We have likened this continuum of activity to building a subway line where both students and faculty members understand and appreciate the choices they have regarding the types of EE experiences that can be employed. When integrating experiential opportunities within degree programs, care must be taken by administrators and course directors to ensure that students are adequately prepared to engage with experiential opportunities in the community.



### **Course Focused EE: Within the course or classroom**

**In-Course Learning Activities** This experiential education strategy takes place in the classroom/course and allows students to apply theory and course content to concrete experiences that encourage reflection and conceptualization. These concrete experiences include, for example, the use of guest speakers, role playing, skits, case studies, simulations, workshops, and laboratory courses. A variety of in-course learning activities may be integrated throughout the course.

**In-Course Community Based Learning (CBL)**. In-Course Community Based Learning (CBL) is a form of experiential education that is interactive with the community but takes place within

the course or classroom<sup>21</sup>. Community partners<sup>22</sup> are invited into the classroom to present pre-defined problems, questions or areas of research interest. Students work with problems/issues provided by the community partners, applying their developing knowledge and skills and reflecting on how the actual experience relates to or informs their learning. In-course CBL can vary in length, from a brief experience of a few weeks to a maximum that covers the duration of the course.

### ***Community Focused EE: Linking courses to the community***

**Within-Community Learning Activities.** This experiential education strategy offers students opportunities to engage with the community and the world beyond. Such experiences allow students to connect course material with the context outside the classroom through observation, reflection and practical applications in order to develop a deeper understanding of concepts learned and to perceive their relevance. Examples of such activities include: interviews with professionals in a particular field, participation in community events, observations of lived experiences that correlate with topics under study, and visits and field trips to sites that are of particular relevance for certain disciplines. Within-community learning activities are *for credit* and may be part of the course assessment strategy.

This type of learning activity can also include international experiences such as participation in exchange programs and in York U Abroad courses which offer students the opportunity to explore content and develop skills in a context uniquely suited to stimulate and deepen learning. Under this model, travel to a foreign site and planned excursions and field activities offer students opportunities to learn in an authentic and memorable context in order to deepen learning through guided observation in the new context, reflection on it and practical experimentation. Examples include the learning of foreign languages, the development of intercultural competence, and experience with social and cultural phenomena in authentic settings.

**Academic Community Service Learning (Academic CSL).** This is a form of experiential education where "students engage in activities that address community needs together with structured opportunities intentionally designed to promote intentional learning goals" (www.nsee.org). Another commonly accepted definition comes from Bringle and Hatcher (1996: 222):

"[A course based], *credit bearing* educational experience in which *students participate in organized service* that meets community needs, and reflect on the service to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic or social responsibility."

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<sup>21</sup> Technology may enable community partners to remotely connect to the classroom (e.g. via Skype etc).

<sup>22</sup> Community partners can refer to small scale local entities from the public or private sector to large scale local, national, trans-national, entities such as corporations, government and non-governmental organizations.

In contrast with Community Based Learning (CBL), where community partners bring the actual problems/issues into the classroom, Academic CSL takes students into the community as part of the learning experience. Students may engage with Academic CSL by providing direct service such as helping at a food bank or by taking on a project defined by a community organization such as assessing how well a given recreational program fits with the developmental needs of toddlers. Again, the real-life situation provides the concrete experience for students to apply their developing knowledge and skills and to deepen their understanding by reflecting on their learning. Academic CSL is often used as a strategy to address not only course-based material but also to help students develop an awareness of the value of civic engagement. Community partners may participate in the evaluation of the students and may benefit from the work of students in the form of service and/or project reports, presentation, or recommendations. The duration of an Academic CSL experience can vary from being very brief, for example, a few weeks to a maximum of the duration of the course (whether the course is a single term of 12 weeks, or two terms of 24 weeks).

*Note: There are forms of Community Service Learning that are co-curricular in nature. They often include volunteering opportunities for students. In these forms, CSL is not-for-credit. For our purposes, we are addressing only academically oriented CSL.*

**Community Based Research (CBR).** Students are given the opportunity to work on a research project that is part of a course and has been co-created and developed through the collaboration of a community partner and a researcher (e.g., course director). In contrast to traditional research on the community, CBR has the characteristic of being community situated. It is: practically relevant to the community; collaborative and action oriented<sup>23</sup>.

