



UNIVERSITY OF
CALGARY

Who Can Do SoTL?

A consultative research initiative for amplified Experiential Learning

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Friday, November 4th, 2022



I would like to acknowledge the traditional territories of the people of the Treaty 7 region in Southern Alberta, which includes the Blackfoot Confederacy (comprising the Siksika, Piikani, and Kainai First Nations), as well as the Tsuut'ina First Nation, and the Stoney Nakoda (including the Chiniki, Bearspaw, and Wesley First Nations). The City of Calgary is also home to Métis Nation of Alberta, Region 3.



Introductions



Lisa Stowe
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Professor (Teaching) Department of Communication, Media and Film



Kara Loy
Educational Development Consultant
Doctoral candidate
Survey student participant



University of Calgary

- Founded in 1966/Canadian Public Research University
- 14 Faculties and 85 Research Institutes and Centres
- 30,201 students (25,000 Undergraduates/6000 Graduates/500 PostDocs)
- Member of Canada's U15: 47 percent of all university students in Canada, 71 percent of all full-time doctoral students in the country, 87 percent of all contracted private-sector research in Canada, and 80 percent of all patents and start-ups in Canada.

Our bold vision for experiential learning



By 2025, experiential learning will be a **cornerstone** of the UCalgary student experience.

All **undergraduate students** will participate in at least two high-quality experiential learning opportunities during their academic studies.

All **graduate students** in a degree program will have the opportunity to participate in at least one experiential learning opportunity.



UCalgary's Experiential Learning Definition

[...] **learning-by-doing** that bridges knowledge and experience through critical reflection. EL activities are **intentionally designed and assessed**. As such, they empower learners to **enhance individual and collaborative skills** such as complex problem solving, professional practice skills, and teamwork. Reflecting **critically on these activities** helps individuals develop higher order thinking to challenge and advance their perspectives. The EL process prepares students to **take on roles as active citizens and thrive** in an increasingly complex world.

The 5 buckets of EL at UCalgary





Benefits of EL

- EL is associated with enhanced student engagement, increased career readiness after graduation, and an improved civic consciousness (Eyler, 2009; Kuh, 2008; McRae, 2015).
- Further benefits include increased academic, professional and interpersonal skill development, enhanced personal learning habits, greater employability, and self-concept (Freestone, Thompson & Williams, 2006; Drysdale & McBeath, 2012).
- EL supports students in discovering a sense of purpose (personally, professionally and academically) and prepare students to make meaningful contributions to their field and communities.



Equitable Pathways Project

To understand the perceived or actualized barriers faced by UCalgary students and the solutions to reducing or removing them as related to any form of EL, or learning by doing. A key element of the project's research design was initiating conversations with student groups, student services teams and student facing units. These conversations were used to develop survey questions and focus group protocols and scripts.

Research Questions:

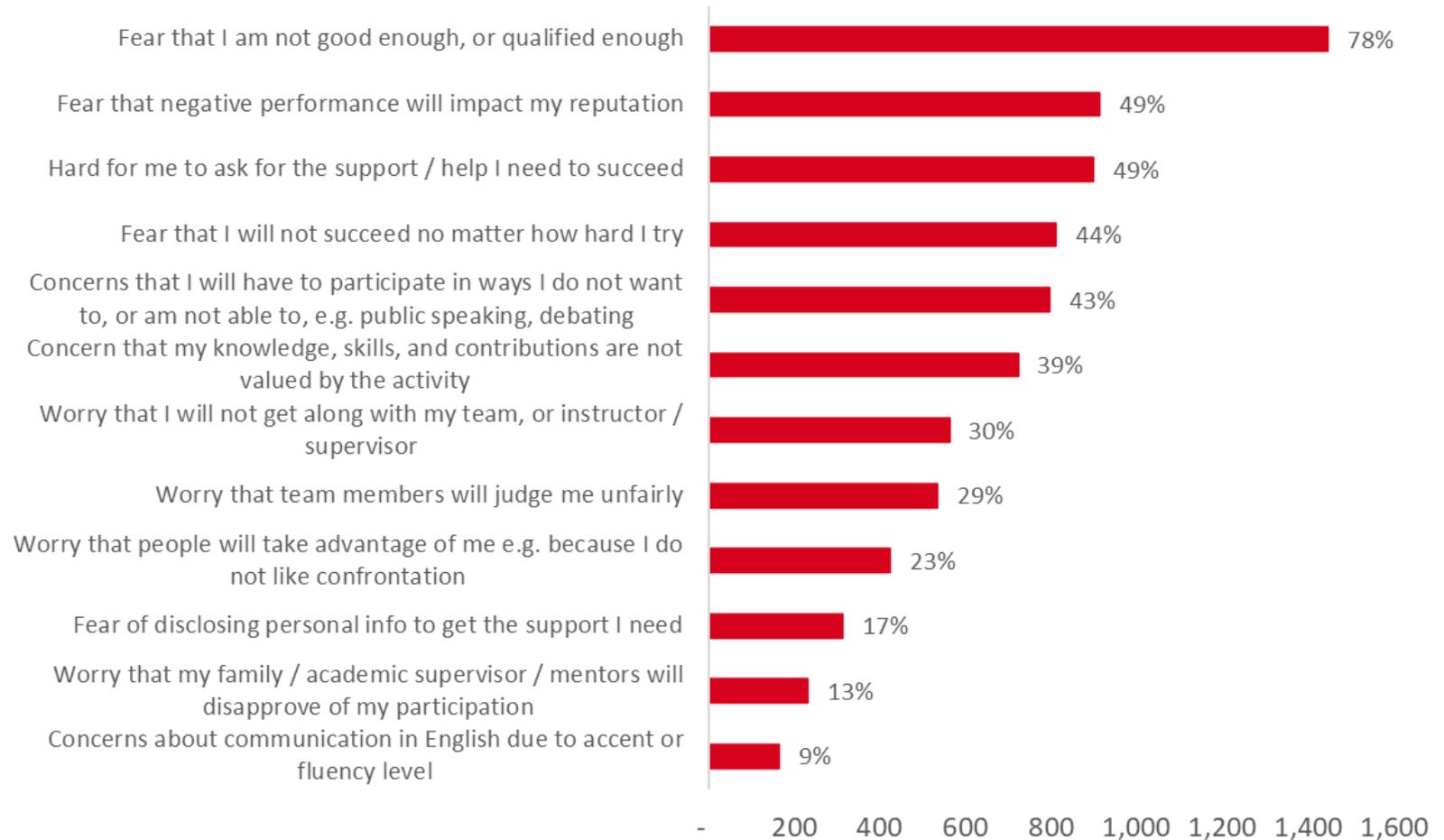
- To what extent are EL activities at UCalgary accessible to, and inclusive of all students?
- What are the actualized and perceived barriers faced by students in participating in EL activities at UCalgary?
- In what ways might EL activities at UCalgary become more accessible and inclusive of all students?



