

THE BROADER LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

ES
EDUCATED
SOLUTIONS

VOL. 10

Addressing the
entirety of the
university
learning
experience.

FOREWORD

From Minister Deb Matthews

PLUS

"GETTING COFFEE VERSUS GETTING A HIGH QUALITY
WORK INTEGRATED LEARNING EXPERIENCE"

"EXPERIENTIAL OPPORTUNITIES: GEARING OURSELVES
TOWARDS THE 21ST CENTURY STUDENT"



AN ONTARIO UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT ALLIANCE PUBLICATION

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Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance



Our vision is for an accessible, affordable, accountable and high quality undergraduate education in the province of Ontario

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FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome to Volume Ten of Educated Solutions! This issue is called The Broader Learning Environment and is aimed at addressing the university learning experience outside of the classroom.

Within the broader learning environment of university is a world of opportunities for students who want to gain work experience, engage in co-curricular activities, and have access to support when they're unsure of their path or are struggling academically. Many of these aspects are being addressed insufficiently and we are using this issue of Educated Solutions to speak directly to those insufficiencies.

We have collected ideas, opinions, and concerns from students and leaders in the post-secondary sector on what's working, what isn't, and how to improve the broader learning environment.

Thank you so much to our authors for their contributions. We greatly appreciate the time taken to write for Educated Solutions. You are guiding the direction for a better broader learning environment for students.

AMANDA KOHLER
Communications Director

When I was in my fourth year at Western University, I had the incredible opportunity to work in a cancer research facility. I'd like to acknowledge the unique learning opportunity this course provided for me, granting ways to apply my knowledge and learn through application in no way I had previously experienced. Since starting my role with the University Students' Council and OUSA, I have seen that not all students have these opportunities. Beyond experiential learning, our students are experiencing poorly resourced support services and a lack of recognition for the need to have more student space. As our classroom sizes continue to grow, now is as important a time as ever to look into ways in which our students can and will be supported outside of the lecture hall.

Our province is making great strides in recognizing the importance of the broader learning environment for our students. Learning during our time in university is so much more than lecture halls, multiple choice exams, and essays. University is a time for students to learn and grow as individuals, but in order for this to occur we need to be creating a sustainable, safe, and welcoming campus environment where students can flourish. By engaging with an environment focused on learning outside of the classroom, our students are able to create a culture of learning suited to today's ever changing career environment.

It is imperative that we continue to seek ways in which our students can succeed throughout the entirety of their education. For years OUSA has made great successes in fulfilling our goals of an affordable, accessible, accountable, and high quality education. I hope that this issue of Educated Solutions will provide many ways in which we can continue to achieve these goals. This publication truly shows the power that OUSA has in bringing innovative ideas and creative minds to the forefront. No one said these changes can occur overnight, but I sure am excited to be a part of the process.

Happy Reading!

JAMIE CLEARY
President 2016-2017

FROM THE PRESIDENT



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“This publication truly shows the power that OUSA has in bringing innovative ideas and creative minds to the forefront.”



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FOREWORD

ONTARIO'S MINISTER OF
ADVANCED EDUCATION AND
SKILLS DEVELOPMENT, DEB
MATTHEWS, REVIEWS PROUD
MOMENTS IN ONTARIO POST
SECONDARY EDUCATION AND
DISCUSSES THE WORK STILL
NEEDED TO BE DONE.

HON. DEB MATTHEWS

As Ontario's new Minister of Advanced Education and Skills Development, it is my pleasure to contribute to this volume of Educated Solutions.

I have always valued the role that OUSA plays in advocating on behalf of students, but perhaps never more so than this past year.

This spring, our government announced we are making one of the most ambitious reforms of student financial aid in North America. Many of these changes – giving free tuition to students with a household income under \$50,000, providing greater access to grants for mature students, indexing student loan limits to inflation – were directly influenced by the well-researched recommendations made by OUSA students.

I remember sitting with OUSA leaders in the cafeteria here in the Legislature as they described their ideas for the future of student financial aid and thinking, "This could really be something." You had concrete, evidence-based suggestions on how we could use the money we were

already spending on student aid to improve the system and increase access to those who needed it. It was a lightbulb moment for me. So when I became President of the Treasury Board, where I was tasked with improving public services to get better value for money, I had a blueprint with which to work with my colleagues across government to champion these changes.

Seeing the results in our 2016 Budget was a proud moment not only for me, but also for you and for student advocates across this province: being a part of the biggest modernization of OSAP in its history. So I can't thank you enough for showing us the light and the way to a better student assistance program.

While I am incredibly proud of what we've accomplished together, we still have a lot of work to do. Even as we continue our important work to increase access to post-secondary education, we are also working to increase opportunities for those exiting post-secondary education and looking for employment. We are tackling this challenge through our Highly-Skilled Workforce Strategy, which puts broader learning opportunities at its core.

Last year, Premier Wynne set up the Highly-Skilled Workforce panel and this June, we accepted all of their recommendations. We're currently developing a plan that focuses on:

- 1. Building stronger partnerships between educators and employers;**
- 2. Increasing access to job market information;**
- 3. Expanding opportunities for hands-on learning by funding more placements so that every student completes at least one experiential opportunity before graduating from high school and another before finishing college or university;**
- 4. Promoting both traditional and non-traditional career paths by increasing students' exposure to options including the arts, science, engineering, technology, skilled trades and entrepreneurship; and,**
- 5. Closing gaps in skills and competencies by teaching and recognizing skills such as teamwork, problem solving and entrepreneurial spirit, and by developing training programs for groups underrepresented in the workforce.**

We know that the same students who face barriers in accessing in-classroom learning have similar challenges accessing broader learning opportunities. Academic internships are often the privilege of those who can afford to pass up a paid summer job. International fieldwork can be out of reach for qualified students who can't afford the plane ticket. Broader learning opportunities can yield huge dividends for students, but even traditional extra-curriculars can include intimidating initial costs.

