

# Collegiate Experience: Experiential Learning in University Education

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## Introduction

What Is Experiential Learning Theory (ELT)?

Education is viewed as a four-step cycle:

- Contextually rich concrete experience
- Critical reflective observation
- Specific abstract conceptualization
- Pragmatic active experimentation

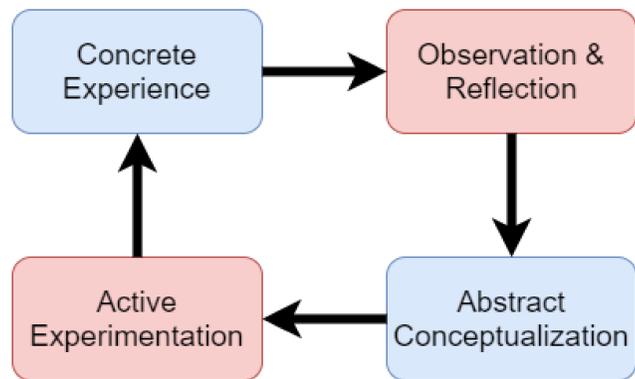


Figure 1: The Experiential Learning Cycle

Within ELT, there are two types of modes: grasping and transforming. The experiencing and conceptualization steps (shown in blue) are the grasping modes, where new information is formed and gained. Meanwhile, the observation and experimentation steps (shown in red) are the transforming modes, where the new information is processed and explored. Each step leads directly into the next.

## Experiential Education

Experiential learning (ExL) is more than just hands-on learning. While often featuring hands-on projects, this education model places an emphasis on teaching students how to think and reflect on their learning. ExL programs provide students with deeper, longer-lasting education, where theoretical knowledge is applied, reinforced, and expanded into real-world scenarios.

For educational institutions to maximize their students' learning, they must develop entire educational programs to fit this model. By addressing the educational process as a whole, rather than simply adjusting learning objectives or course material, students' full potentials can be drawn out.

This holistic reform should encompass the following aspects, visualized in Figure 2:

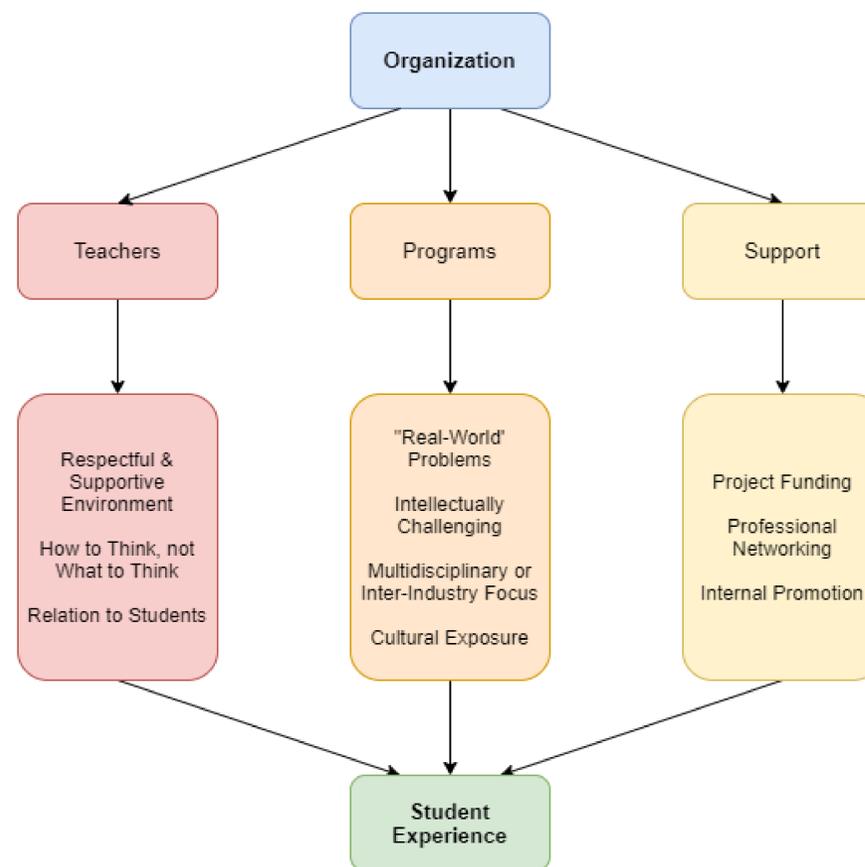


Figure 2: Holistic ExL Program Requirements

## Developing ExL Programs

### The Teacher's Role in ExL

The teacher should first and foremost cultivate an environment of respect and support, where students develop personal connections and relationships with each other and the instructor. Secondly, the teacher should focus on teaching students how to think: how to identify problems and find solutions, and how to reflect on their own learning. And lastly, should strive to relate the learning to the students' passions and interests.

### The ExL Program

The actual course that students would take should strive to serve several purposes. First, it should provide projects that introduce students to real-world problems they may face one day. These projects should be challenging, pushing them to their boundaries and introducing them to the prospect of failure so that they can learn to handle the stresses of risk and how to pick themselves back up and learn from their mistakes.

Further beneficial aspects that might be implemented to a program include interdisciplinary or inter-industry problems. By having students of different backgrounds address problems that may not be in their specific field, they will learn to apply their specific knowledge learned previously in a broader range of scenarios. Additionally, if multi-cultural exposure can be introduced, such as working with distant team members or professional organizations, students can develop their social and cultural intelligence.

### The Organization's Support

While schools often focus on their teachers and course material, the institution's support is often overlooked. First, programs may require financial support to fund the specific projects or provide learning materials. Additionally, the organization should help provide networking opportunities for the students, such as connecting the students to professional organizations to collaborate with. Lastly, internal promotion is key, so more students can take the course and grow the program.