What resulted from our conversations

- Development of a survey that was extensive and inclusive of all units across campus engaged in EL. Units felt seen, heard and invested in this project.
- Survey had 2002 respondents from students across most faculties and disciplines (5.5% of UCalgary students) asking a wide range of questions related to barriers and accessing EL in curricular and co-curricular spaces
- Development of focus group protocols that unpacked identified barriers students face when accessing EL
- A list of recommendations from students on how to overcome barriers to EL

Concerns that have influenced respondents' decision to participate in EL (N=1,851)



Student Barrier Themes



Design of EL activities, policies and processes



Lack of Time and Energy



Fears, uncertainty and imposter syndrome



Lack of Financial Resources



Limited understanding and awareness of EL



EL Activities are Limited and Difficult to Find



Mental Health Concerns



Need for guidance from a mentor or advisor

Additional barrier themes: impact of the pandemic and negative past experiences



“Every once in a while, we'll get e-mails [from the Department]; at the very bottom there would be in tiny, tiny print, like, ‘Oh, there's this opportunity’. But it's implied that you better be the perfect candidate or else don't even bother applying or going for it. That's pretty much what the department feels like always. They don't really talk to us – if we get an email, we're lucky, but other than that, no.”



“The university needs to provide flexible support for all students. Flexibility is not a perk that only falls under the category of inclusivity. In order for flexibility to be accepted it must be universalized, it must be commonplace. I should not have to ask for flexible arrangements based on my specific case, it should be a best practice.”



“I am managing a part-time job with full-time school, as a first-generation university student with little to no support from family. Barely have time to do anything else even though I want to, but then it would take me longer to finish my degree. Full-time coursework is like a full-time job that leaves very little room to enjoy other activities.”

Student Proposed Solutions to Reduce Barriers



Follow principles of universal design for learning in EL activity development



Increasing communication and promotion of EL Activities



Enhanced information and resources about EL activities



Increase number and variety of EL activities



Providing financial supports to enable participation



Diverse faculty and staff representation and engagement



Relational Groundwork

- Who are the campus social conveners, connectors and amplifiers?
- How do these people operationalize in the academy?
- What sort of intellectual, social & cultural capital do they mobilize?



Systemic biases

What makes them fraught:

- students' feelings of exclusion
- limiting factors – nationality, grade point average (GPA), year of study
- mentorship- who has access to guides and experienced or quality advice
- students' competing priorities



- unspecified & implicit rules for applications
- competition and application processes
- timing, timelines to apply & to participate
- cost – stated and invisible fees



Keeping the Experiential Ethical

- why are institutions offering much of the resource-intensive, enriched learning outside of the curriculum?
- what are the effects of positioning enriched, high-impact (Kuh, 2008) programming outside of the curriculum?
- why are students calling for equity and access in competitions and exclusionary experiences?
- what are the costs to students, staff, faculty and community of this duplication or paralleling of 'education'?



Questions or Comments?

Thank-you for your attention

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