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# Small EL

Design and Assessment

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# Introduction

Small Experiential Learning (Small EL), or Short-term Experiential Learning, refers to incorporating hands-on, practical learning experiences on a smaller scale into classroom settings. Unlike large-scale internships or extended fieldwork, small EL is *intentionally* narrow in scope, concentrating on a particular aspect of a subject, experience, or skill set. Small EL is:

- *Tightly time-bound* (i.e. 1-2 classes, 1 lab/tutorial, a single field trip, a 1-day job shadow, a 20-hour micro-placement)
- *Low risk* – risk is relatively low for the student and faculty member (not a huge impact on a student's grade, or huge loss of time if they decide it isn't a fit for them)
- *Focused* on a specific skill, topic, or a chance to “dip your toe” into an experience

These experiences can take various forms, including small group projects, simulations, role-playing exercises, or case studies. The goal is to deepen student engagement, enhance critical thinking, and provide opportunities for applying academic concepts in realistic contexts, without requiring significant time commitments outside the classroom.

Small EL helps overcome barriers for students by offering flexible, accessible, and inclusive opportunities for hands-on learning because it happens in the curricular space where students are already engaged. Small EL overcomes barriers related to time by integrating EL experiences directly into the classroom. Internships, coops or study abroad can be cost prohibitive for some students but there is no extra cost to Small EL. Some students do not have equal access to longer term EL due to personal responsibilities, disabilities or other constraints, and thoughtfully designed Small EL can be tailored to accommodate diverse learners. Small EL offers a low-stakes environment where students can ‘dip their toe’ into professional and practical skills gradually and at their own pace.

Small EL helps reduce financial, logistical, and social barriers, making experiential learning more inclusive, equitable, and accessible to all students.

This handout helps faculty and staff think about the design of Small EL activities as well as developing suitable assessment practices for these types of in-class activities.

# Designing a Small Experiential Learning (EL)

Small experiential learning is EL that is *intentionally* narrow in scope, concentrating on a particular aspect of a subject, experience, or skill set. What is the subject, experience, or skill set of your Small EL activity? This could relate to a course or a co-curricular program.

Why do you want to develop a Small EL activity for this subject, experience, or skill set?

What skills do you want students to **focus** on during this activity?

What is the **environment/context** for this activity?

- Number of students:
- Setting:
- Time for activity:
- Support/resources:
- Assessment:
- Year of program:
- Skills development or gaps:





<p>Will this experience be assessed? If yes, how?</p> <p>(Refer to the “Assessing EL” handout for additional guidance)</p>	
<p>How will students redo/try out or apply these skills in future learning opportunities?</p>	

# Assessing Small EL

Assessing experiential learning activities requires thoughtful planning to ensure fairness, accuracy, and efficiency. Here are several assessment strategies that can be effective in classes where small EL is a component. For your context, consider the benefits and drawbacks of these types of assessments. Please feel free to include any examples you have with these forms of assessment or an experience where things went well or not so well in the space below the table.

Type of Assessment	Benefits	Drawbacks
<b>Peer Assessments:</b> Implement peer assessments within small groups. Peers can provide valuable feedback on teamwork, contributions, and collaboration skills. Structured peer evaluation forms can guide students in evaluating their team members' performance.		
<b>Self-Assessment:</b> Encourage students to reflect on their own learning and contributions. Self-assessment activities, such as journals or reflective essays, can help students articulate their experiences, challenges, and personal growth during experiential learning activities.		
<b>Group Presentations:</b> Have small groups present their experiential learning projects or experiences to the class. This not only allows for assessment but also promotes peer learning, as students can learn from the experiences of others.		

<p><b>Online Portfolios:</b> Ask students to create digital portfolios showcasing their experiential learning projects, reflections, and other related materials. Online platforms make it easy to collect, organize, and assess students' work.</p>		
<p><b>Structured Reports:</b> Have students submit structured reports detailing their experiential learning activities. Include sections such as project objectives, methods, outcomes, challenges faced, and lessons learned. This format allows for a comprehensive assessment of their work.</p>		
<p><b>Collaborative Assignments:</b> Introduce collaborative assessments where groups of students work on a common goal or project. Assess the collective output of the groups, emphasizing teamwork, coordination, and the overall impact of their collaboration.</p>		
<p><b>Online Quizzes and Surveys:</b> Use online quizzes or surveys to assess students' understanding of key concepts related to their experiential learning activities. This method can be particularly useful for assessing theoretical knowledge and concepts that are covered alongside practical experiences.</p>		



<p><b>In-class Discussions:</b> Organize structured in-class discussions or debates related to experiential learning topics. Assess students based on their participation, contributions, and ability to connect practical experiences with theoretical knowledge.</p>		
<p><b>Continuous Feedback:</b> Provide ongoing feedback throughout the experiential learning process. This can be through emails to the large class or groups or large class discussions on how you think things are going. Timely feedback can guide students, allowing them to make improvements before the final assessment. Consider using online platforms for quick feedback and communication.</p>		

Are any other types of assessment not on this list that you currently use or are aware of?

Any examples or experiences you want to share about assessing EL?

# Small EL in the 2024 UCalgary Continuum

The 2024 UCalgary Framework for Experiential Learning introduces a continuum approach to experiential learning, moving beyond rigid categories of EL to recognize the diverse contexts and purposes of these experiences. This new framework allows for greater flexibility in describing and understanding experiential learning (EL), ensuring that all students can access meaningful, high-impact opportunities across a range of environments and focuses.

Small EL aligns perfectly with this updated framework. By occurring directly within the curricular or co-curricular space, where students are already engaged, Small EL makes experiential learning more accessible and flexible. It fits nicely into the framework's recognition that learning happens across various environments and serves different aims for student growth.

