

**THE STATE OF COURSE BASED
EXPERIENTIAL
EDUCATION
AT SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY**

A Summary Report of the Experiential Education Project

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SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY
ENGAGING THE WORLD

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FOREWORD

JON DRIVER, VICE-PRESIDENT, ACADEMIC

The work described in this report challenges and inspires. The analysis of a broad range of student experiences at SFU challenges academic administrators to find out what undergraduate students want from their education and to provide support for those instructors who take on the difficult task of creating intensely experiential learning. The report challenges instructors to think less about the content of a course and more about how students learn. And students themselves are challenged to become more engaged with their education.

The findings in the report are also inspiring. It is clear from surveys and analysis of curriculum that SFU instructors broadly embrace experiential education, in a wide range of approaches, and across all our Faculties. Surveys of students belie the widely-reported concern that students are only interested in grades, credentials and a job. The analysis also shows how the research activities of instructors shape undergraduate education, and demonstrates the importance of freedom of inquiry in the classroom, laboratory and broader community for both student and instructor.

I look forward to supporting the recommendations in this report, and to fostering more diverse and more intense experiential education at SFU building from the strong experiential activity already in evidence

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In recent years, experiential education has increased in significance and strategic importance for Simon Fraser University. As an institution, SFU has been successful at articulating and leveraging the value of experiential learning opportunities such as Co-Op and Field Schools to students and the broader community. However, little is formally known or communicated about SFU's use of experiential education through the course-based curriculum. In an effort to address this gap in institutional knowledge, and due to its strategic importance, the Experiential Education Project was launched in late 2010.

This project has been exploratory in nature, focused on documenting and promoting the use of course-based experiential education at SFU across all eight of our academic Faculties. More specifically, the project has aimed to:

Understand how course-based experiential education is practiced and create a baseline profile of its extent, location and distribution through the curriculum across all eight of SFU's academic Faculties.

Understand instructor/professor, student and administration engagement with, and interest in, experiential education within the classroom.

The project has been guided by the following definition of experiential education:

Experiential Education is the strategic, active engagement of students in opportunities to learn through doing, and reflection on those activities, which empowers them to apply their theoretical knowledge to practical endeavours in a multitude of settings inside and outside of the classroom.

What is perhaps the most interesting finding of this project when the data is considered in aggregate is the inverse relationship that exists between the quantity of experiential opportunities and the depth and intensity of those experiences. While SFU may appear to offer its students a significant number of course-based opportunities to learn through doing – 32% of the overall curriculum, undergraduate and graduate – deeply immersive, highly engaging experiences are few in number and largely inaccessible to the majority of the student body. If SFU is to fully realize itself as the Engaged University, a considerable academic challenge in the coming years will be to more directly align the course-based curriculum with the strategic vision, reversing this inversion and increasing student access to engaging course-based experiential education opportunities.

Following this finding, a key question for consideration emerges: SFU, *what kinds of classroom experiences do you want your students to have?*

The intention of this report is to detail the results of this investigation, while providing recommendations as to both the current and future use of course-based experiential education at the university.



INTRODUCTION

A WORD FROM AND ABOUT THE AUTHORS: POSITIONING THE PROJECT & THE POTENTIAL

What happens when two engaged students' education transforms them? They then try and transform their education. This is precisely what started the two year exploration of the Experiential Education Project in trying to uncover course based experiential opportunities and make the invisible, visible.

In 2009 Jennifer and Deanna found themselves in the Semester in Dialogue program, which did nothing short of allow them and their fellow students to realize their potential; access outstanding mentorship opportunities; build a community of support; and, exposed us not only to the expanse of what was happening in the local community but also integrated us and our peers with it. With a cast of visionaries and a disorienting, "classroom environment" we quickly learned and internalized the attitude that if you care, connect to the right people and pursue passion, success will only be limited by the limitations you place on yourself.

On the first day of our Dialogue experience, our professors, Janet Moore and Duane Elverum, stated that we were to discuss the questions "What are your greatest concerns for the 21st century and which of those issues keep you up at night?,". This was our first taste of just how unique of an experience this would be. Life is too short to be asking and answering bad questions.

While deeply transformative and a positive experience by nearly any measure or indicator, it also proved to create a very large problem for us. When we re-entered our degree programs after Dialogue we quickly realized that they no longer delivered according to our transformed expectations. Where we were once top students, happily going to lectures and engaging with

our course materials, we were now debating dropping out. The contrast between the environment in Dialogue and the environment of the lecture courses we returned to the following fall semester was stark. This led us to ask how we as undergraduates could change our educations and understand the discrepancy in our experience of what a classroom could be.

So, how can the classroom change the world? Dialogue, yes, is transformative and is certainly unique within the university structure. It is higher cost, intensive, and has accessibility limitations in terms of the number of students it can reach. However, the potential not only for education to shape visionaries and critical thinkers, but (we feel) the responsibility of post-secondary institutions to empower them with the skills and abilities to act to create positive change in a time when we are facing so many interrelated challenges as a global society, is paramount. Uncertainty is not likely but assured, and students need tools to not only cope with that uncertainty, but shape it toward positive change. What other opportunities besides Dialogue-like programs are there within the University for transformation and mobilization on the historical challenges we face as a community?

By sharing this story we wish not only to position ourselves, our experiences and our biases clearly within the context of this work, but also to share the impact, power and potential that exists in and through experiential education; to catalyze and transform not just students, but broader society beyond the so-called Ivory Tower. Like many others participating in conversations on undergraduate education across SFU and the nation, we believe Universities are at a crossroads. To quote Mount Allison University President Robert Campbell: “We all feel and know that the character of the undergraduate experience has deteriorated in our lifetimes, especially so in the last decade. And we know in our heart of hearts that this experience can and should be much better,” .

We don’t just know in our hearts that undergraduate education should be much better, we have experienced what it could be. And we are not alone. We are part of a growing group of students experiencing experiential and transformative educations. In reflecting on the potential of this kind of education for universities in particular, recent Semester in the City (CityStudio / Undergraduate Semester in Dialogue collaboration) alum, Becky Till offered this: “...you stand to empower a generation of people to be engaged with, motivated to, and

capable of addressing real-world challenges...this is not some far off possibility. I just witnessed 20 students, including myself, become proof it can happen,”ⁱⁱ.

Students are hungry for this opportunity. We cannot state this clearly or emphatically enough. To this end we have a question: what kind of course –based experiences do you want your students to be having, SFU? By asking this you will also be addressing the kind of future you want to be part of creating.

INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT & PROJECT PURPOSE

In recent years, experiential education has emerged as a focal point for Simon Fraser University, as well as universities more generally across Canada. As an institution, SFU has a long and proud history of providing its students with a multitude and diversity of opportunities to *learn through doing*. Our Co-Operative Education program was the first of its kind in Western Canada, which, along with our Field School programs, have received a number of national and international accoladesⁱⁱⁱ.

In 2009, through the Undergraduate Student Survey (UGSS), SFU students spoke loudly and clearly to the institution, when a large majority indicated that experiential education has inherent value to them, worthy of integral academic credit toward their degree requirements^{iv}. The success of and increasing demand for flagship experiential programs such as the Undergraduate Semester in Dialogue and the Co-Operative Education Program continue to reinforce this demand, both at SFU and across the Canadian post-secondary landscape. The Semester in Dialogue was identified by delegates at the 2011 Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada workshop on undergraduate education as one of eight initiatives that should be “encouraged, built upon and made sustainable,” across the country^v.

In 2010, the Task Force on Teaching and Learning (TFTL) recommended that SFU needs to take action to formally recognize experiential education through the awarding of integral academic credit and to “provide more opportunities for...learning that extends beyond the classroom,”^{vi}. The TLTF recommendations were subsequently reflected in the 2010 – 2013 Academic Plan where numerous academic goals coalesced around providing students with more highly engaged learning experiences through their degree programs.

The arrival of President Andrew Petter to SFU in late 2010 reinvigorated the discussion about the importance and value of experiential education to the institution. Soon after arriving, President Petter launched a notable and extensive public consultation, *Envision: SFU*. This process resulted in the adoption of a strategic vision which profiles SFU as the Engaged University. Central to this vision is the call for SFU students to have “an unparalleled selection of experiential learning opportunities that allow them to apply knowledge, to grow as individuals, to engage with diverse communities, to develop entrepreneurial skills and to refine their sense of civic literacy,”^{vii}.