We know it is essential that our goal of improving access to post-secondary education is not confined to credits earned, but also to skills learned. As we work to develop and implement our Highly-Skilled Workforce Strategy, we will ensure all students can access experiential learning and the benefits it brings. It's part of my job to ensure that everyone in Ontario, regardless of their background or circumstances, is able to get the right skills to participate in the new economy.

The "new economy" can seem like an intimidating prospect, but I think it's an exciting one and one that Ontario, with our talented and skilled people, is ready to take on. The attributes our graduates will

need to succeed there – problem solving, teamwork, resilience, innovation – are all improved by embracing broader learning opportunities.

Before I sign off, I want thank you as student leaders for the work you do every day advocating for students in this province. The business of advocating for change can seem long and difficult, and keeping one's "eye on the prize" even harder. I want you to know that the work of many students over many years has changed lives.

The most recent example, of course, is the work we did to break down the financial barrier to post-secondary education. Making tuition free for thousands of low and moderate-income students, making post-secondary education more affordable for thousands more – we've achieved a concrete outcome that makes the future brighter for a lot of people. That's why I do what I do, and I know it's why you do what you do.

We have more work ahead of us, including work to increase access to mental health and to deliver on the historic Sexual Violence and Harassment Action Plan, and more prizes in sight. The possibilities are vast – or broad, some might say. I'm excited to get started. ♦

GETTING COFFEE VERSUS GETTING A HIGH-QUALITY WORK INTEGRATED LEARNING EXPERIENCE:

Do's and Don'ts for Student Success

DR. ASHLEY **STIRLING** & DR. GRETCHEN **KERR**

Referred to by a variety of names such as internship, co-op, placement, or work study, the topic of work integrated learning seems to be on everyone's radar. Expressions of "experiential education" and "community engagement" are hot catch phrases at the moment and the idea of integrating theory and practice is more popular than ever. Students want the opportunity to get out of the classroom to get hands-on practical experience. They want to see the relevance of what they are learning, and at the same time build their résumés working with reputable organizations to increase their prospects for future employment. Industry is invested in student development, as there is a recognized need for highly trained and skilled professionals entering the workforce. The potential for "free labour" as a benefit to industry also can't be denied.

The resurgent focus on creating more work integrated learning opportunities comes at a time when the current job market is challenging and there are increasing pressures for higher education programs to produce "work ready graduates." There is also a recognized need to attend to the diverse learning styles of students. An article was recently written in the Toronto Star about the changing landscape of higher education and how today's students struggle to engage with traditional lecture-based teaching styles. Information can now be Googled more quickly than a professor can provide an answer from the front of the class, and for a generation of students that has grown up on computers and is accustomed to multi-tasking and being socially connected at all times, it is not surprising that there is a desire for more interactive and diverse educational approaches. In response to these needs, work integrated learning is one alternative approach to traditional lecture-based education.

While the practice of having student work opportunities built into academic programs is not new, there seem to be increasing pressures from students, industry, and academic educators and administrators alike, on Ontario colleges and universities to offer more and more of these types of experiences for students. In fact, the Business Council of Canada and the Ontario Premier's Highly Skilled Workforce Expert Panel have recommended that

all post-secondary students have at least one work-integrated learning experience by graduation. As a result, substantial attention has been devoted to addressing questions about the appropriate length, type, location, and potential payment for work-integrated learning. That all sounds great, right? Here is where the problem lies. With all this focus on more, more, more, where is the consideration for educational quality? While there are many potential benefits to be gleaned from a structured work experience, these benefits are not automatic or inherent in the experience itself; instead, these benefits are realized only through sound pedagogical structuring and delivery of these experiences. In other words, just because a student may sign up to volunteer in a workplace, doesn't mean that she is actually getting anything meaningful out of this experience and she may instead be spending her time surfing the web and delivering coffee. In the same way that watching someone cook does not necessarily translate to being a good chef, simply being present in a workplace organization does not guarantee that a student will gain enhanced skills as a professional in that area. Without consideration for the educational quality of work integrated learning, including the articulation of explicit learning outcomes, assessment of the extent to which these outcomes are achieved, and links with the broader academic curriculum, there may be no academic merit and thus a missed educational opportunity.

WITH ALL THIS FOCUS ON
MORE, MORE, MORE, WHERE
IS THE CONSIDERATION FOR
EDUCATIONAL QUALITY?

In order for an experience to be educational, it must be structured deliberately, with intended learning outcomes as well as hands-on purposeful practice, reflection, meaning making, and the opportunity to test new skills and ideas.

The Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance policy brief on “Promoting Student Success in the Broader Learning Environment” explains the importance of providing professional experiences to students while in school, as well as opportunities for students to become more involved in the broader community. This brief further identifies the necessity for meaningful experiences and emphasizes the need to link work integrated learning programs to course curricula. Similarly, a Huffington Post article argues that when it comes to student internships “education comes first.” Any company that does not provide a highly educational experience through mentorship and immersive tasks is doing the students and company an injustice.

Whether it’s the professional development, advanced skills, networking or career exploration gained through the work integrated learning opportunity, the potential impact of these experiences on student success, and benefits to all parties involved, is a driving motivator for enhancing these opportunities. It’s not uncommon to hear grand stories from top executives about how an internship experience ‘way back when’ opened a door to the path that got them to where they are today. Saying this, we know that not all students achieve the same level of success resulting from their structured work experiences.