The Community Based Research project is normally completed within the duration of a *full-year 6.0 credit course* (i.e., 24 weeks).

*"It was a great experience to actually see ourselves implementing our education....whatever we have learned so far in three years.... in a way that was helpful for our community agency as well."*

4<sup>th</sup> Year Student

### ***Work Focused EE: Skill development in the workplace***

**Placements.** This experiential education strategy permits students to develop competencies and skills in organizational environments that augment the theories/concepts learned in academic course settings. Students engage in activities where they practice the discipline or course specific competencies; *they receive course credit for doing so but (generally) are not paid.* Placements have been associated with but are not restricted to professional programs and are also known as fieldwork or field placements (e.g. Social Work, Communication & Culture, Anthropology, Disaster and Emergency Management), practica (e.g.Nursing) or practicum (e.g. Law).

Students apply theories and concepts from their course work in a practice-based environment and reflect upon their actions. The placement experience may be full-time or part-time and

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<sup>23</sup> As indicated by the Center for Community based research (<http://www.communitybasedresearch.ca>)



requires that students periodically return to class to share their experiences and make meaning of their time 'in the field'. Students are evaluated (e.g., report, sponsor evaluation, self-evaluation, etc.) on their placement performance as part of their final grade in the course. The length of placements typically last the entire duration of a course.

**Internships.** Similar to placements and co-ops, internships permit students to develop competencies and skills in organizational environments that augment the theories/concepts learned throughout their degree and/or certificate programs. *Internships are (generally) zero credit, paid one-time work assignments.* They may be either full or part-time and are generally associated with academic programs (degrees, diplomas or certificates) that include a practice, service or professionally oriented application.

Internships are supervised experiences in which a student has documented intentional learning goals that are shared by the employer, the faculty supervisor and the student. Learning is assessed via the student creating an end of term work report<sup>24</sup>, which is reviewed by the faculty supervisor, and the employer's evaluation of the student. Students receive a transcript notation - typically a pass/fail is assigned by a faculty supervisor.

Specifically, York Internship Programs are optional and provide students with the opportunity to engage in a four, eight, twelve or sixteen month paid work term after their third year of studies.

*"I didn't know what to expect because Environmental Studies is so broad. It was hard to make the link between courses and what is out there. Internship showed me different aspects of the conversation that I now want to get into once I graduate. I'll be taking a few more technical courses now too".*

Environmental Studies Internship Program Student, Intern, Humber Watershed

**Co-operative Education Programs.** Co-op programs provide students with the opportunity to integrate their classroom learning with hands-on work experience related to their field of study in which they alternate periods of full-time work with their academic terms. According to the Canadian Association for Cooperative Education (CAFCE; <http://www.cafce.ca/en/coop-defined>), a co-op program is one which alternates periods of academic study with periods of work experience in appropriate fields of business, industry, government, social services and the professions in accordance with the following criteria:

- "each work situation is developed and/or approved by the co-operative educational institution as a suitable learning situation;
- the co-operative student is engaged in productive work rather than merely observing;
- the co-operative student receives remuneration for the work performed;
- the co-operative student's progress on the job is monitored by the co-operative educational institution;
- the co-operative student's performance on the job is supervised and evaluated by the student's co-operative employer; and
- time spent in periods of work experience must be at least thirty per cent of the time spent in academic study."

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<sup>24</sup> Best practices dictate that critical reflection about the concrete activity informs the report.

Co-operative education programs can be *either for credit or zero credit* endeavours, and are generally noted on the transcript and degree. Co-operative student positions are most often 4 to 8 months in duration, with a commitment of 12-16 months in total over the course of the degree. Given the alternating nature, co-operative education programs tend, in most cases, to necessitate alignment with a trimester system.

## Experiential Education in Higher Education

In 2010 an experiential education business case was developed to support the direction provided by the White Paper. As part of the business case development, an overview of the EE activity taking place at major institutions across Canada was conducted. Themes that emerged across the twenty-four institutions surveyed included:

- All universities offer elements of EE and all consider EE a priority;
- Some view EE as a way for students to gain practical experience, while others underscore the pedagogy of reflection in linking theory and practice and many embrace both;
- Universities vary greatly in the EE opportunities profiled vis-à-vis credit or not-for-credit, type, length, etc.; and
- Many have plans for the expansion of EE.