While SFU has been successful at articulating and leveraging the value of experiential learning opportunities such as Co-Op and Field Schools to students and the broader community, little is formally known nor stated about SFU's use of experiential education through the integral course-based curriculum. In an effort to address this gap in institutional knowledge, and due to its strategic importance, the Experiential Education Project was launched in late 2010. This project has been exploratory in nature, focused on documenting and promoting the use of course-based experiential education at SFU across all eight of our academic Faculties. More specifically, the project has aimed to:

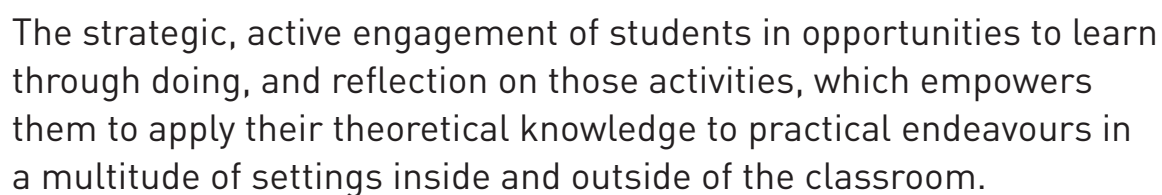
Understand how course-based experiential education is practiced and create a baseline profile of its extent, location and distribution through the curriculum across all eight of SFU's academic Faculties;

Understand instructor/professor, student and administration engagement with, and interest in, course-based experiential education

The intention of this report is to detail the results of this investigation, while providing recommendations as to both the future and current use of course-based experiential education at the university.

DEFINING EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION AT SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

The project's focus on understanding course-based experiential education at SFU has been purposely broad in nature. In particular, the definition of experiential education used to inform our investigation was also intentionally kept quite open, meant to capture the breadth and depth of experiential activities through the curriculum. Developed in consultation with the project's advisory committee and informed by an initial pilot in the Faculties of Environment and Arts and Social Sciences, we have defined experiential education at SFU as:



The strategic, active engagement of students in opportunities to learn through doing, and reflection on those activities, which empowers them to apply their theoretical knowledge to practical endeavours in a multitude of settings inside and outside of the classroom.

Commentary in both the findings section on page 13, and in the recommendations section on page 34 will speak more specifically to the strengths and weaknesses of such an all-encompassing definition. However, as this initiative was the first of its kind at SFU, it was important to capture the full range of course-based experiential activities to establish a baseline going forward.

METHOD

The project endeavored to engage as many stakeholders from the internal university community as possible. Over the course of our activities we consulted with students, faculty members, administrators and key staff to more deeply understand the nature of course-based experiential education through the curriculum. In particular the project employed the following strategies to collect data:

COURSE REVIEW

The project's scope was specifically limited to integral credit-bearing courses offered in each Faculty as they are listed in the Calendar. Course outlines for individual courses offered by each academic unit were reviewed for experiential components against the framework provided by our project definition. In total 3,774 courses across all eight Faculties were reviewed as part of the project.

FACULTY SURVEY

Through the respective Dean's Offices, faculty members in all eight Faculties were issued an open-ended 7-question survey regarding their engagement with and use of course-based experiential education in their classrooms. In total, 258 faculty members and instructors participated in the survey.

COURSE VERIFICATION

Faculty members and instructors whose courses were identified as potential experiential opportunities were contacted via email asking for verification and clarification regarding the content and pedagogy used in their courses. In total, 303 faculty members responded to our verification inquiries.

INTERVIEWS & DIALOGUES

Key informant interviews were conducted with faculty, administration and staff in the early stages of the project. In the later stages of the project however, resources were too limited to continue with formal interviews. Informal interviews, conversations, and dialogues that were largely organized by student groups were conducted and are captured anecdotally within our findings.

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

The Fall 2009 Undergraduate Student Survey had a significant response rate of 25.1% (or, nearly 6000 students) and clearly indicated their desire for increased access to experiential education opportunities recognized by integral academic credit^{viii}. Because we could utilize this existing data, the project chose not to engage students through further surveys or focus groups, but tried to embody an experiential approach in understanding student engagement with experiential education by: inviting interested students to plan and host dialogues to engage the SFU community on experiential education, for course credit; participate in facilitating pilot experiential courses developed in partnership with the project; and, work directly with the project as Research Assistants through the Work Study program.

LIMITATIONS OF THE PROCESS

The methods employed for this project have been in constant evolution; the subject of continual reflection and revision. In general, we recognize the following limitations of the methods and this process:

COURSE DELIVERY VARIABILITY

Instructor autonomy is one of the central tenants of the academic process at SFU, and as such leads to variability in course delivery methods and the pedagogy employed. At the intersection of instructor autonomy and course delivery, is the first limitation -- or rather, challenge -- we faced in reviewing courses. Only one course outline was reviewed for each course offered by a unit, therefore we may be “missing” courses taught by multiple instructors that would have been considered experiential in approach. Issuing the Faculty survey was one way in which we attempted to account for this variability, however without 100% response rate on the survey, accounting for all EE opportunities is difficult.

COURSE OUTLINES: INCOMPLETE INFORMATION

In addition to this are the limited nature of course outlines themselves, often not providing enough detail to infer whether or not EE opportunities are provided. Interestingly, this also demonstrates a possible shortcoming of the information provided to students about SFU course content. Again, the survey and course verification process were helpful in digging deeper into instructors’ practice, but also necessarily led to courses being “missed”.

SELF REPORTING AND SUBJECTIVITY

Both the Faculty Survey and Course Verification processes involved instructors self-reporting on their use of experiential education and self-defining what experiential education is, as informed by their practice and discipline.

PROJECT SCOPE AND OTHER EXPERIENTIAL OPPORTUNITIES

The scope of this project was specifically limited to courses listed in the Calendar for each of the eight Faculties. We wish to acknowledge the breadth of EE opportunities that exist across the university, particularly through Volunteer Services, Peer Education and Career Services, among others. Experiential Education takes many forms at SFU and our intent was only to document and explore what is happening in the course-based curriculum, as listed in the Calendar.

In addition to this, it is important to note that Co-Operative Education and practicum courses are listed in the Calendar and were captured as part of the review process; they are counted in the noted 1213 Experiential opportunities discovered by the project. However, they were only accounted for in the review process. We have operated from the assumption that these courses are fully immersive EE opportunities, and as such they were not assigned practice descriptors, nor were Co-Op advisors contacted in the verification process as faculty members and instructors were. Therefore other than being included in the total count data, these experiences are not included in the remainder of the analysis as the majority of their learning activities occurs outside of the traditional classroom setting.

AN APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY APPROACH

After consultation with the project Advisory Committee, it was agreed that an Appreciate Inquiry framework would be the best approach to most fully understanding course-based experiential opportunities at SFU. It would allow for us to capture the breadth and depth of activities across the curriculum and gauge the community's engagement with these approaches. However, this approach is purposeful in, as a starting point, putting aside the academic literature in order to cast the net as widely as possible. The findings in this report, including the practice descriptors that were developed are exclusive to SFU and were both created and informed by our data alone. Now that a baseline of activities has been established, next steps would be to align these findings with current literature.

FINDINGS:

Describing the Use of Experiential Education at SFU

This section considers our data in aggregate and represents our findings across all eight academic Faculties at SFU. It is organized in two sections that recognize the primary themes found across all data sets and Faculties:

1 ➤ THE DISTRIBUTION OF EXPERIENTIAL COURSES THROUGH THE CURRICULUM

2 ➤ FACULTY & STUDENT ENGAGEMENT WITH COURSE-BASED EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION

What became clear through this analysis, and is the central finding of this work, is that while SFU is already providing a myriad of experiential opportunities, an inverse relationship exists between the *quantity* of those experiences and the intensity and depth of those experiences. While SFU offers students a significant number of course-based opportunities to *learn through doing* – 32% of the overall curriculum, undergraduate and graduate -- immersive, deeply engaging experiences are few in number and largely inaccessible to the majority of the student body, especially first and second year students.