Drawing upon student learning theory, research shows what makes quality work integrated learning experiences and how to best deliver these opportunities for student learning and success. To simply suggest that more experiences should exist is faulty as this type of thinking falls back on the outdated assumption that all experiences are educational. While there may be something to be learned from every experience, without

a grounding in student learning theory, there is no guarantee that the experience will contribute in any way – let alone in a positive way – to learning.

Rather than calls for work integrated experiences for more students, we must keep educational quality as the priority. Without quality considerations at the forefront, the quantity of work integrated learning opportunities is irrelevant. Only once we have assured the educational quality of work integrated programming will undergraduate students reap the benefits of these experiences.

SO WHAT DOES A HIGH QUALITY WORK INTEGRATED LEARNING EXPERIENCE LOOK LIKE?

The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario and Education @ Work Ontario recently released a guide on effective practices to enhance the educational quality of work integrated learning opportunities offered through colleges and universities.

Key recommendations include:

#1: SET LEARNING OUTCOMES AND A PLAN TO ACHIEVE THEM

What is the point of the work experience? What learning outcomes will the student achieve? Ideally learning goals should be set in partnership between the student, educator, and the workplace mentor, with common outcomes including skill development, knowledge acquisition, professionalism, citizenship, workplace relations, and self-awareness, as a few examples. Once you have determined the intended outcomes of the work integrated learning experience, the next step is to create a plan. What will be learned? How is this learning best achieved? What learning activities will be performed? What resources are available? And, how will the learning goals be assessed? Ideally, work integrated learning positions should afford students an opportunity to participate in real-world work activities relevant to the students' learning goals – with appropriate opportunities to practice and contribute to the organization in a meaningful way.

#2: CONNECT THE PRACTICE WITH THE ACADEMIC CURRICULUM

Typically speaking, the connection between theory and practice is the number one way that work integrated learning programs can be improved to enhance educational quality. There are a number of ways that this can be done - whether it be the theory that informs the practice, the practice informs the theory or they are introduced simultaneously. Students can be asked to intentionally draw upon classroom learning and apply it to practice in the workplace. There is also the possibility for students to derive questions and insight from their practice, which can inspire topics of study in the classroom. What better way to ensure that the academic programs are teaching the most relevant information than to be able to connect the class content with emergent questions from the field?

#3: TAKE TIME TO REFLECT

Students must take the time to stop and think about their practice in order to identify ways for improvement. A quick search online about the importance of reflection procured the following quote, “Sometimes you have to step back to see that you are moving forward in the right direction.” There are many ways that reflection can be facilitated. It can be as simple as taking 5 minutes to critically think about the work experienced, or it can be achieved more strategically through debrief meetings, journaling or facilitated reflection activities.

#4: EXPERIMENT AND TRY NEW THINGS

Within the work-integrated learning context, experimentation describes the process of students testing theories in practice, taking on new challenges, and pushing themselves to try new things. It involves allowing students to have more autonomy in creating their own learning experiences and encouraging students to express any new ideas and take risks in the workplace environment. Allowing students to share new ideas and test them in practice offers fresh insight in the workplace in addition to being a valuable learning opportunity for students.

#5: CONSIDER THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Supporting the student’s learning through quality mentorship helps create a positive and effective environment for advanced education and skill development. Ideally the mentor/employer should be knowledgeable, approachable, caring, a strong communicator, and dedicated to supporting and educating students. It is also important to consider the safety of the physical environment for students. Efforts need to be made to reduce the risk of harm and ensure that, as required, workplace accommodations are made.

#6: BUILD IN OPPORTUNITIES FOR FEEDBACK AND EVALUATION

No matter how great a student may be, there is always room for improvement. Continual, constructive feedback on a student’s strengths and ways in which she can further enhance her practice are critical for growth and development. This idea also applies to the work integrated learning program itself. In order to be most effective, program evaluations should be conducted on a regular basis with a focus on constant improvement and consideration of the ever-changing societal context in which the work integrated programs are delivered. ♦



ENROLMENT IS RISING SPACE ALLOCATIONS ARE NOT

KAYLA
SMITH

Current space allocations on campuses have not kept pace with the size of the undergraduate student population. This is problematic, as enrolment growth has been central to every university across the sector for many years. According to the Council of Ontario Universities, there are approximately 400,000 students currently enrolled in the sector. Given this large student population, space allocations must be considered.

At Trent University Durham, where significant growth is expected over the next few years, the administration believes that rising enrolment should be accounted for and considered for future planning. Prior to 2013, the student population at Trent Durham was rising 10-15% each year. In 2014, the population rose about 30%. One administrator believes that the nature of the campus is what draws people to the school. Students currently react well to the available study spaces and appreciate the small, close-knit setting. With enrollment on the rise, it is possible that students will start to react negatively to less available study space.

At present, classroom space usage at Trent Durham is fairly low, with plenty of room to grow; however, there is not enough space for faculty and staff to work outside of the classroom. Administration recognizes that plans are necessary to use the space more efficiently, as it is difficult to maintain high acceptance rates while not having enough faculty to keep up with the students. Trent University Durham has put an expansion plan into place, which will allow for increased undergraduate, graduate, and faculty space. In order to proceed with the plan, administration will have to approach the board of governors. The Trent Durham Student Association may be involved in funding the expansion, but funding from outside sources, as well as the university itself, will also need to be considered.





At other schools, such as University of Toronto and University of Ontario Institute of Technology (UOIT), blueprint plans for expansion have been made. Specifically, UOIT and Durham College have reached maximum capacity, so growth cannot continue without additional space considerations. The problem is that the schools do not have the enough resources to carry out their plans. Although some government funding has been received, the schools will need to look to other funding sources before construction can begin.

