**Characteristics of Experiential Learning**

**EL**

***The Definition of Experiential Learning at Nazareth College***

Experiential learning is the process of making meaning from direct experience in a real world context.[[1]](#footnote-1)Experiential learning is a philosophy and methodology in which educators purposefully

engage with learners in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develop skills and clarify values. Facilitated and guided practice, reflection and evaluation are all essential components of this transformative method of learning.[[2]](#footnote-2)

***The Goals and Objectives of Experiential Learning***

Student may choose to engage in one (or more) of a number of very different Experiential Learning Pathways depending on their interests, but there is a common set of Core Student Learning Outcomes, which are the same ‘across the board,’ and a common rubric is used to assess student learning in all Pathways.

Successful students are able to:

* Describe and reflect on the learning process
* Explore, evaluate and articulate personal and social values
* Integrate and apply academic skills to understanding practical experiences and problems found in our world

***Experiential Learning Pathways***

At present there are seven identified Experiential Learning Pathways at Nazareth College:

* Service Learning (course-based)
* Student Leadership
* Internships
* Co-curricular Service
* Educational Field Hours, Student Teaching, Practica & Clinicals
* Study Abroad
* Undergraduate Creative Activity, Research & Scholarship (CARS)

***EL Pathway Structure and Capturing Student Completion***

Each Pathway has its own leadership, specific structure, and student oversight. Nonetheless, all Pathways share a general structure insofar as they share certain Core Student Learning Outcomes. This general common structure is ensured because each EL Activity adheres to the best practices of Experiential Education as described by the National Society for Experiential Education (see below).

Students must fulfill the requirements of their chosen Pathway in order to satisfy their Core Curriculum Experiential Learning requirement. In addition, the EL Activity Leader ensures that students reflect on their experience, archive their reflections and other artifacts from their EL (if there are any) in the Core Portfolio in P@N, and assess this reflection using the common rubric.

Typically, in a course-based EL, successful completion of the course entails successful completion of the EL Requirement. Such courses will have an ‘EL attribute’ attached to them in the NazNet system that is tracked on students’ degree audits. In a non-credit-bearing EL activity, the Activity Leader will be trained to upload the names of students who have successfully completed the EL into the system.

***Experiential Learning Best Practices***

Consistent with Nazareth College’s definition, goals and objectives for this requirement, EL Pathways are intentional, involve preparedness and planning, are authentic, involve student reflection, are assessed and acknowledged. Following NSEE’s ‘Principles of Good Practice in Experiential Learning’ all EL Pathways at Nazareth College can demonstrate that they:

Are INTENTIONAL—It is clear from the onset why this experience is the chosen approach to learning & expected learning outcomes are delineated

Involve PREPAREDNESS & PLANNING—The knowledge/skills students will need beforehand are identified & there is a focus on measurable learning objectives. The evaluation process is clearly explained to students and how their grade (if there is one) and credit will be documented

Are AUTHENTIC—Students engage in experiences that have a real world context and/or are useful and meaningful in reference to an applied setting or situation.

Include REFLECTION—There are structured opportunities for critical analysis so that students can transform simple experience into a learning experience, integrating knowledge and experience to achieve new understandings and future actions

Provide FORMATIVE FEEDBACK—Students’ learning objectives and outcomes are monitored throughout the learning activity and they receive formative feedback so that they can adapt

EVALUATE THEMSELVES—Each EL Pathway has systematic procedures to document and refine initial goals and quality outcomes and to provide comprehensive data about the process. ACKNOWLEDGE student learning—EL Pathway leaders recognize learning and celebrate impact through reporting, documentation and sharing of accomplishments.

***Experiential Learning and the Core Curriculum***

Ideally, students will have engaged in a number of Experiential Learning opportunities while at Nazareth College. From these, they will choose the one that best fits with their Core Integrative Studies[[3]](#footnote-3) to be their ‘Exemplar’ EL (if more than one fits well, students may choose them all). If a student is not able to participate in an EL Pathway that has clear connections with their Integrative Studies, his/her ‘Exemplar’ EL should be chosen on the basis of connections with the major. In either case, the EL is integrated with students’ curricular education.

Students have an opportunity to think about their ‘Exemplar’ EL and how it relates to the rest of their education (core and/or major) in the Core Milestone Experience (CME). Students who have completed their EL before engaging in the Core Milestone Experience will, in the CME, reflect on this integration and the relationship between academic skills and knowledge and practical experience and problems. Students who have not yet completed their EL will, in the CME, ‘pre-reflect’ on this integration, and learn from other students about the Pathways and what is possible in each.

***Approval of EL Courses and Non-credit-bearing EL Activities***

Pathway Leaders (instructors or activity leaders) will complete an EL Proposal form and submit this form, along with required attachments, to the Experiential Learning Committee (through the Director of the Core Curriculum) for their review. Course-based and non-credit-bearing EL activities will have separate forms.

* For Spring courses, proposals are due in mid-August.
* For Fall courses, the deadline is early January.

Faculty and staff may offer a course or activity that fits the EL criteria, yet choose not to have it count as an EL for students.

Students transferring to Nazareth College may use credit-bearing EL activities from their prior institution(s) to satisfy the Nazareth College EL requirement. Transfer students may also petition to have non-credit-bearing experiences count. Likewise, Nazareth students may petition to have non-Nazareth co-curricular activities satisfy the requirement so long as the experience has occurred during their time as a student at Nazareth College. Petitions must include a reflection that is uploaded into P@N.

***Oversight of Experiential Learning***

Oversight of Experiential Learning will be conducted by the Experiential Learning Committee.

* Review of proposals for new Activities,
* Decision-making regarding logistical issues,
* Professional development for Pathway leadership (including development of successful Reflective prompts),
* Assessment, etc.

Membership includes Directors and Leaders of the various Pathways and the Director of the Core Curriculum.

Questions about EL should be directed to the Pathway Leaders first and then will be brought to the EL Committee as needed.

1. Itin, C. M. (1999). Reasserting the Philosophy of Experiential Education as a Vehicle for Change in the 21st Century. The Journal of Experiential Education, 22(2), 91-98. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Adapted from NYIT Experiential Learning and NSEE. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See ‘Characteristics of Integrative Studies’ for a full description of Integrative Studies and the Core Milestone Experience. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)