In the summer of 2013 the Ontario Ministry of Training, Universities and Colleges requested 'strategic mandate statements' from each university and college in the province. Institutions were to reflect in these statements approaches that differentiated them from other institutions. It is interesting to note that 13 (of 20) universities incorporated EE as part of their statements. Of York's major competitors, Ryerson stated that currently over 90% of its undergraduate programs include various types of experiential learning. The University of Toronto reported that it offers EE through such vehicles as co-op (1500 students) and internship (600 programs), which it has plans to expand in the coming years. McMaster has created an Experiential Learning Centre to increase the number of students who are actively engaged with the community through service learning, co-op training, entrepreneurial activity or direct work experience.

## Current Status of Experiential Education at York University

York has a long history of delivering experiential education within various Faculties. EE has traditionally been associated with professional programs such as Business, Education, Law, Nursing, Social Work, and more recently Engineering through the provision of placement, internship and co-op opportunities. The Faculty of Science has offered internships in computer science since 1995. The School of Nursing alone provides clinical placements for approximately 800 students each year and the Osgoode Law School has received several prestigious awards for the manner in which it has embedded EE in its degree program.

The pioneering efforts of the former Atkinson Faculty of Liberal and Professional Studies as well as the former Faculty of Arts developed and supported various types of EE activity including academic service learning, community based learning and internships. Much of this work now continues in Faculties such as Health and Liberal Arts and Professional Studies.

### ***Baseline for Experiential Education Activity on Campus***

A recent survey of experiential education at York gives additional insight into the scope of its use across the continuum from in-course learning activities to co-op offerings.



Through November 2011 to March 2012 a short survey was sent to all course directors who taught a course during summer 2011, fall 2011, fall-winter 2011-12 or winter 2012. For each course taught, faculty members were asked to select the mode of instruction, along the EE continuum, that best described their course. In total, surveys were distributed for 3,405 undergraduate courses taught by 1,527 individual faculty members. Responses were received for 1,909 courses or approximately 57% of the total.

Table 2 summarizes the results. Many course directors adopted in-course learning activities (36.4%) followed by a smaller proportion of course directors utilizing academic service learning (5.5%) and closely followed by in-course community based learning (4.0%). Approximately 2.6% of course directors reportedly have their students engaged in placements while it appears that few opportunities exist currently for co-op and internship activities.

Table 2.  
*Distribution of EE activity on campus in 2011*

|                                    | Percentage |
|------------------------------------|------------|
| No experiential education          | 35.90      |
| In-course learning activities      | 36.40      |
| In-course community based learning | 4.00       |
| Academic community based learning  | 5.50       |
| Placements                         | 2.60       |
| Internships                        | .20        |
| Co-op                              | .20        |
| Other                              | 15.20      |
| Total                              | 100.00     |

Approximately 1/3 or (35.9%) did not utilise any form of experiential education. A proportion of course directors (15.2%) utilized some other form of experiential education that did not correspond to our categories.

### ***Recent Initiatives to Advance Experiential Education***

Over the past two years, the Academic Innovation Fund (AIF) has begun to foster more Faculty-wide and pan-University interest and activity, encouraging the development of models for various EE strategies and their formal integration into degree programs. It should also be noted that some Faculties are combining eLearning with EE initiatives in their future plans.

Six Faculties have specifically referenced EE in their current Integrated Resource Plans (see Appendix 1). LAPS, for example, identified measurables that included increasing funding to expand EE activities within the Faculty. Osgoode, Health and LAPS have recently hired EE coordinators to encourage faculty members to engage with EE strategies and to provide supports and coordination with community partners. Schulich utilized the AIF to transform one of its graduate degree programs. Appendix 2 lists and describes the projects that were sponsored by the Fund which span eight Faculties and have contributed to the pan-University EE infrastructure through the development of replicable and sustainable activity.

All of this represents a good start.