When universities are aware that funding will be received, building needs are categorized and prioritized. Unfortunately, critical priorities such as building maintenance are barely met, let alone new building and space needs. When funding for space becomes available, classroom upkeep is often prioritized above student space and residences. This funding arrangement poses a problem to students, who require comfortable study spaces in order to be successful. Prairie Research Associates found that, on average, students need to spend about seventeen or more hours each week on academics. Students who live at home can be easily distracted by other obligations, and, likewise, the fast-paced atmosphere of residence is not an optimal study environment for those who live on campus. For this reason, campus study space is highly valuable.

Often, students themselves will provide the funding for their own spaces. For example, Trent Peterborough students funded 80% of their new student centre. Third parties have also become involved in space arrangements, and particularly in funding new residence buildings. Despite these small-scale solutions, more widespread

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answers need to be found so that university students can be accommodated. Education is important when working towards a professional career, and lack of space may be detrimental to student success.

Another possible compromise could be offering increased online courses. Professors who teach online courses from a distance do not often need designated office space, so this could solve faculty space problems. Additionally, if more students take online courses, then perhaps less crowding would take place on campus. For example, if Trent Durham has a capacity for 2000 students, but there are 500 students who choose to study remotely, then there would be room for an extra 500 students on campus, assuming that remote students spent less than the average amount of time studying on campus.

A further consideration could be eCampus Ontario (eCO), which seems to be a leader in digital learning development. The purpose of eCO is to increase the number of courses available to students from various locations, and to also make knowledge of course options more accessible to students. It is likely that if more students were aware of the many options through the eCO portal, then many more would choose to enroll in online courses. This may give students increased course options and result in less use of campus space.

Current space allocations have become challenging due to rising enrolment; therefore, it is important that a solution is found. Ample space is necessary in order for students to succeed, so we must make it our goal to promote space-saving solutions. ♦

BUILDING A SUCCESSFUL ORIENTATION

From participator to planner

SOPHIE HELPARD

The first week of term is a significant week on campuses across the province. Orientation weeks have become the standard method of welcoming first year students. Not only are they a student's first peak into campus life, they are an opportunity for students to make valuable relationships, and learn fundamental lessons about university. While it is common to slap undesirable stereotypes on "frosh" programs, most have something different in common: they are well-oiled machines that work to acquaint students with their curricular, co-curricular, social, and cultural identities.

On September 4th, 2012, I showed up for my first orientation week at Western University, unaware that I would go on to experience three more during my undergrad. In my second year, I worked as a volunteer with incoming students. A year later, I coordinated

all 800 volunteers, and a year after that, I advocated to improve the orientation and experiences of all students. Orientation in post-secondary education is an issue I'm very passionate about, having seen the great impact it can have. To many students, it is the jump-start they need to propel them into a healthy life on campus, and to others, it simply means that they have built the confidence to stay for a second week.

Institutions have invested great time and money into these programs because of the link between a successful transition, and the retention and graduation of students. Student affairs professionals often coordinate programming, while returning students act as the approachable conduits of information. No two orientation programs are identical, but many champion four key values for incoming students that I believe lead to a successful orientation:

1

BECOMING ACTIVE CITIZENS ON CAMPUS

Familiarizing students with social aspects of campus is not just about making friends. Truly engaged students go a step further to become an active citizen. "Getting involved" is not an empty slogan on a pamphlet, but is a core outcome of a successful orientation program. This often means acquainting students with all clubs, societies, teams, and student organizations, as well as helping each student determine which activities are right for them. In addition to students picking something to participate in, it instills in them the importance of participation in general. Setting expectations from a students' involvement on campus early gives them more opportunity to be a positive force in the community while they're in school.

2

UNDERSTANDING RESOURCES AND SUPPORTS

While the first question students usually ask is, “what time does the dining hall open?” many later realize there are other resources they will need throughout their education. Orientation programs provide an important chance to introduce the many resources and supports on campus, explain why they’re available, and when students should use them. This means not only will a student learn that there are career services on campus, they know how and when to best utilize them. With students seeking similar resources for physical and mental well-being, getting educated on services must be more than pointing them out on a map, and orientation is the prime time when students are captive audiences for advice and guidance. When students have this mutual knowledge it also removes any stigma from using services because they do not have to go out of their way and seek them out.

3

LEARNING THE VALUE OF MENTORSHIP AND PEER SUPPORT

One of the greatest lessons I learned from my university experience was the importance of mentorship and peer support. Many orientation weeks involve upper year students as “leaders” for incoming students (no doubt because they learned to participate during their orientation). These student leaders bring first year students through the activities of the day, give them advice from their own university experiences, and offer support when students need it. Western’s O-Week has a network of 800 “Sophs” that are trained to help students through not just the first week, but their entire first year, and often times years afterwards. These student volunteers embody the meaning of mentorship and peer support for doing things from helping their students build good study habits, to having Thanksgiving dinner with international students who didn’t get the chance to go home. By being exposed to this program early on, it fosters a culture of peer mentorship and support on campus that is integral to the success of many students.

4

BUILDING A STRONG FOUNDATION FOR THE TASK AT HAND – GETTING AN EDUCATION

At the end of orientation week, there is one thing that binds every incoming student together – they are all students. They have overcome a great deal of barriers to come to university in the pursuit of higher education, and an Orientation program must adequately prepare them for that. Orientation week builds a strong foundation for this task by giving students exposure to their academic lives on campus. A student’s success on campus and satisfaction with their experience will be dependent on their academic performance. ♦

Where credit is due:

MICHAEL GILL

We are getting close. After centuries, governments and administrators are beginning to acknowledge that the lecture hall alone is no longer a perfect tool for the provision of higher education. This realization is a natural one. If the goal of post-secondary education is to elevate and advance society, then as our definition of citizenship evolves, so too should the tools which inspire this definition.