Finally, it is also important to note that many of these findings reflect and complement those contained within the reports of the Task Force on Teaching and Learning (TFTL). While SFU is making great progress on many of the issues highlighted by the TFTL, there is still work to be done in addressing structural barriers that affect the Teaching and Learning environment at SFU.

DISTRIBUTION OF EXPERIENTIAL COURSES THROUGH THE CURRICULUM

Through the initial research phase a descriptive typology of experiential components was developed to better elucidate and describe the diversity of EE practices through the curriculum. Again, we reiterate that these categories are descriptive and exclusive to the SFU curriculum. In total 6 practice descriptors were developed and special types of courses were isolated. Definitions of these practice types and special courses follow on pages 15 – 18.

It should be noted that taken in isolation, many of these practices, while necessary components of EE, are not sufficient alone to create fully EE opportunity. For example, a course may feature group work, but unless tied to an additional experiential activity, it is in itself not necessarily “experiential”. In many cases courses featured multiple EE practices that combined to create an EE opportunity accounted for in this inventory.

Finally, as the work progressed, it became clear that while courses could be described by the types of experiences they provided, they could also be described in terms of the depth and intensity of that experience. A continuum of experience depth and intensity, termed course experientiality, emerged according to the number of practice descriptors assigned to a single course: the greater number of experiential practices contained in a single course, the more immersive, engaging and experiential it is nature. This continuum of course experientiality is described in visual detail in the infographics contained on pages 21 – 24. This continuum is also where the inverse relationship between quantity and depth first revealed itself.

This subsection will describe the distribution of courses through the curriculum focusing first on the continuum of course experientiality, and secondly on each Faculty’s strengths in regards to EE provision.

EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION – PRACTICES

REFLECTIVE EXPERIENCES

This practice captures courses in which students are required to engage in **purposeful reflection**, sense-making or integrating course content into their personal lived experiences in **personally meaningful ways**

It is a process of placing the self in context with the content; asking meaningful questions about the relationship between the two

Reflection is **most often encouraged through journal writing and dialogical exchange**

Reflection is an inherent component of EE

FIELD EXPERIENCES

This practice captures courses which put students **in situ in the field**

This may include field work for labs, assignments or research-based activities, field trips or longer term field schools

CREATIVE PROJECT EXPERIENCES

This practice captures work, grounded in experience that falls outside of the traditional paradigm of papers and exams and is **often the output of EE processes and engagement**

Interesting ways this manifests include: **publically oriented work and web-based work** (such as blogging, video and radio production, writing Wikipedia entries, writing and submitting Opinion Editorials, etc); Creatively-oriented assignments including portfolio-based work (such as producing professional-quality reports, policy recommendations, manufacturing artefacts, producing original artistic works, etc)

COMMUNITY EXPERIENCES

This practice captures many broad-based activities including: **service learning; practica; Internships; and action- or community-based research**

Additional to this category includes immersion in and interaction with the external community, including inviting community guests into classrooms, or **engaging in situ with the external community**

COLLABORATIVE EXPERIENCES

This practice was informed largely by **experiential activities conducted within group work**, interaction with peers, **learner-directed environments**, co-created curriculum and courses, democratically-directed classrooms, etc

It also encompasses **inter-institutional** and **inter-disciplinary** activities, such as running integrated concurrent classes with other institutions or departments, team-teaching, etc

Lastly, it also encompasses classes or activities which take the form of **process-oriented workshops**

PROBLEM BASED EXPERIENCES

Problem based experiences encompass the use of **simulations, case-studies/competitions, role playing and other games**

It also encompasses **real-world problem solving** activities or grappling with /manipulating/observing/collecting **primary data/empirical data**

Generating original research questions and conducting primary empirical research are also included

SPECIAL COURSES AND ENGAGED EXPERIENCES

In addition to these 6 practices are two special types of courses, Directed Studies and Co-Op/Practicum Courses, which deserve note, as we have included them as experiential opportunities. In addition, the concept of *Engaged Experiences* is expanded upon and undetermined courses explained.

DIRECTED STUDIES/READINGS

The vast majority of units across all eight Faculties offer Directed Studies and/or Readings course options. We considered these courses “experiential” because they are a pre-existing structure which students can use to gain credit for engaging in experientially based, learner-directed education. In particular, directed studies courses were used as the credit structure for many innovative and unique experiments in experiential education delivery.

142 Directed Studies courses were found distributed through the curriculum during the review process.

CO-OP & PRACTICUM COURSES

In addition to directed studies are Practicum and Co-Op courses, offered by most units throughout the university. They are courses designed to give students practical experience in their chosen disciplines and/or in the workforce. Because these courses are listed in the Calendar, they are accounted for in this inventory. However, as was stated in the limitations section on pages 11 - 12, these courses were only accounted for; no further elaboration on those experiences was pursued as they are widely understood as EE, are assumed to be fully immersive, and fall outside of the scope of inquiry.

201 Co-Op and Practicum courses were found distributed through the curriculum during the review process. However, this number does not accurately reflect the impact of the Co-Op program at SFU. Current figures show approximately 8200 students, or 23% of SFU’s total undergraduate enrollment (35,500 students), as being active in some stage of the program^{ix}.

ENGAGED EXPERIENCES

The continuum of course experientiality begins with courses assigned one or fewer practice descriptors and increases through to courses assigned six or more practice descriptors.

We take the position that Engaged Experiences are those courses in the curriculum found to contain five or more practice types during the review process. These courses are the most immersive and deeply engaging EE courses; they represent the highest degree of experientiality possible on the continuum. We acknowledge that in certain circumstances, this correlation between number of practice types and the degree of experientiality in a course will not hold true.

There are 25 of these courses throughout the entire curriculum; 18 were found to contain at least five practices, and 7 were found to contain all six practices. More detail on Engaged Experiences follows on pages 21 – 24.

UNDETERMINED COURSES

There were a group of courses (376) captured in the review process for which experiential content could not be determined. These courses may feature experiential approaches, but due to insufficient information contained in course outlines and lack of clarification from instructors and academic units, they remain as undetermined.

CONTINUUM OVERVIEW

Pages 21 – 24 provide a graphic, visual overview of key data captured in our course review process, paying particular attention to the distribution of practice types through the curriculum and course experientiality.

Key messages elucidated through these infographics for consideration include:

2684 courses, or 71% of SFU's total curriculum was assessed and determined as to its experiential content

The remaining ~29% of courses were excluded from review because:

- 1** A course outline was not available for review;
- 2** Special Topics Courses, due to their highly variable nature were excluded from review;
- 3** The respective academic unit had deemed a course cancelled or no longer offered.

Problem Based Experiences are the most prevalent through the curriculum

Problem Based Experiences account for 11% of the total curriculum.

Field and Community Based Experiences are the least used of the 6 practice types

Field Experiences account for only 4% of the entire curriculum.

Community Based Experiences account for only 2% of the entire curriculum.

Experiential courses are heavily concentrated at the Upper Division level in the Undergraduate curriculum

Engaged Experiences are inaccessible to the majority of SFU students, in particular first and second year students.

There are only 25 fully engaged experiences throughout the curriculum. This represents only 0.66% of SFU's entire course-based curriculum.

19 of these engaged courses are concentrated in upper division curriculum where enrollments are limited and class sizes are significantly lower than average.

There are only two *Engaged Experiences* found in the Lower Division levels of the curriculum and both are 200 level courses. There are no 100-level *Engaged Experiences*.

The majority (71%) of the 1213 experiential courses captured by this review were found to have a very low degree of experientiality

The definition of experiential education used to guide our review process was kept purposely broad in nature, as has already been discussed. The implications of this are such that a significant number of courses captured as being “experiential” through our review were only assigned a single practice descriptor. By our estimation, a majority of these single experience courses would likely not be captured by a second review under a tighter definition. To extrapolate, this would mean the experiential percentage of the curriculum could be as low as 9% (or 355 courses), versus the current figure of 32% (or 1213 courses). This is a significant difference that should be carefully considered and measured against SFU's goals for an engaged curriculum.