However a more systematic approach is needed in order to transform course learning environments and degree programs. The implementation of EE should be planned, deliberated and coordinated at pan-University and pan-Faculty levels rather than individual courses being offered randomly across a variety of programs. Moving forward, the programs and courses utilizing EE should be strategically identified. The strategies (course focused or community focused) will be decided based on the best fit with the disciplinary pedagogy and student needs, while at the same time being mindful of a faculty member's right to choose instructional methods as per YUFA and CUPE collective agreements. Quality assurance processes will ensure quality course development, along with educational development expertise and resourced support systems to facilitate coordination with and the cooperation of respected community partners.

### ***Institutional Support for Experiential Education***

A significant increase in EE course offerings necessarily requires a concomitant increase in support services for development and ongoing maintenance. Currently, support for EE at York is available from a variety of sources.

- The Teaching Commons provides advice and professional development on effective pedagogy and/or good practice, developing course learning outcomes and using EE strategies to enhance learning. Courses to inform about the use of EE are available in a number of formats to faculty members and may be customized to meet the needs of specific Faculties.
- The Career Centre provides extensive support for recognized internship programs and, more recently, has been supporting the development and implementation of the Faculty of Science's co-op pilot project. The Career Centre supports students in finding and securing meaningful internship and co-op opportunities and in articulating the skills and experiences gained from these workplace exposures.
- The York TD Community Engagement Center provides a gateway into the Jane-Finch community for Faculties, programs or course directors who are interested in developing relationships with community partners for purposes of teaching, research and community development.
- The Libraries provide support to Faculties through their subject librarians who can assist both faculty members and students in finding, evaluating and using resources relevant to EE in their courses, practica and internships, field courses and labs. Librarians can also assist in designing assignments and curricula that incorporate experiential learning methods (hands-on research exercises, archival research, etc.).

A complaint voiced by many faculty members has been that though these types of resources and supports exist, it is often not clear how to access them. A consistent request from many community partners addresses the need for a coordinated approach for partnering with the University in the provision of EE activities that take place within the community. If it is York's desire to grow and institutionalize the use of EE, a well-resourced and deliberate approach to planning and supporting EE will be required.

### ***Benefits for Course Directors***

There are many benefits of incorporating EE strategies in one's course curriculum. Above all, is the enriched teaching and learning environment that blending theory with practice creates, resulting in deeper learning for students and greater satisfaction for course directors. Further

EE can be a vehicle for integrating teaching, research and service. In-course community based learning strategies and community based research strategies; in particular, lend themselves to this type of integration resulting in the weaving of one's research interests and one's desire to give back to the community with one's teaching. EE strategies can also be used in conjunction with eLearning strategies to bring an even more exciting and impactful experience to the students. Finally, all of this adds considerably to one's teaching portfolio and other forms of recognition.

## A 2018 Vision for Experiential Education at York

The Provostial White Paper and the University Academic Plan have both pointed to an increasing role for EE at York. As recognized earlier in this paper, York has accomplished a great deal in the utilization of EE strategies but in order to meet the challenges and opportunities of the future, our approach to EE must adopt an increasing strategic and systematic focus.

Over the next five years EE must become an integral element of:

- A strong teaching culture that supports teaching innovation and creates an engaging learning experience for students;
- A quality student experience that incorporates a reflective approach linking theory and practice; and
- A value proposition that enhances the reputation of the university and distinguishes York in attracting and retaining students.

Based on the principles above, the EE Work Group has created the following **2018 Vision** for the integration of EE at York.

By 2018 York is emerging as a leader in Experiential Education (EE) in Canada. Colleagues share common language and Faculties have mapped a range of progressive EE strategies into all degree programs. Course Directors feel confident in their knowledge of how EE strategies can be used to deepen learning and engage their students. Students recognize the relevance of their education and appreciate that the institution is responsive to their desire for applied learning environments both in the classroom and within the community-at-large.

The affiliations that York has developed with its community partners are based on mutual respect and shared interests. Community partners have a clear path to connect with interested parties on campus to collaborate. To facilitate this, an advisory committee comprised of both community and York leaders provides guidance on partnership building. As a result, global and local organizations are now actively recruiting York students for a variety of EE opportunities. York's vast alumni network has been incredibly helpful in establishing many longstanding partnerships.

York provides support to its Faculties, students and community partners through a shared service approach. Common administrative, technical and professional development support services for students and faculty are provided centrally, while Faculty-specific customized services are provided locally. Both Faculties

and community partners appreciate the sophisticated pan-University relationship management system that has been established to match students with community EE opportunities.