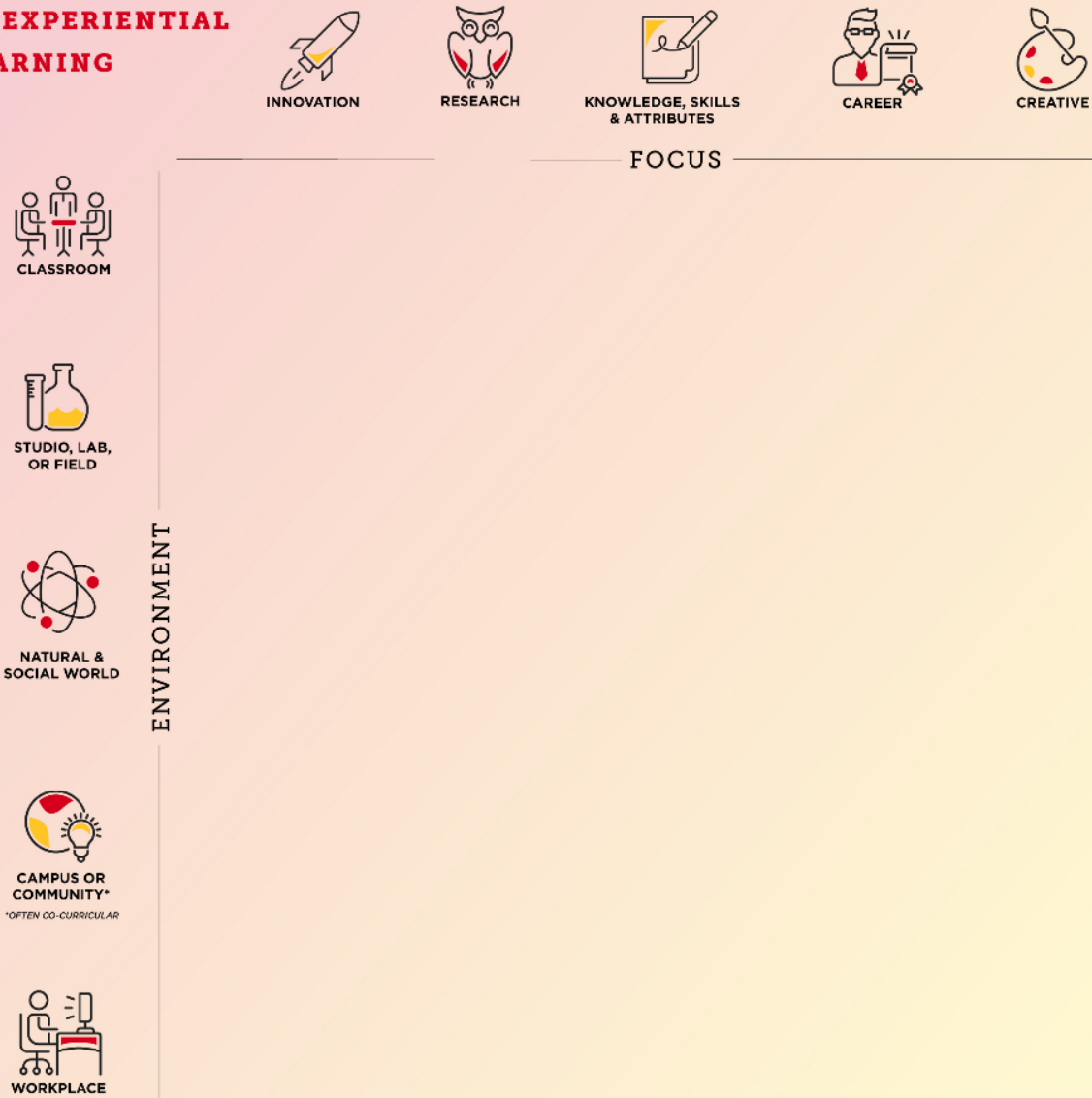
In our continuum, environments or places and spaces for and focus on experiential learning are essential, and Small EL typically takes place within a classroom, campus or community space. Whether curricular or co-curricular, students engage in activities like simulations, role-playing, case studies, or small projects that provide EL in a focused, manageable way.

When considering the focus of Small EL, it can cover a variety of aims, from developing Knowledge, Skills & Attributes related to the course material to encouraging Innovation through problem-solving or fostering Career and Life skills like collaboration and communication. For example, a case study in a communication course might help students apply theoretical concepts to real-world situations, while a role-play activity could develop critical thinking and negotiation skills.

By situating Small EL within the framework's continuum, instructors and students can better understand its value as a form of experiential learning that emphasizes intentional, practical learning aligned with course or program objectives. Whether the focus is on research, innovation, skill-building, or career preparation, Small EL provides students with direct experience and reflection opportunities without the barriers of more time-intensive experiential activities.

With this flexible framework, instructors can describe their Small EL activities using combinations of place and focus. For instance, you might refer to your activity as Innovation-focused Classroom EL or Skill-building Classroom EL, depending on your learning goals. This approach ensures that Small EL is recognized as a valuable, accessible part of the experiential learning continuum at UCalgary.

## THE CONTINUUM OF EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING



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Continuum from: Flanagan, K., Stowe, L., Martineau, C., Kenny, N., & Kaipainen, E. (2024). The Land and the A.I.R.: Revisioning Experiential Learning on a Canadian Campus. *Experiential Learning and Teaching in Higher Education*, 7(3). Retrieved from <https://journals.calstate.edu/elthe/article/view/4149>