However, the discussion surrounding experiential education thus far has centered on employment as the central outcome. This approach risks prioritizing the needs of employers over those of society. While the soft skills lauded by business certainly have a place in the graduate's arsenal, many less profitable qualities are equally important to social progress. For skills like empathy, creativity, and inclusive attitudes, which aren't prized in traditional corporate settings, there should be no illusion of work integrated learning as a silver bullet. In the pursuit of more holistic education, institutions would do well to formally recognize a separate source of education that exists on our campuses: extracurricular activities. Unsurprisingly, research has already supported campus involvement as a source of extensive personal development and learning.

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ACTIVITIES**



Higher education doesn't just happen in a lecture hall

One such learning outcome is empathy – a quality that motivates altruism and improves one's ability to resolve problems collaboratively. For these reasons, empathy plays a crucial role in the continued development of just and fair societies. However, neither textbooks nor corporations are designed to facilitate this fundamental competency. In fact, according to the journal, *Academic Medicine*, individual empathy tends to decline throughout both medical school and during certain undergraduate programs. This needn't be the case. Service learning and community involvement have the potential to foster empathy in post-secondary students. Similarly, acting as a mentor to others can help develop perspective taking in both college-aged individuals and professionals. Should an institution want to produce more empathetic individuals, there is a clear route to do so through extracurricular participation.

Alongside empathy, creativity is a necessary quality for those who hope to address global problems. Given the critical role of this trait in not only social progress, but also academic innovation, it is no surprise that institutions have sought to better support graduate creativity for well over a decade. Extracurricular activities, campus involvement, and interpersonal project work have potential to develop individual creative ability and problem solving for students from all faculties. According to the *Globe and Mail*, given the recent push for Southern Ontario to become an "innovation super cluster," institutions pursuing more creative graduates would benefit by reevaluating the role of extracurricular participation within their curriculum.

A final area that institutions have often struggled with, but which is essential to the establishment of a more equitable society, is the facilitation of inclusive attitudes. One need only reference the recent backlash against #BlackLivesMatter Toronto's protest to see that many articulate, university-educated individuals still lack a fundamental understanding of allyship and oppression. Research suggests involvement can help to bridge this gap. Campus activities which focus on diversity seem to have a strong positive impact on participants' willingness to challenge their own prejudice and promote social justice. Less directly-related campus activities have potential to facilitate a similar understanding. Many leadership positions on campus

that provide a support or mentorship function require formal inclusivity training for volunteers. These programs facilitate inter-group dialogue, which may bolster perspective taking and improve support for institutional equity. Finally, extracurricular activities are a natural bridge for interaction and relationship building. Whenever socializations occur between individuals with different intersecting identities, studies have revealed an increased awareness of inequality and support for educational equity.

These three areas are just a small sample of tangible learning that stems from campus involvement, meant to illustrate its legitimacy as an educational medium. However, there are substantial indirect benefits to extracurricular participation that also warrant institutional consideration. At surface level, the Journal of Higher Education states that student engagement in the initial years of post-secondary education significantly improves GPA in following years. Beyond this, the NASPA Journal shows that extracurriculars can bolster academic autonomy, individual sense of purpose, and strength of interpersonal relationships. Similarly, the Journal of Health and Social Behaviors show students who engage in campus involvement often benefit from the mediating effects of social support on stress and adverse health outcomes. These peripheral benefits have the potential to amplify the institution's positive impact on society.

However, without meaningful institutional intervention, the benefits of campus involvement will remain financially inaccessible to a large portion of the student body. For those who spend many hours a week working to support their education, it can be very challenging to also find time for club meetings, sport practice, or student government. Institutions have at least one powerful lever to reduce this burden: course credit. Recognizing involvement on student transcripts would not only save participants the cost of courses they would



FOR SKILLS LIKE EMPATHY, CREATIVITY, AND INCLUSIVE ATTITUDES, WHICH AREN'T PRIZES IN TRADITIONAL CORPORATE SETTINGS, THERE SHOULD BE NO ILLUSION OF **WORK INTEGRATED LEARNING** AS A SILVER BULLET.

otherwise have to take, but also affords them time to meaningfully engage in their communities.

Similar to work integrated learning, a more nuanced discussion around learning outcomes and relevant extracurricular activities is required. A simple solution here might be to ask students which qualities, from a set determined valuable to the institution, they have developed through their extracurricular experiences. Then challenge them for evidence.

My own trajectory post-graduation is far more reflective of my extracurricular experiences than those inside the classroom. By legitimizing involvement through course credit, the institution demonstrates to students that their path forward need not fit neatly into academia or the private sector, that their impact might transcend dollars and cents, and that education is far more about the community than it is about the individual. ♦



TRANSITIONING THROUGH EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING:

BEYOND THE FIRST YEAR

LINDSAY D'SOUZA

Every September, universities prepare for the arrival of thousands of new first year students, with an emphasis on events, campus resources, and academic assistance. Transitioning into a new environment can certainly be difficult for many individuals as they face the realities of making new friends, creating a comfortable living space, and establishing efficient work habits. In fact, the focus on preparation stands out as a key component of successful transitions not just into first year, but into upper years as well. While important, the first year transition is not the only critical period in a university experience. As such, universities should strive to identify the challenges with transition through consecutive years of study to ensure that undergraduate students can feel prepared and supported at each point in their university journey. The transition into university focuses on a strong start, but how can students continue to strive for their goals transitioning out of university?