York recognizes and celebrates the innovative work of its faculty, community partners and students. Stories about York's EE accomplishments are showcased in the media every year enhancing the institution's reputation. Students are choosing York because of its engaging learning environments that link theory to practice. Parents and students recognize that York University provides an excellent well-rounded education replete with opportunities to apply learning in a variety of workplace settings, better preparing graduates to become thoughtful, productive and involved citizens.

To realize this 2018 Vision, a number of supporting initiatives have been suggested below. Some of these initiatives may be undertaken at the pan-University level while others may take place at the Faculty or unit level.

### ***Establishing Common Language and a Strategic Approach***

- Encourage Faculty leadership teams to a) identify where EE is currently being employed, and b) document plans for the expanded use of EE in Faculty Integrated Resource Plans
- Adopt a common language for EE at York
- Establish a baseline of EE activity and routinely measure progress
- Create appropriate rubrics and identify EE designated courses in course calendars so that students are aware of their options and can seek out EE courses or programs
- Identify and compile a compendium of EE best practices from across the university and share widely with faculty members and students
- Ensure that EE strategies are reflected as appropriate in the setting of degree level expectations, student learning outcomes and in deliberations addressing new course proposals
- Develop and implement a faculty incentive strategy(ies) to encourage the redesign or creation of new EE courses
- Establish professional development support for those faculty members who would like to explore course redesign or creation

### ***Establishing Shared Support and Win-Win Relationships with Community Partners***

- Establish a centralized office to provide a coordinated approach to (1) identifying and working with community partners; (2) establishing a database (Client Relations Management) of community contacts; (3) developing standardized tools and frameworks for the administration of partnerships (eg. legal or ethical frameworks, risk management, project charters, etc.); (4) encouraging alumni engagement and (5) establishing a robust web site that can be accessed by faculty, staff, community partners to provide resource materials and to showcase EE initiatives
- Encourage the hiring of Faculty EE coordinators who will provide oversight for Faculty-specific initiatives, liaise with the central office, community partners, and support faculty members

- Establish a Community Engagement Advisory Group comprised of faculty, staff, students, community partners and alumni which will provide guidance to York in the implementation of its EE Integration Strategy

### ***Recognizing and Rewarding Achievements***

- Recognize and celebrate EE achievements: via celebratory events such as the AIF May 9<sup>th</sup> event and Teaching In Focus; through YFile stories; incorporate into York's branding campaign; encourage current faculty EE champions to share their stories in conference or other presentation settings, etc.
- Engage students in a social media campaign to tell their EE stories
- Leverage relationships with alumni to help us share our success stories with the community
- Create EE awards for outstanding faculty members, students and community partners
- Ensure recognition through the tenure and promotion process for faculty members that employ EE strategies

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## Appendix 1: Experiential Education Initiatives as Identified in Integrated Resource Plans (IRP) by Faculty

| FACULTY               | ACTION/STRATEGY  | MEASURABLE/MILESTONE   |
|-----------------------|--|--|
| Environmental Studies | Update the recruitment strategy to highlight specific experiential education opportunities in the program, e.g. Costa Rican field course, in-class experiential education and the undergraduate internship program   | a) All recruitment documentation and the FES website accurately reflect and promote experiential education opportunities   |
| Health                | AIF Project: Experiential Education in the Faculty of Health: Engaging Undergraduates, Faculty and Community; create a communications and sustainability plan for experiential education.  | a) AIF Project: Experiential Education in the Faculty of Health: Engaging Undergraduates, Faculty and Community completed; communications and sustainability plan for experiential education created.  |
| LA&PS                 | <p>Encourage more programs to build EE into their curriculum.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• By 2013 increase funds available to expand experiential learning, such as internships, work placements, service to the community and attending community-focused events.</li> <li>• Create a database of EE offerings by canvassing programs.</li> <li>• Create a website presence for EE on the LA&amp;PS site.</li> <li>• Create a Faculty-wide policy on whether and how EE events are counted for credit.</li> <li>• Use the <i>Shoreham School</i> placements as a best practice to model new EE initiatives.</li> <li>• Work with alumni networks to develop new EE linkages for programs.</li> </ul> | <p>a) Increase funds, by 2013, to expand experiential learning, such as internships, work placements, service to the community and attending community-focused events.</p> <p>b) Create a database of EE offerings by canvassing programs.</p> <p>c) Create a website presence for EE on the LA&amp;PS site.</p> <p>d) Create a Faculty-wide policy on whether and how EE events are counted for credit.</p> <p>e) Develop new EE linkages for programs.</p> |
|                       | <p>Increase student participation in EE activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase the number of students participating in</li> </ul>  | a) Increase in the number of students participating in Experiential Education activities, using 2009-2010 as a base year.  |