VISUALLY SPEAKING

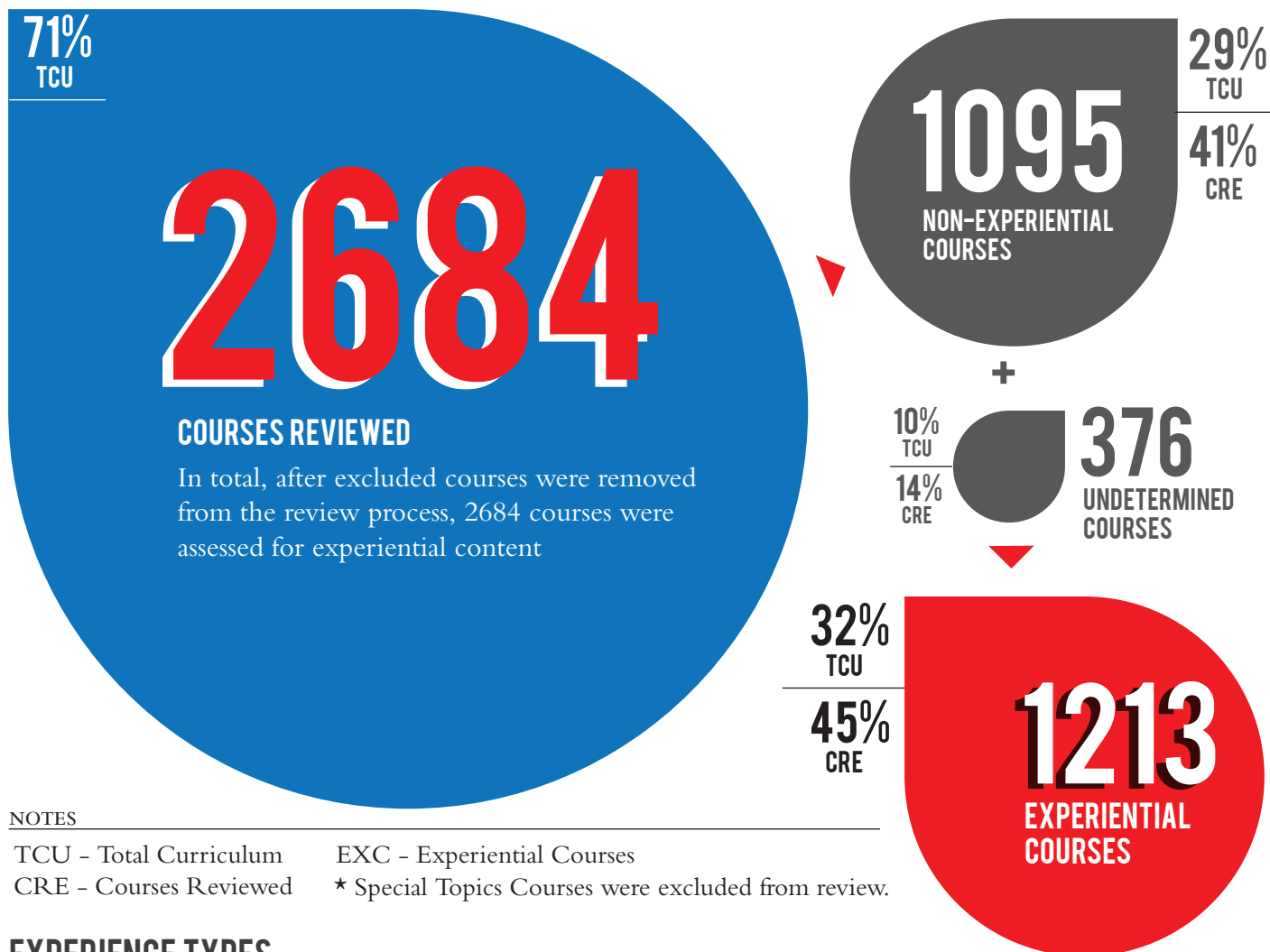
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TOTAL COURSES

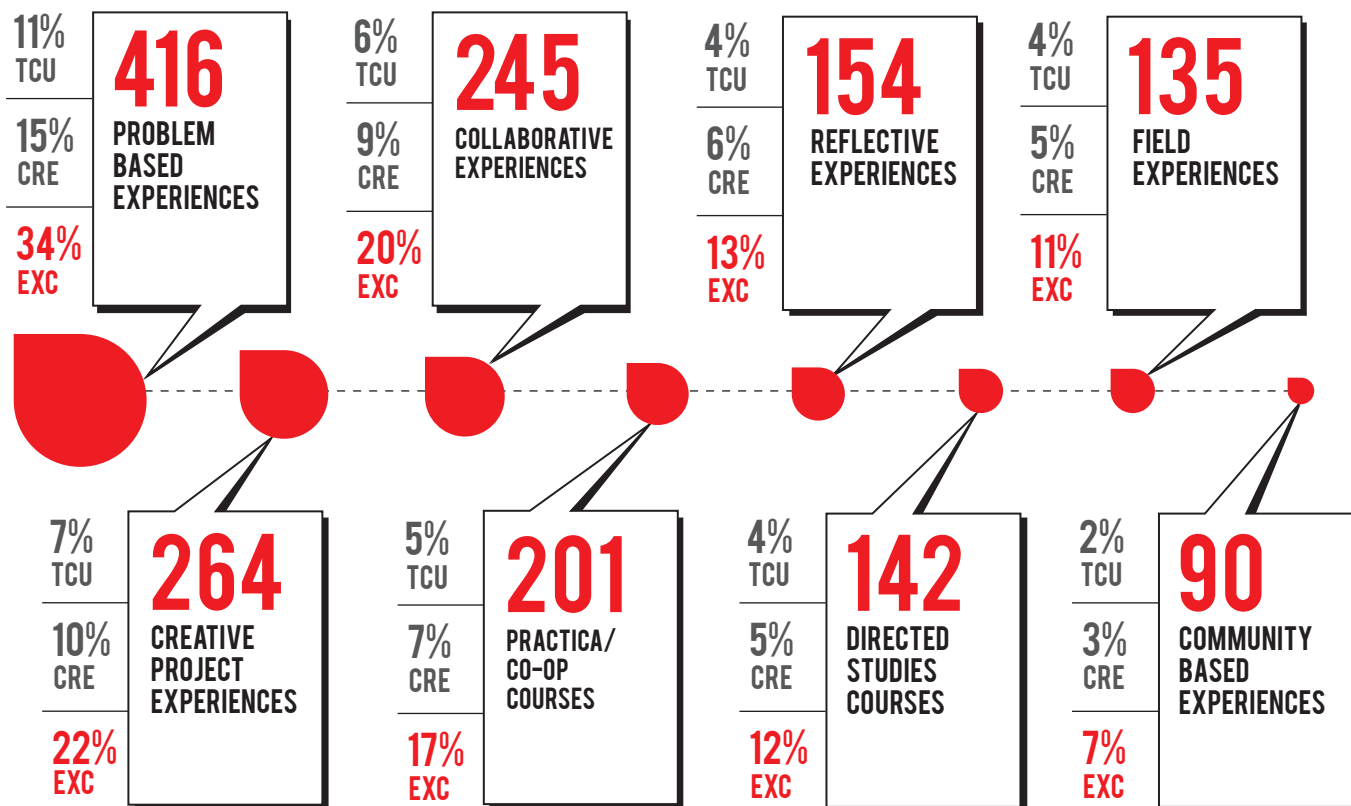
The total number of courses reviewed for this project, representing (nearly) the entire undergraduate and graduate curriculum at SFU, across 8 faculties