Transition and support after first year can begin to look different to students especially as they begin to approach their last year of university. While first year transition programs focus on growing comfortable to a new environment, each academic year brings new challenges that require different approaches and strategies to address specific needs.

Upper year students face a different type of transition: transitioning into further education as graduate students, or transitioning into careers. While the support they received in their first



year is still a valuable base, it is now important to layer on new skills and resources, in particular those pertaining to a more specialized field. For example, while first year students may turn to upper year peers or mentors for advice (someone they can confide in who has recently had similar experiences), upper years may seek support from professors or working professionals.

After working at my summer intern position, I returned back to school this September excited to begin my third year of university. However, as soon as I stepped foot in my classroom, now as an upper year student, I felt like there was still something I was missing. I didn't feel unprepared, just a little lost. Every time I sat in the lecture hall it felt as though I was slowly losing the soft skills I had worked so hard to build over the previous four months like contributing in large group meetings or conversing with individuals in the policy sector. I felt this way because after seeking the transitional support I heavily depended on during my first two years, now as an upper year student I wanted to gain support from the individuals I had met from being in the work force. Yet, how was I going to continue receiving this support?

My university has recently implemented peer-based introductory courses for specific faculties, for example Science 3A03 or Humanities 3LM3. Some of my science and humanities peers have had the opportunity to lead and mentor small groups of new students and engage them in discussions about their trajectory through their chosen disciplines while using coaching strategies. This program is intended to help incoming students learn within a certain discipline using the role of mentorship and I believe that this same type of relationship building can be implemented for transitioning out of university.

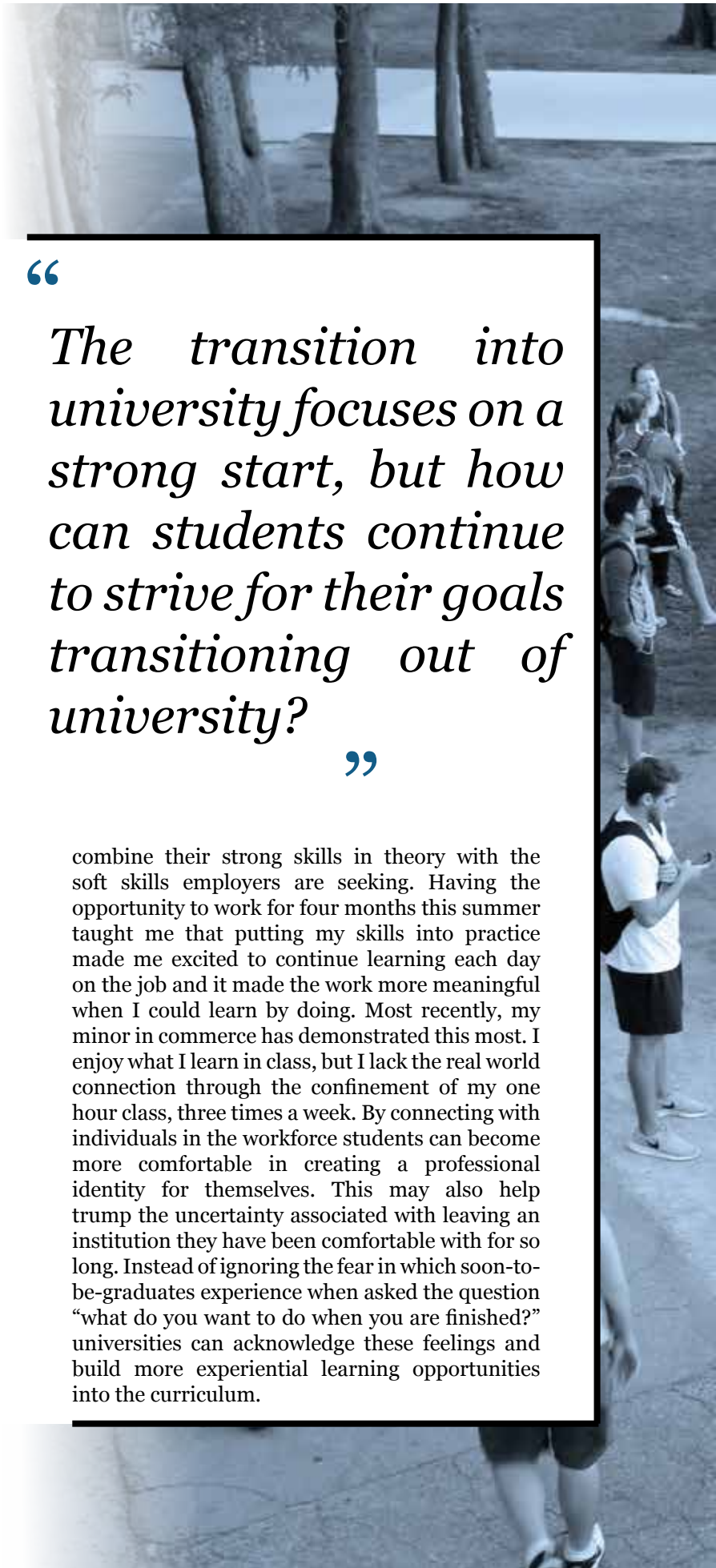
Having working professionals contribute to a component of our classes — whether through online modules or in class workshops—can help students who are transitioning out of university

“

The transition into university focuses on a strong start, but how can students continue to strive for their goals transitioning out of university?