| FACULTY  | ACTION/STRATEGY  | MEASURABLE/MILESTONE  |
|----------|--|---|
|          | Experiential Education activities, using 2009-2010 as a base year.   |   |
| Lassonde | Develop co-op and expand internship programs for students  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Program developed and approved</li> <li>b) Hire co-op/internship coordinator</li> <li>c) Plan developed and resources identified</li> <li>d) External partners established</li> <li>e) Promote and market opportunities</li> <li>f) Grow the number of students on internships</li> <li>g) New partnerships formed</li> </ul> |
| Osgoode  | Continue to implement academic strategic plan (2011-2016)  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>h) Evaluate our progress in the key areas of experiential education, research and community engagement</li> </ul>  |
|          | As indicated in our successful Academic Innovation Fund (AIF) application, establish an Office of Experiential Education (OEE) to develop programs to support and coordinate experiential learning initiatives, the Osgoode Public Interest Requirement, and our experiential courses and clinical and intensive programs. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Creation of OEE</li> <li>b) Hiring of Director of OEE</li> <li>c) Mandate for the office is developed and well communicated</li> <li>d) Infrastructure and resources made available to carry out the mission of the OEE</li> </ul>  |
| Schulich | Engage in program redesign projects beginning with 'Re-Tooling the IMBA Program' to implement cross functional, experiential-based leadership and management training in the International MBA program   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) See detailed project proposal (AIF) for 4 year project which will slowly build up leadership and functional management knowledge, adding complexity, through cross-functional integration, and the investigation of global management and stakeholder issues</li> </ul>   |

## Appendix 2: AIF Experiential Education Projects

### **Advancing EE in the Graduate International Business Management Program**

Project Lead: Atipol B. Supapol, Schulich School of Business

Alternate Designate: Ingo Holzinger, Schulich School of Business

This project introduces Community Partnership, Integrated Management Experience and Career Development and Coaching to the graduate international business program, incorporating elements of experiential education and e-and web enhanced learning, consistent with the university academic priority areas.

### **Business & Public Administration Internship Program**

Project Lead (Academic) - Professor Gary Spraakman, Faculty of Liberal Arts & Professional Studies

Project Lead (Administration) - Julie Rahmer, Director, Career Centre

The Business & Public Administration Internship Program is an optional experiential education program that provides Honours Bachelor Degree students, majoring in Administrative Studies, Business & Society, Communication Studies, Economics or Public Administration, with the opportunity to apply their classroom learning in a workplace environment between their 3rd and 4th years of study. Through these internship opportunities, students gain confidence in field-related knowledge, general employability skills, and valuable full-time, paid work experience (i.e. 4, 8, 12 or 16 months in duration). This initiative builds on the success of other collaborations between the Faculty of Liberal Arts & Professional Studies and the Career Centre, such as the Certified Management Accountants Internship Program, Human Resource Management Internship Program and Technology Internship Program.

### **Centering Community: Developing a “Community Centric” Action Plan for Experiential Education**

Project Lead: Yvette Munro, Office of the Provost

This project involves the creation of a Community Partner in Residence Program (CPIR) to work in collaboration with other university structures to support experiential education and community engagement. The CPIR program brings community perspectives to bear on the development of activities and strategies, and create opportunities for York to explore and enhance the reciprocal benefits of experiential education by linking community partners and projects more closely.

### **Experiential Education, Osgoode Hall Law School**

Project Lead: Lorne Sossin, Osgoode Hall Law School

Growing out of Osgoode’s plans for the broadening and deepening of experiential education opportunities, so that all students will include a significant EE component as part of their degree, and building on Osgoode’s innovative initiatives in this area, including legal clinics, intensive

programs, simulation-based courses and internships, the funds support the development of an Office of Experiential Education - the first of its kind at a Canadian law school - intended to serve as a catalyst for further support, including the leveraging of external resources.