COURSES EXCLUDED



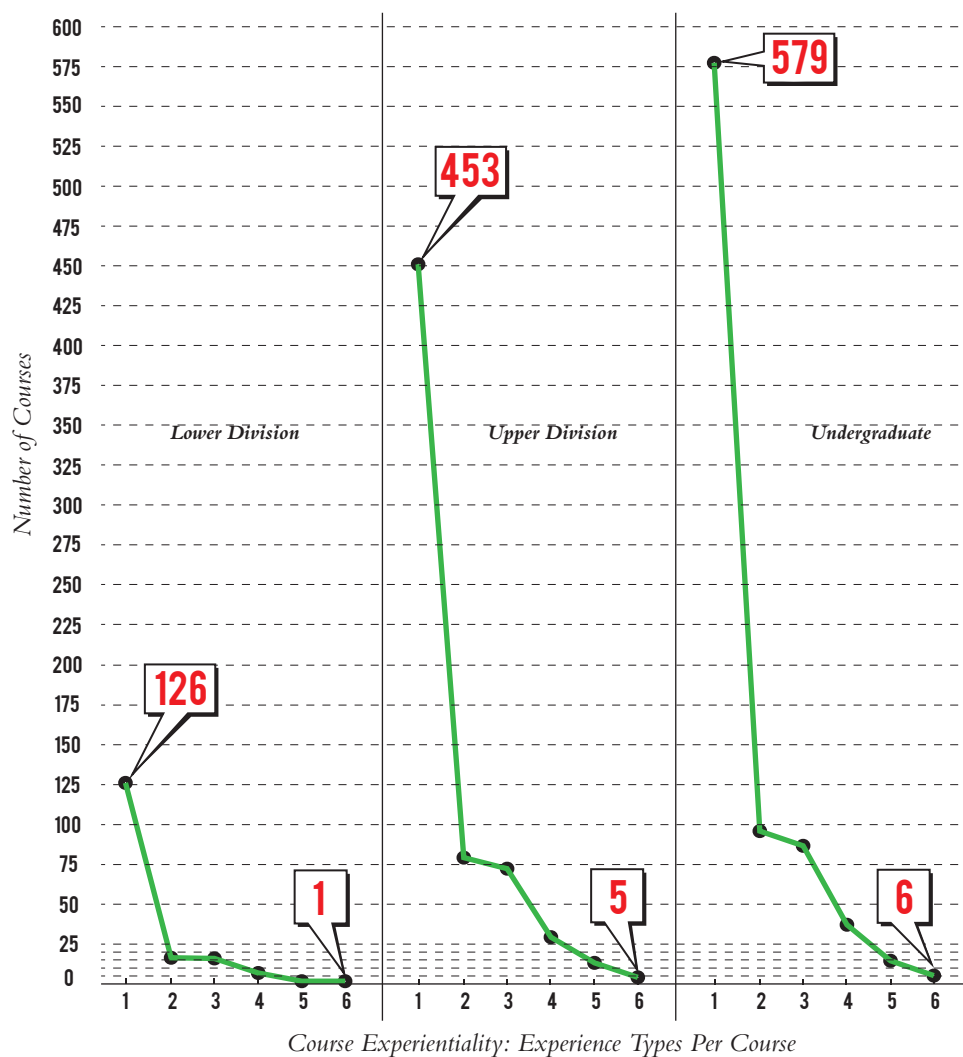


EXPERIENCE TYPES

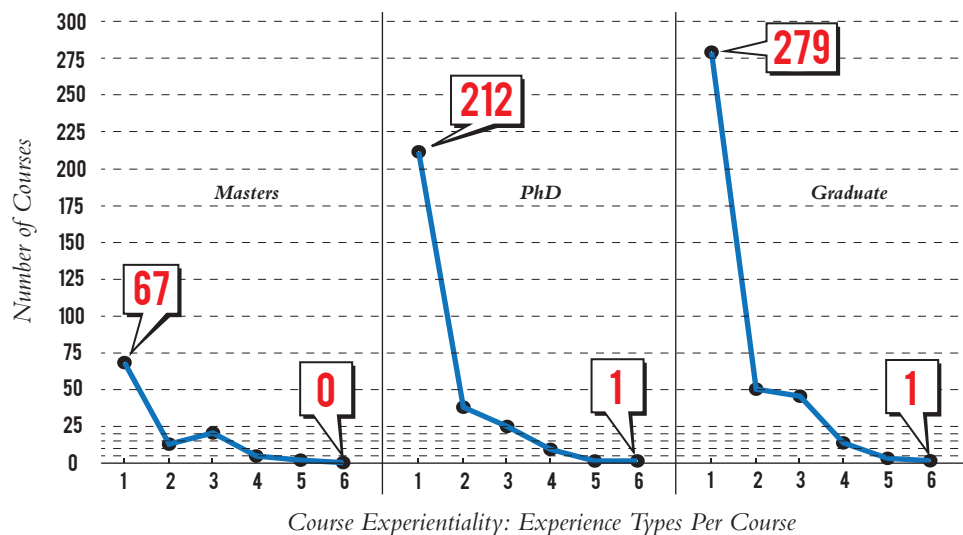


DISTRIBUTION OF COURSE EXPERIENTIALITY

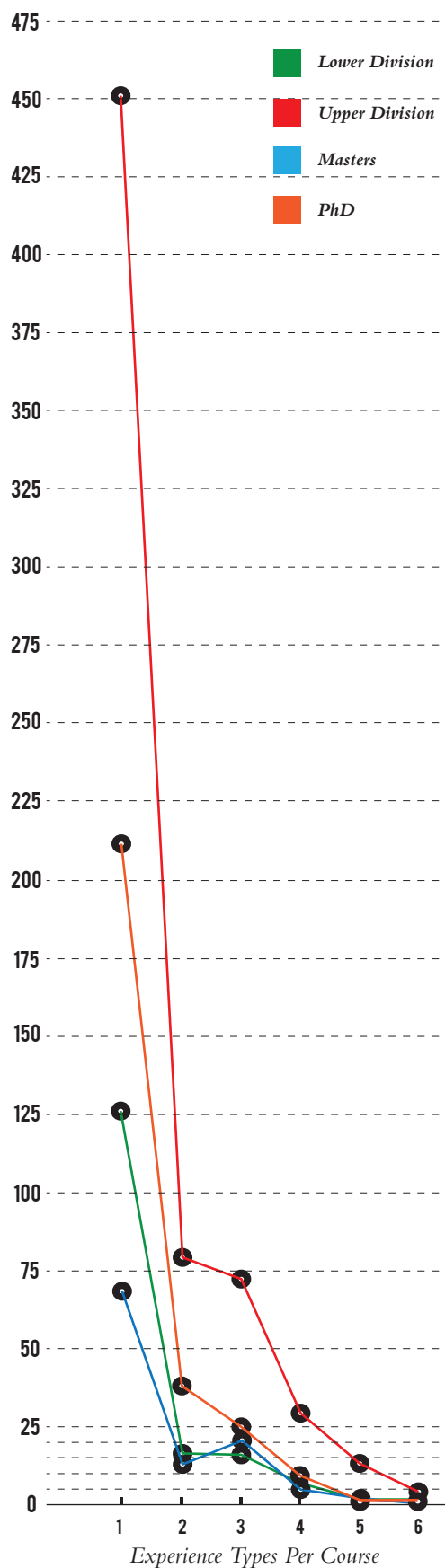
COURSE EXPERIENTIALITY: UNDERGRADUATE DISTRIBUTION