”

combine their strong skills in theory with the soft skills employers are seeking. Having the opportunity to work for four months this summer taught me that putting my skills into practice made me excited to continue learning each day on the job and it made the work more meaningful when I could learn by doing. Most recently, my minor in commerce has demonstrated this most. I enjoy what I learn in class, but I lack the real world connection through the confinement of my one hour class, three times a week. By connecting with individuals in the workforce students can become more comfortable in creating a professional identity for themselves. This may also help trump the uncertainty associated with leaving an institution they have been comfortable with for so long. Instead of ignoring the fear in which soon-to-be-graduates experience when asked the question “what do you want to do when you are finished?” universities can acknowledge these feelings and build more experiential learning opportunities into the curriculum.



Increasing experiential opportunities as a support system for upper year students can have positive effects on not only the student, but also for course instructors and the community. As a student, implementing what I learn in class to a professional work setting provides a deeper understanding of a social and civic responsibility and promotes more awareness to diverse environments. This in turn allows students to participate in relevant and engaging class discussions, and reinforces key concepts from research and course material, beneficial to the instructor. Finally, the community fosters a stronger connection with the university, and could possibly explore more projects or fresh areas if they incorporated a student perspective.

Before we know it, that fresh feeling of September quickly turns into writing that last exam or handing in that final project in April. All the hard work from the year feels like it is coming to a close and it's another year of a familiar cycle. The connections that can be reinforced from experiential learning are only an opportunity to collaborate with upper year students and the individuals present in the community. By supporting, empowering, and expressing individual passions we can refine potential and critical thinking skills in order to solve specific community needs in the future. There is positive power to inspire members of the community to set goals, and achieve a collective outcome that develops in class ideas into tangible solutions. ♦

AS A STUDENT, IMPLEMENTING WHAT I LEARN IN CLASS TO A PROFESSIONAL WORK SETTING PROVIDES A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING OF A SOCIAL AND CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY AND PROMOTES MORE AWARENESS OF DIVERSE ENVIRONMENTS.



THE LACK OF STUDENT SPACE CANNOT CONTINUE

BLAKE OLIVER

Summer on a university campus is a beautiful thing. I marvel at how quickly I can make it from one end of a building to the other. As I eat my lunch, I'm shocked at the sight of available tables and chairs. Passing by the library, I'm pleasantly surprised at the number of empty cubicles. A friend and I could even sit side-by-side, if we wanted. And when I go to the gym, sometimes there's even a free squat rack.

During the school year, there is no such luck. At my institution, McMaster University, space — any and all kinds — is at a premium. This isn't unique to our campus.

The Council of Ontario Universities conducts a triennial inventory of physical facilities for all Ontario universities. The most recent report released in 2015, which stated, "Universities are operating at 78.8% of the space that they should have." COU's 2014 Facilities Condition Assessment Program report deemed that almost 50% of the total space within Ontario universities "is classified as in 'poor' condition." What this essentially means is that there is both a lack of appropriate space, and a lack of effective space for students.

Perhaps more concerning, undergraduate space has not been a recent priority for Ontario institutions. The statistic used to measure existing space versus needed space is called "Inventory/Generated" (I/G) — the ratio of actual inventory and the inventory

generated by COU factors. For academic and administrative offices, these numbers are at 99.6% and 109%, respectively. For student and central services, this number is at a dismal 67.3%.

Apart from obvious physical accessibility concerns, absence of appropriate space affects every aspect of the university experience. From crowded libraries to packed dining halls, everything from studying to socializing can be impaired due to lack of space. Furthermore, services that are imperative to student well being, such as support services, wellness centres, and equity centres, may be impacted due to lack of space. How can a wellness centre hire an additional counsellor when there is no office for them to work in?

Absence of appropriate space affects every aspect of the university experience.

The government needs to make student space a targeted funding priority. Currently, government funding is not usually provided for anything outside of what is thought of as the academic realm — therefore, "non-academic" spaces like athletic centres, health centres, and student centres are left underfunded, not funded at all, or (most likely) funded almost entirely by student dollars. Yet these student-centric spaces are anything but non-essential — they are altogether necessary for successful student development. And with Ontarian students now funding over half of university operating costs, it's about time campus space worked for students, without students needing to work to find student space. ♦

EXPERIENTIAL OPPORTUNITIES: GEARING OURSELVES TOWARD

SANDY HOWE

Clubs. Co-op. Campus events. Community service-learning. Consulting. Volunteerism. Internships. Student jobs. Placement and practicum. Simulations. Entrepreneurship. Lab work. International experiences and beyond. What has the most value? How do we speak with students about experience? When does one fit this all in and why? And should there truly be a line drawn between the importance of curricular and co-curricular experiences?

There are a couple of reasons for the buzz and discussion on this topic: Premier Kathleen Wynne's support of recommendations from the Highly Skilled Workforce Expert Panel that outline the need for all postsecondary students to have experiential or co-op opportunities and talk of the new university funding formula reflecting the quality of student experience and including mechanisms for reporting experiential opportunities. Experiential and co-op opportunities are the foundation of what Canadian colleges have naturally been offering to students since their inception, although on the university side, while this may have existed in some forms and at some institutions across the province, we are seeing a sudden spark to get on board with this idea - and quickly.

We know the vast majority of students are on campus seeking a degree. Curricular offerings and outcomes are at the core of what we do as universities. What shouldn't be far from the front of our minds when we consider the quality of the student experience, is the co-curricular world. Some argue that the mission for higher education should be to bridge the gap between theory and practice and this happens both within the classroom and beyond.

Co-curricular involvement, the learning taking place alongside one's degree, brings as much value to students as classroom experiences might. They also offer the opportunity for one to personally

choose meaningful experiences to engage in, develop additional skills, and gain confidence in personal abilities they may also wish to showcase. If we take this to heart, experiential courses are a must. The co-curricular world cannot be ignored, even in academia.

