



University of Dayton
**Experiential
 Learning**

Experiential Learning: Guide for EL Practitioners at UD

Karen Velasquez, Ph.D. : kvelasquez1@udayton.edu

Director of Experiential Learning

Office of Experiential Learning: Roesch 034

www.udayton.edu/el

University of Dayton

Experiential learning (EL) at UD takes many forms. Programs and activities such as education abroad, faculty mentored research, co-ops and on-campus employment, internships, leadership positions, faith immersions, and community-engaged learning are all considered forms of EL. However, EL is more than just the program or activity. It is a pedagogical approach that includes several key components. Across all forms of EL (from co-ops to research) there are some common best practices that can be identified, including **Preparation, Immersion, Reflection/Application, Assessment (PIRAA)**. The PIRAA model, developed by Karen Velasquez, Director of Experiential Learning in the Office of Experiential Learning at the University of Dayton, is outlined below.

1. **Preparation:** *Help students understand what you would like them to achieve through the experience. What does successful participation in the experience mean? How will you know? How do you frame the experience for students? How is the experience integrated in the course and to what extent? What do you hope students will learn from the experience? How will the experience help students achieve the learning goals and outcomes of the course? How are you tying together institutional learning goals with the experience? How do students explain and define what they would like to learn through the experience? What background information do students need to know going into the experience? What information do you need to know in order to prepare yourself for the experience? Will students be entering a new social context, community, or environment, and if so, what should they know before going in?*
 - a. EL practitioners are encouraged to articulate learning outcomes for the experience connected to the specific course and/or program **and** at least one institutional learning goal (ILG)
 - b. EL practitioner is encouraged to connect experience to learning goals and guidelines associated with the type of EL pedagogy with which it is most

closely affiliated (*for example, if course is centered on community engaged learning, it should demonstrate engagement with the CEL principles promoted by the University of Dayton and Fitz Center for Leadership in Community*)

- c. Students should be encouraged to develop and articulate their own learning outcomes for the experience in a learning outcomes assignment prior to the experiential immersion
- d. EL Practitioner is encouraged to guide students to appropriate information and contextual knowledge prior to the immersion that will enable them to navigate the experience and prepare them for entering a new learning opportunity (*for example, if the experience takes place in a community, culture, or environment that is unfamiliar to students, the EL practitioner should adequately engage students with useful information about that community, culture, and/or environment prior to immersion*). This can take form in assignments such as:
 - i. A pre-immersion information session guided by the EL Practitioner
 - ii. A student reflection paper about what they anticipate they will learn
 - iii. A student research assignment about the culture, community, environment in which the immersion will take place

2. **Immersion:** *Guide and empower students to embark on a self-guided learning journey where they can experiment and test out ideas in new and diverse settings, on or off campus.* One of the most important distinguishing features of experiential learning is the extent to which the experience provides students the opportunity to take ownership of their own education- the experience should allow students to experiment, apply theory to practice, problem solve on their own, and become immersed in self-guided learning.

- a. Immersion is a hands-on, self guided learning experience where students have the opportunity to experiment, test out and apply concepts, identify problems and courses of action individually and/or in groups. During this period students should have agency and ownership of their own learning experience. Examples of immersions that are common to different forms of EL at UD include:
 - i. A lab experience where students are using lab equipment themselves rather than simply being shown how to use it
 - ii. A community river clean-up where students identifying pollution and environmental issues as they actively pick up litter
 - iii. A student employment experience during which students are interacting with customers and addressing in-the-moment needs of a business or corporation

- iv. A field research project where students interview people and collect data on their own about a particular theme or topic

3. **Reflection (including connection and application):** *Prompt students to make meaning of the experience and deepen their learning through guided reflection activities such as group discussions, journaling, and presentations.* How are students making sense of the experience? How do you ask them to reflect on the meaning of the experience and how it applies to their personal, academic, and career goals and aspirations? What assignments do you incorporate in the course that ask students to make connections between the experience and course work or material? How can you help students transform experience into knowledge through reflection? This is an important aspect of experiential learning because it is an opportunity for students to try and articulate what they learned and how they think they can apply their knowledge to contexts beyond the singular experience. Students also frequently have multiple experiential learning experiences in the same year or over the course of their college careers. How can you help students reflect on the knowledge that is built and transferred across multiple forms of EL? How can you draw from this experiential knowledge they have accumulated, to help them succeed in your course? How can they explain what they've learned through the experience in your course to other audiences such as graduate school committees and potential employers? What key realizations and takeaways will they have as a result of the EL in your course or program?

- a. EL Practitioner is encouraged to incorporate opportunities for meaningful individual and/or group reflection **before, during, and after the experience** in the form of assignments such as:
 - i. Journal
 - ii. Essay
 - iii. Concept map or other creative and artistic assignment
 - iv. Conversation
 - v. Presentation
 - vi. Project
- b. **Reflection on Connections:** Reflection should include opportunities for students to make connections. *Ask students to connect what they learned from the experience to other contexts: the course/program, their major, or personal, academic, professional, vocational goals. How do experiences build upon each other?*

- i. During or after the immersion and reflection components, the EL Practitioner should guide students to make connections between the what was learned through the experience and other contexts beyond the experience itself. Students should be asked to connect the experience to one or more of these dimensions, as part of their vocational discernment process:
 1. Their major/discipline
 2. Personal goals and experiences
 3. Academic goals and experiences
 4. Professional goals and experiences
 5. Other experiential learning goals and experiences
 - ii. The EL experience should not only guide students to make these connections but it should also demonstrate how it will help students understand their experience in a holistic and integrative way that honors the development of the whole student.
 - c. **Reflection on Applications:** Reflection should include opportunities for students to imagine applications and apply what they've learned: *Help students articulate how they will apply the lessons learned from the experience. Ask students to consider the "now what?" question. How can they use their experiential knowledge to make a unique impact in the world?*
 - i. In preparing servant leaders who will make unique and important contributions to society, experiential learning activities and programs should ask students to envision how they will apply the lessons they learned from the experience and/or implement this vision. Depending on the depth and breadth of the experience, not all will have the opportunity to put their plans into action. However, the experience should culminate in a "now what?" question, aimed at empowering students to take action on what they've learned and make use of their knowledge into future contexts. Below are some suggested tools, resources, and action steps to help students leverage their experiences and incorporate them into what comes next:
 1. Update resume and personal statement
 2. Connect with career services advisor
 3. OEL Experiential Learning Lab video testimonial & digital story
4. **Assessment:** *EL Assessment means understanding how and what students have learned as a result of participating in experiential learning, with the goal of using that information to deepen student learning and improve the experience for students.*

- a. EL practitioners are encouraged to develop and integrate their own assessment plan for the following:
 - i. Experiential Learning Program/Activity Assessment
 - 1. Structural and logistical features of the program/activity: timing, execution, quality
 - ii. Assessment of Student Learning through Experiential Learning
 - 1. The extent to which the learning outcomes and goals identified by the EL practitioner were reached (course/program specific, ILG goals).
 - 2. The extent to which learning outcomes identified by students were reached
- b. The EL practitioner is encouraged to analyze student reflections and identify themes in student reflection assignments and activities that indicate transformational learning has or has not occurred, and what action steps should be taken to enhance the quality of the program and deepen student learning in the future. This analysis of student reflections about experiential learning can also form the basis of important feedback for students.