COURSE EXPERIENTIALITY: GRADUATE DISTRIBUTION



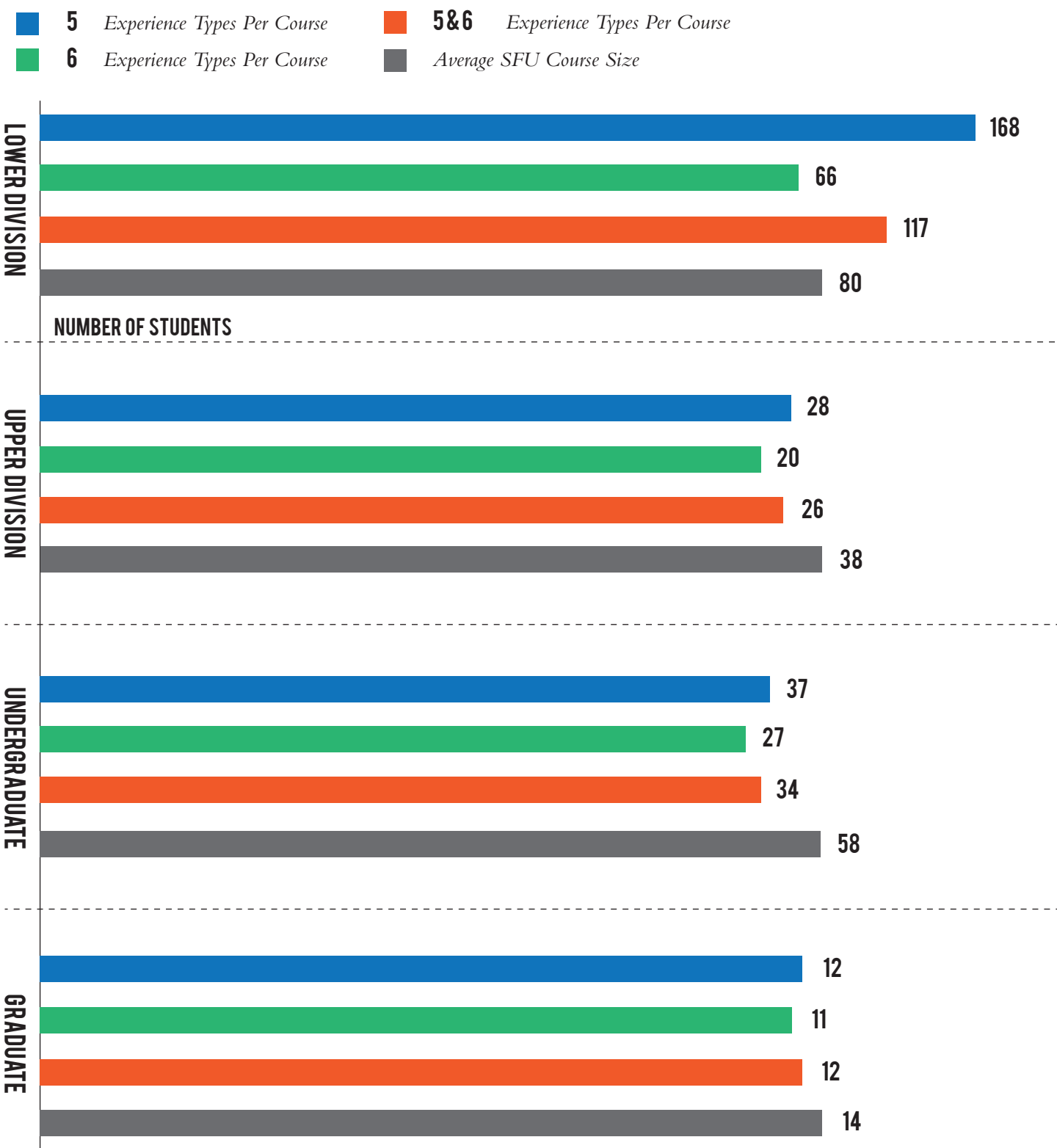
THE COMPARISON



COURSE EXPERIENTIALITY: ENGAGED CLASS SIZE COMPARISON

ENGAGED EXPERIENCE CLASS SIZE COMPARISON

Using actual enrolment data gathered by Institutional Research and Planning (IRP) over a five year period (2007 – 2012), class size averages for the 25 most engaged experiences in the curriculum were calculated. They were then contrasted with IRP data on average class sizes at SFU across the entire curriculum; almost exclusively, engaged experience courses have been smaller in size than all other courses offered at comparable levels of the curriculum.



FACULTY STRENGTHS

Each of SFU's eight Faculties deliver experiential education in a unique way. No two Faculties are exactly alike. Each Faculty has their own strengths and specific expertise in their unique and combined use of experiential approaches. This subsection will detail the strengths of each Faculty focusing on their distinctive combined use of the 6 different types of experiential education practice.

FACULTY OF APPLIED SCIENCES (FAS)

Upper Division Creative Problem Based Experiences

34% of the FAS curriculum is experiential

50% of FAS experiential courses feature problem based experiences


22% of experiential courses feature creative project experiences

62% of FAS experiential curriculum is found at the Upper Division

FACULTY OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES (FASS)

Diverse Experiences

21% of the FASS curriculum is experiential

 FASS' experiential curriculum is the most diverse and well rounded; it features nearly equal use and distribution of all 6 practice types throughout

7 of SFU's most engaged experiences are found in the FASS curriculum

BEEDIE SCHOOL OF BUSINESS (BUS)

Collaborative Problem Based Experiences

39% of the BUS curriculum is experiential

45% of BUS experiential courses feature collaborative experiences

51% of BUS experiential courses feature problem based experiences

5 of SFU's most engaged experiences are found in the BUS curriculum

FACULTY OF EDUCATION (EDUC)

Creative, Reflective Experiences

46% of the EDUC curriculum is experiential

53% of EDUC experiential courses feature reflective experiences, the highest percentage of use across all Faculties

41% of EDUC experiential courses feature creative project experiences

FACULTY OF ENVIRONMENT (FENV)*Experiences Outside the Classroom*


45% of the FENV curriculum is experiential

51% of FENV experiential courses feature field experiences, the highest percentage of use across all Faculties

19% of FENV experiential courses feature community based experiences, the highest percentage of use across all Faculties

FACULTY OF HEALTH SCIENCES (FHS)*Reflecting on Community Collaborations*

33% of the FHS curriculum is experiential

 Reflective, collaborative and community based experiences occur in conjunction most often in the FHS, respectively:

16% of FHS experiential courses feature reflective experiences


18% of FHS experiential courses feature collaborative experiences

14% of FHS experiential courses feature community based experiences

FACULTY OF SCIENCE (SCI)*Problem based experiences through all levels of the curriculum*

34% of the SCI curriculum is experiential

28% of the SCI experiential courses feature problem based experiences, the highest percentage of use across all Faculties

 Experiential courses are well distributed across all levels of the curriculum, providing early access to experiential opportunities in students' degrees

FACULTY OF COMMUNICATION ARTS AND TECHNOLOGY (FCAT)*The Three C's: Creative, Collaborative, Community Experiences*

50% of the FCAT curriculum is experiential

64% of FCAT experiential courses feature creative project experiences

12% of FCAT experiential courses feature community based experiences, the highest percentage of use across all Faculties

29% of FCAT experiential courses feature collaborative experiences, tied with FASS for highest percentage of use across all Faculties

13 of SFU's most engaged experiences are found in the FCAT curriculum

FACULTY & STUDENT ENGAGEMENT WITH COURSE-BASED EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION

This subsection of our findings considers what was reported by faculty members and students regarding their engagement with experiential education. In particular, the results of the faculty survey, course verification process and interviews are reported on in aggregate in the Faculty Engagement section. In the Student Engagement section, the outcomes and sentiments captured through our activities with students are reported on.

FACULTY & INSTRUCTOR ENGAGEMENT WITH EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION

Faculty members and instructors speak of Experiential Education as *Learning by Doing*

The most frequent phrase used by instructors in response to the faculty survey, and most common way people at the university seem to understand EE is as “learning by doing.” “Active engagement” and the “application of theory to practice” were the next most frequently used phrases in defining experiential education; common language and understanding as to what experiential education is exists in a broad sense, at SFU.

Expertise in the provision of Experiential Education exists at SFU

Experiential education approaches appear to already exist as part of the pedagogical DNA of most Faculties at SFU, with many excellent and diverse examples of its use present through the curriculum. Of the 253 survey respondents, only 5% responded as having no interest in, or familiarity with, the use of experiential education. Of the remaining 95%, 87% are highly to moderately interested in experiential education and report already using it in their teaching.

In addition, survey responses, anecdotal evidence, and outcomes from the Honeycomb Project suggest that instructors using experiential approaches are eager to collaborate with one another and share best practices^x. These same instructors are actively experimenting with its provision in their classrooms. Moreover, there is already an informal network of EE advocates beginning to form through initiatives like the Honeycomb project as well as through this work. Combined with the rich tapestry of expertise that exists in other areas of the university such as the Faculty of Education, the Teaching and Learning Centre,

Co-Operative Education program, Student Leadership programs, Orientation, Rez Life, LEAD SFU, Peer Education, Volunteer Services and Career Services, SFU has great potential to develop its own unique set of internal resources to grow and further the use of EE approaches.

Experiential Education engages students; often “the best experience of their degrees”

The faculty survey asked instructors to report on their students’ reactions and feedback on experiential approaches in their courses. 66% of respondents reported students reactions to be positive or extremely positive. The phrase “the best experience of their degrees” was used often throughout responses. Anecdotal evidence from students supports instructor claims. Further, only 1% of respondents indicated their students having negative or extremely negative reactions to experiential approaches.