### **Environmental Studies Internship Program (ESIP)**

Project Lead (Academic) - Professor Gail Fraser, Faculty of Environmental Studies

Project Lead (Administration) - Julie Rahmer, Director, Career Centre

The Environmental Studies Internship Program is an experiential education program designed to provide Honours Bachelor of Environmental Studies students with the opportunity to apply their classroom learning in a workplace environment between their 3rd and 4th years of study. Through these internship opportunities, students will gain confidence in field-related knowledge, general employability skills, and valuable full-time, paid work experience. This initiative expands on the relationship between the Faculty of Environmental Studies and the Career Centre to leverage existing internship models, systems and expertise, with a focus on collaboration and sustainability.

### **Experiential Education in the Faculty of Health: Engaging Undergraduates, Faculty and Community**

Project Lead: Lesley Beagrie, Faculty of Health

This project focuses upon the development of infrastructure to support experiential education in the Faculty of Health and potentially other Faculties. The Faculty is working with interested course directors to develop a series of demonstration projects. Best practices and new partnerships will be explored. Prototypes will be developed for future use and the course directors will serve as mentors.

### **Geoinformation Based Disaster & Emergency Management Training Facility – Prototype Set Up**

Project Lead: Niru Nirupama, Faculty of Liberal Arts and Professional Studies

Project Lead: Costas Armenakis, Faculty of Science and Engineering

This project has developed a geoinformation based disaster and emergency management training facility to offer hands on experience to our students. A prototype training facility was created which over time will evolve to provide a first class digital environment that will allow our students to be trained in simulation of emergencies, decision making, and the on-scene response and evacuation. The project has allowed us to set-up the prototype facility and to develop operating procedures to be used by students, faculty and staff.

### **New Opportunities for Innovative Student Engagement, “NOISE for Social Change”**

Project Lead: Uzo Anucha, Faculty of Liberal Arts and Professional Studies

NOISE for social change is a unique engaged learning opportunity for social work students at York. It brings social work students together with high school students from the Jane-Finch community and York University alumni in 20 community actions pods.

Throughout 2012-2013 each pod designed and implemented a community project. This invaluable multi-directional learning opportunity increased participants connection with the university, their larger community and a passion for lifelong learning.

### **Science and Engineering Co-op**

Project Lead: Peter Cribb, Faculty of Science & Engineering

Designed to allow students to build on classroom learning through work terms directly related to their field of study, and building on experience with the Technology Internship Program, this project involves planning and implementation of a model for a co-op program appropriate to FSE. It includes development of the academic framework, integration of the co-op into the academic experience, and securing of work placements for students. It may ultimately serve as a model for programs in other Faculties.

### **Student Leadership Development: From the Classroom to the Community**

Project Lead: Rosanna Furgiuele, Glendon College

This project involves the creation of a 3 credit elective course on student leadership development to be housed in Multidisciplinary Studies at Glendon College. This course will provide students with an experiential education opportunity enabling them to combine theory and coursework with practical, concrete experience. Students will be required to complete 35 hours of volunteer service in the community. They will choose from a variety of partner organizations and, given Glendon's bilingual mission, they will have the option of doing their service placement in an English-speaking, French-speaking or bilingual environment.

### **The Alternative Campus Tour at York University**

Project Lead: Anders Sandberg, Faculty of Environmental Studies

The alternative campus tour serves as pedagogical tool to equip and engage students and community members to critically examine conceptions of the campus space and community. The project seeks to select and collect material and stories about different sites of the campus and make them widely available to the campus population and the wider public. By walking the campus as tourists and talking about the campus as tour guides, the alternative campus tour seek to enable students to learn and converse about the historical context of their university. This participatory learning process gives students the opportunity to explore and contest how the campus space is or could be used by members of the university community; and, it allows them to envision new stories about the campus space.

### **YorkU Abroad**

Project Lead: Carol Irving, York International

Alternate Designate: Beth Alaska, York International

The YorkU Abroad program enables students to take courses that take place in locations outside of Canada. These courses are designed to enhance students' learning by



contextualizing the content and enabling the kind of direct experience and exploration that may not be possible on campus.

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