If we take advantage of this co-curricular vehicle for student learning and impact, teaching students how to make strong choices and how to engage outside the classroom in ways that will benefit them in the future is critical. Much like a quilt joins separate and often diverse squares to create a larger, beautiful whole, coaching students through their menu of engagement options is quite similar. Brock University's model of co-curricular engagement has been developed over time and is slowly but surely linking these two worlds together for the benefit of students.



A BROCK UNIVERSITY PERSPECTIVE

ON THE 21ST CENTURY STUDENT

CAMPUS WIDE CO-CURRICULUM LAUNCH:

What types of activities do we intentionally aim to build into the student experience? Is this message clear to students regarding how we hope they might use their time? The message that needs to be communicated is that every opportunity is equally important, and often, critical. Considering the massive amounts of information, through social media, posters, TV screens, e-mails/memos, and announcements we target to students, how do we expect them to make sense of it and set reasonable priorities?

Brock University has taken on the highly collaborative task of cataloguing every opportunity a student might have outside the classroom. As a full campus, including academic units and student affairs, these opportunities were grouped into ten domains representing skills employers increasingly expect from university graduates. The messaging to students upon acceptance into the university is, in simplest terms, “do something...now!” The Campus Wide Co-Curriculum (CWC) is a “choose your own adventure” spin on getting involved with the goal of having students complete each of the ten domains by the time they graduate. These domains are the foundational squares of the “co-curricular quilt”.

One of the key features of the program, is teaching the students how to seek out their own activities and points of engagement, whether on campus or in the local and/or international community. With students being able to choose when in their university career they fit these things in, it cuts down on some of the advertising and noise targeted at students and also allows them the freedom to decide on some of the specific “domain items” that satisfy the base requirements, making it personal and meaningful to them; it also breaks down “getting involved” into more manageable, achievable chunks.

CO-CURRICULAR INVOLVEMENT,
THE LEARNING TAKING PLACE
ALONGSIDE ONE’S DEGREE,
BRINGS AS MUCH VALUE TO
STUDENTS AS CLASSROOM
EXPERIENCES MIGHT.

REFLECTION EQUALS LEARNING:

Whether the focus is turned to co-curricular or curricular experiential opportunities for students, one of the keys to make experiences successful is reflective practice. While experience does not necessarily equal learning, John Dewey stated, “Reflection on experience equals learning”. Whether curricular or co-curricular, giving intentional thought to what has been realized is critical.

In addition to the task of students completing the experiences in each of the ten CWC domains, reflection on learning and on skill development is a strand that is woven throughout the co-curriculum. After the completion of each of the ten domains, students must also reflect on the objective of each domain and the impact of it on their personal development, skill acquisition, and also on their academics (how the domain compliments their academic learning and vice versa). This is the thread that weaves the squares of the quilt together. To bookend the CWC, students are prompted to complete a pre- and post- reflection related to what they have learned about themselves and the communities around them, their overall skill development, and the achievement of their goals, similar to the trim around the edges of the quilt creating a polished finish to the full structure.



THE CO-CURRICULAR RECORD:

When a student is updating their resume, preparing for an interview or working with their career office to prepare for their future career or education, all of one's experiences have equal value. It can be challenging, particularly for those who have had a high level of involvement, to recall and remember the details or see the linkages between their experiences and their future aspirations.

For almost twenty years, Brock University has facilitated a co-curricular record (CCR) for students, called ExperiencePlus, allowing students to capture experiences such as volunteer work, campus jobs, workshops, and professional development, as well as awards and skills. The experiences a student reports here, or those completed in the CWC, are validated by a supervisor or point of contact who can speak to the student's participation and determine the skills the student showcased. This transcript-like document is a great addition to a portfolio, job application, or scholarship package, and provides a quick reference for students when looking at the skills required for a job. Student can easily review the skills acquired on their transcript and prepare to speak to that experience in an interview. Much like hanging or displaying a quilt upon its completion, the CCR is the final product on display after the experiences have been assembled.

THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS?

The ultimate maximization of opportunity, efficiency, and time management for students may just be the blending of the curricular and co-curricular "worlds". With the learning outcomes of co-curricular experiences and/or programs often meeting those of a course or academic program, why wouldn't we leverage co-curricular opportunities and build these into the curricular fabric? In order to enhance student learning, institutions are aiming to make theory come alive and are also encouraging students to make the most of their time outside the classroom in ways that will serve them well in the future. These, potentially, can be one in the same.

Since 2014, when Brock University launched its CWC, there has been a slow, but steady uptake by faculty to include co-curricular domains as part of their courses. Faculty align the outcomes of their course with the most relevant and purposeful domains. With co-curricular engagement easily monitored and validated, faculty then include an assignment as part of their course based on the co-curricular experiences to assess student learning in these activities. Hearing accounting students reflect on the relevance of the arts in their future career and create valuable linkages across disciplines is often a challenge to do, but given the vehicle, is made easy and prompts students to reflect in new and creative ways about themselves and their world.

While the future will contain twist and turns, new research, and innovative approaches we haven't yet imagined, we know students will continue to look for meaning and purpose in their lives, during their undergraduate degree and beyond. We may serve them best by thinking about our messaging, how we maximize excellent learning opportunities, and how we coach them through their experiences inside and outside the classroom. Why not see what happens when two valuable worlds collide? ♦

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Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance

We represent the interests of over 140,000 professional and undergraduate, full-time and part-time university students at eight student associations across Ontario.

Our approach to advocacy is based on creating substantive, student driven, and evidence-based policy recommendations. Our professional government relations practices ensure that we have the access to decision-makers we need in order for our members' voices to influence provincial legislation and policy.



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