Of the remaining responses, most instructors reported their students having “mixed” reactions to experiential approaches, which they largely attributed to students’ uncertainty with these types of learning environments. These two response excerpts from the survey help to highlight this:

“In instances when EE is embedded in the course within a single or short series of exercises students are concerned about the time involved and need to find external partners - yet when the course is done students state that these were the most beneficial learning experiences they have ever had. In courses when it is a long term project students overwhelmingly positive and find the experiences invaluable,”

“Many students are uncertain when their tasks become less scripted, this results in a good deal of push-back. Some of this is concern for marks, but some seems to be due to their belief that they should not be called upon to be active agents in learning,”

Despite prevalence of use, significant structural barriers are still perceived to exist in using experiential approaches

Combined survey, interview, course verification, TFTL and anecdotal findings suggest that barriers, or perceived barriers, still exist in the use of experiential approaches. Specifically the following was heard from instructors:

COURSE-BASED EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION TAKES ADDITIONAL TIME TO DELIVER

Instructors report feeling as though the additional time and effort required to provide well-crafted, meaningful course-based curricular experiences is not yet adequately recognized. In particular, instructors spoke of the immense time associated with organizing field and community based experiences. Liaising with community groups, scoping projects, and mentoring students in their community interactions is so time intensive for many instructors that they simply do not integrate it into their courses. Those who do it in spite of the time involved debate removing these activities from future course offerings. This could be one of the key reasons community and field experiences make up such an insignificant percentage of experiential activities at the university, 2% and 4% of the overall curriculum, respectively. Moreover, it could be an explanation for why there are so few fully Engaged Experiences found throughout the curriculum, which are very time intensive to prepare and deliver.

There are a few examples throughout the university of individual departments that have made single-instance exceptions and have awarded additional teaching credit for field based classes. There is also a single reported example of an instructor who has collaborated with volunteer services, which liaised administratively behalf of the instructor with community groups for course projects. However, these instances are rare and seem to be a deviation from the norm.

In addition to this, it was often reported to us by faculty that the supervision of directed studies courses in most units is not awarded teaching credit. If true, this is particularly significant, as directed studies courses are ripe ground for curricular experimentation and for motivated students to craft personally meaningful experiences in their degrees. Without adequate teaching credit, directed studies courses will not be utilized to their full potential as instructors may decline student requests for supervision.

ETHICS APPROVAL & RISK ASSESSMENT

Getting approval for certain course-based experiential activities from the Office of Research Ethics, as well as requirements for risk assessments were reported as structural deterrents in the provision of experiential education. While important, these processes are perceived as both time consuming and broadly prohibitive.

SCHEDULING SOME EXPERIENCES IS DIFFICULT

Course scheduling requirements necessitated by SFU's unique trimester system inhibit the opportunity for certain types of experiential activities, especially community and field based experiences. In particular, the difficulty of scheduling courses over two semesters, or conversely, to offer intensive, short-duration block scheduling of courses was considered by many instructors, especially in the sciences, to be prohibitive.

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT WITH EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION

As the 2009 Undergraduate Student Survey (UGSS) focused so specifically on students and experiential education, it is helpful to summarize their findings in this section. It should be noted that their definition of experiential education is different to the project's and looked more specifically at experiences outside of the classroom.

In addition to summarizing the UGSS findings, this subsection will also report on the project's engagement with students. Because our interaction with students was both distributed and broad, specifically in method and approach, most of this information can only be reported anecdotally; rigorous recording and analysis of our student interactions was not pursued. Two reports^{xi}, outcomes from student-faculty dialogues on experiential education, are also included here.

Summary of the 2009 Undergraduate Student Survey sections on experiential education

Respondents indicated that they believe that “learning through experience” does have an educational value that deserves academic credits towards a degree (in addition to credits for any related coursework). In particular:



Over 80% believe that co-op, practica/internships, and research assistantships deserve academic credit towards a degree







Over 70% believe that international exchange, work-study, field school, and community based learning deserve academic credit



Over 50% believe that field trips deserve academic credit

Most respondents agree that experiential learning programs have an educational value of 3 or more credits. Field trips are the exception; with most agreeing they have an educational value worth less than 3 credits

On the condition that experiential learning programs resulted in academic credits that counted towards SFU degree requirements, students showed high levels of interest in participating:

-  90% of respondents indicated that they would be interested in participating in co-op
-  85% in the work-study program
-  77% in research assistantships
-  74% of respondents said that if they were to start their SFU studies over again, they would be interested in joining a cohort program^{xii}

Undergraduate students want voice and place within the academic life of the university and to be appreciated for the capacity and quality of work they are capable of

Many of the students whom were engaged as part of this project spoke with mixed emotions about their undergraduate course-based experience. One student's comment continues to echo and is largely representative of the sentiment conveyed: *"My university experience has felt like an exercise in jumping through the hoops,"*.

Undergraduates are capable of far more than writing term papers destined to do no more than populate recycling bins and would like to be recognized for the ability.

Students are seeking transformative experiences

The UGSS and TFTL data shows a desire amongst students for transformative experiences through and within formal course-based experiential education opportunities. Students reported to us also that they wish to engage fully with their university experience and in turn hope that it transforms them as individuals. They crave to work on personally meaningful and relevant assignments. They want to connect with content in practical and applicable ways, and be provided the space to mesh their personal and professional concerns with what they are learning in their course work.

Students are interested in process-oriented & reflective experiences

Taken in its broadest sense, experiential education is a process for meaningful engagement with content and curriculum. From the data collected through the UGSS, the TFTL, and our work, it can be said that undergraduates at SFU are seeking opportunities to engage in a range of process-oriented experiences through which they can gain new and tangible skills and methods of inquiry.

Students would like increased availability and access to course-based community experiences

One of the findings of the dialogue series involving students, faculty and staff hosted by the Change Lab course, was a call by both students and instructors to “increase the availability and accessibility of programs that enable students to engage with their communities for course credit,”^{xiii} Anecdotally, this sentiment has been reiterated in the project’s overall engagement with students.



RECOMMENDATIONS

The central finding of this report is that while a myriad of diverse course-based experiential opportunities indeed exist across the SFU curriculum, there is a clear inversion between quantity and depth of those experiences. Related to this is the issue of accessibility. The most engaged course-based experiences found in the curriculum are largely inaccessible to the majority of SFU students. Therefore, recommendations are focused in two sections:

- 1 ➤ ALIGNING THE COURSE-BASED CURRICULUM WITH THE STRATEGIC VISION;**
- 2 ➤ INCREASING STUDENT ACCESS TO COURSE-BASED EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION, PARTICULARLY THE MOST ENGAGING EXPERIENCES**

ALIGNING THE COURSE-BASED CURRICULUM WITH THE STRATEGIC VISION

President Petter has often stated that SFU’s newly adopted strategic vision is not just built upon our strengths as an institution, but is also aspirational in nature requiring the contribution and commitment of the entire SFU community to realize. Where this project interfaces with that directive, is in helping to better understand how the SFU course-based curriculum aligns with SFU’s identified strengths and where there is still work to be done in better aligning course-based academic activities with the aspirational parts of the vision.

While experiential education is only one of many relevant and engaging pedagogical approaches, the broad nature of this project’s inquiry and subsequent inventory of the course-based curriculum, specifically the practice categories, go far in describing and making the course-based curriculum visible. Although we may have found only a small number of courses that would be considered as Engaged Experiences, the high number of courses in which a small number of EE practices are being utilized should be regarded as necessary and fertile ground for the growth of immersive EE across the SFU curriculum. The potential is huge in this regard. To this end then – more directly aligning the course-based curriculum with the strategic vision – we propose four recommendations:

Review and arrive at an institutional definition of Experiential Education

As was highlighted in the findings section on page 13, arguably, nearly two-thirds of the courses captured by this inventory as being “experiential” would potentially be excluded under a more robust definition, especially one more explicitly informed by the academic literature. While it was both strategic and important to keep our initial definition broad for the purposes of capturing the breadth and depth of course-based experiential education activities, this decision has also meant that a large number of courses with a very low degree of experientiality were captured. Stated another way, it is likely many ‘false-positives’ were accounted for by our efforts. If depth of experience matters at SFU, this definition should be revisited and this inventory viewed with a certain amount of caution. Going forward, we recommend SFU adopt an institutional definition of experiential education, especially one that is informed by the strategic vision, this project and current literature.

Further to this is the necessity for SFU to engage in internal conversations about what kinds of experiences (especially course-based experiences) its students should

have. The decision of how many practices descriptors would equate to an Engaged Experience was arbitrary and meant largely as a descriptive tool in making the invisible, visible. However, what that analysis reveals, begs the question: SFU, what kinds of learning experiences do you want your students to have? As the institution moves through the accreditation process and aligns itself with the strategic vision, it is important to establish both a definition of experiential education and an answer to the above posed question that will allow for the continued measurement and review of institutional progress in regards to both experiential and engaged course-based activities.

Develop Infrastructure & Support Mechanisms for Community Based Experiences

Courses with a high degree of experientiality are not only time intensive for faculty members, they are also more demanding of students. Three or four credits are not sufficient recognition of the time and effort required to engage fully with these types of experiences. We recommend 5 – 15 credits as an appropriate range for these types of courses. Excellent example The Co-Op infrastructure that exists at SFU is very well resourced and is mature in its development. Presently, this structure does not support community based learning, more specifically service learning and community involvement that is embedded in courses. Given that community engagement is an identified gap in the existing course-based curriculum according to this inventory, if SFU is to be the Engaged University, infrastructure and support mechanisms need to be developed to address this gap. Given the history and distributed nature of academic and administrative activities at SFU, what that infrastructure looks like should be carefully considered. s of this do exist in the present curriculum, thus the recommendation is less to ‘invent’ this, but to make more pervasive use of this approach across all Faculties.

Develop an Internal Teaching Exchange Program

Faculty members often expressed a desire to connect with their colleagues across the university and to be provided the space to exchange best practices, share stories and improve their practice together in a community. The Honeycomb project is an excellent example of one such space that exists for this purpose. Interestingly, we also heard stories of faculty members who, when they wanted to incorporate new approaches into their existing practice, would set up classroom visits with colleagues to observe the teaching practice of their peers.

Considering the wealth of expertise that already exists at SFU in regards to experiential education, and in building off the success of the Honeycomb project, we suggest developing a formal mechanism by which faculty members can participate in internal “Teaching Exchanges”, hosting one another for observational visits in courses, co-developing courses together and exchanging best practices. This should especially provide faculty members the opportunity to cross disciplinary boundaries and will facilitate the integration of broader and more interdisciplinary approaches in their practice. We feel such a program would go far in distributing the strengths that do exist in course-based experiential approaches more broadly through the curriculum and would serve to better align that curriculum and the teaching and learning environment with the strategic vision. The Teaching and Learning Centre could play a role in the development and facilitation of such a program.

Continue and Preserve Teaching and Learning Grants & the Honeycomb Retreat

Many faculty members we spoke with praised both the Teaching and Learning Grants program as well as their experience at the Honeycomb Retreat. These programs appear to have inherent value to faculty, and are working to shift the existing teaching and learning culture. We recommend the preservation and further development of these programs, especially aligning their future offerings with areas of strategic importance, perhaps also with involvement from the Teaching and Learning Centre.

INCREASING ACCESS TO COURSE-BASED EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION

Lectures for Content, Tutorials for Process & Experience

While the tutorial model has not been sustained across all units and course offerings, it does persist and remains one SFU's most unique features as an institution. It is also one of the greatest existing structural opportunities to increase student accessibility to course-based experiential education through the curriculum. We recommend considering the merits of focusing on existing tutorials as a space for experiential and process-oriented activities. Moreover, this also represents an excellent opportunity to increase the scope and scale of experiential offerings in large lower division lecture courses, a current gap in experiential offerings according to these findings.

Secondary to this recommendation is to train Teaching Assistants in facilitation techniques and experiential pedagogies. This could be achieved through expanded programming options offered through the Teaching and Learning Centre's Certificate in University Teaching and Learning as well as could benefit from input from the Centre for Dialogue. This would not only have benefits for increasing the degree of experientiality of course-based offerings, but would also be of direct benefit to TAs as facilitation skills are increasingly in demand, expanding their skill set and career opportunities post-graduation.

Finally, a related and interesting recommendation that emerged from a group of undergraduate students is to create course-based mentorship opportunities for alumni from programs such as the Semester in Dialogue or the co-curricular LEAD SFU program. Functioning alongside TAs in 1st and 2nd year courses, these mentors would be themselves registered in experientially-based integral credit-bearing courses (yet to be created), perhaps part of a certificate program in Facilitation or as an extension of the Minor in Dialogue program that already exists.

The synergies represented by this idea are three fold: firstly, it would give senior undergraduates an opportunity to further their facilitation and mentorship skills, providing continuity in experience and space to continue their work from previous programs such as Dialogue; secondly, it would grow internal community and perhaps contribute to better retention rates by giving more time and attention to

first and second year students who would benefit from direct interaction with not only a TA but also with a mentor; finally, it would be a self-sustaining and reinforcing cycle whereby mentees would eventually themselves one day become mentors and mentors will gain applicable, real-world experience that will serve not only their career pursuits, but the broader community upon leaving the university.

Continue Support for Innovation in Experiential Course Delivery

A number of interesting and innovative new experientially-oriented courses and programs have come online at SFU during the execution of this project, including:

 **CITY STUDIO**

 **SEMESTER IN INNOVATION**

 **SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP ACCELERATOR AND INCUBATOR COURSE**

 **CHANGE LAB**

 **KINESIOLOGY DIRECTED STUDIES COHORT**

We recommend continued support for these programs and courses as well as ensuring their stories are shared more broadly with the SFU community to better demonstrate the diversity of potential in experiential education practice and delivery. Moreover, the more information that is distributed about these innovations, the more likely it is that the opportunities will grow, and in turn, external community-based groups may then seek out SFU faculty and units to collaborate with.

Make the experiential opportunities that do exist more visible to students and the broader community

Communicating experiential opportunities to students is paramount in ensuring they are able to access them. Moreover, it is also important to communicate these opportunities externally as SFU moves toward greater integration in, and cooperation with, our broader communities. To this end, the following is recommended:

MAINTAIN THE DEGREE OF EXPERIENCE TOOL AS A LIVING RESOURCE

The team at Work Integrated Learning recently released a promotional and advising tool called Degree of Experience which highlights the many curricular and co-curricular EE opportunities at SFU available for students. We recommend continuing to update this document, which is already live and accessible online, and inviting the continued contribution of the community to ensure its accuracy and relevancy. It should be considered a living document and added to over time. Finally, this document should be more purposely integrated into the advising structure. Like the Viewbook, as it matures, this document could prove invaluable to students and advisors in academic planning.

OPEN SOURCE CALENDAR

Further to this, we recommend creating more intuitive and open-source search capacities within the Calendar, especially allowing the ‘tagging’ of courses by students and faculty members. Much like a blog or a website that allows both content publishers as well as the online community to tag posts and videos with content descriptors, the tagging of courses in this manner would better inform students of their content, focus and delivery, aiding in students crafting the most personally relevant degree paths. This would negate the need to identify experiential courses with an “E” or other type of designation. Moreover this also represents a rich real-time data-capture opportunity for SFU. The costs of this could be mitigated, and experiential education embodied, if SFU was to turn this project over to a computing science / engineering capstone course, for example.

Focus on Developing First Year Engaged Experiences









In considering the continuum of course experientiality, a glaring gap reveals itself: we could find no evidence of first year fully Engaged Experiences and could locate only two second year fully Engaged Experiences. As first year learning communities and first year cohort programs become more prevalent at SFU, a focus should be put on more deeply integrating Engaged Experiences into these levels of the curriculum, in particular integrated with these emergent programs. The multiplier effects of such an approach will be far reaching, especially in terms of increasing early access to courses with a high degree of experientiality.

Award More Credits for Certain Experiences

Courses with a high degree of experientiality are not only time intensive for faculty members, they are also more demanding of students. Three or four credits may not be sufficient recognition of the time and effort required to engage fully with these types of experiences, as was expressed by students in the Fall 2009 Undergraduate Survey: “most respondents agree that experiential learning programs have an educational value of 3 or more credits,”^{xiv}. We recommend units review the number of credits awarded for certain experiences. Examples of units that have awarded more than three and four credits for courses with a high degree of experientiality do exist at SFU.

END NOTES

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