FYEE Project: First-Year Experiential Education in Large Classes at UBC Vancouver

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Part 2: Preliminary Findings

As part of the approved and funded "Advancing Education Renewal" (AER) project to identify, analyze and address key facilitators and barriers to engagement and teaching effectiveness of experiential education (EE) pedagogies for faculty members in UBC, research assistants, Assem Zhakysbay (she/her), Valeria Pérez (she/they) and Naomi Hudson (she/her), have created this report with the purpose of summarizing and analyzing some of the key findings from interviews and focus groups with UBC Arts faculty and students.

This report was written between May-July 2023 and is based on the findings from research conducted beginning in August 2022.

To access **Part 1** of this project, please see our **comprehensive literature review here.**

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1. Background and research questions

The First Year Experiential Education (FYEE) project began in 2022 as an "Advancing Education Renewal" project through the Office of the Provost and Vice-President Academic. It seeks to address strategy 11 of the UBC Strategic Plan, which aims to "facilitate sustained program renewal and improvements in teaching effectiveness." Over the past year, the FYEE team has engaged in research that seeks to identify the challenges and facilitators in the application of experiential education (EE) in large first-year classes in the Faculty of Arts at UBC Vancouver. The research methods primarily consisted of interviews with Arts faculty members and a focus group with upper-year sociology students.

This project has been ongoing since May 2022. The Summer of 2022 (May-August) primarily consisted of setting the grounds for data collection. This included performing an environment scan of instructors in the Faculty of Arts who taught experiential education, with emphasis on professors that taught either large or first-year courses (or both). It also included the production of a comprehensive literature review as well as an application to (and a subsequent approval from) the Behavioural Research Ethics Board (BREB).

The Autumn of 2022 (September-December) was focused almost exclusively on data collection in the form of interviews with 13 members of the Faculty of Arts, all of whom had experience designing and/or implementing experiential education initiatives in one or more of their courses. The Winter of 2023 (January-April) was largely dedicated to data analysis, including coding the interviews and beginning the drafting of a report on our preliminary findings. During this time, we also conducted a workshop with approximately 30 upper-year Sociology students to learn more about the student perspective of experiential education.

The literature review identified that more research needs to be conducted on the ways in which first-year courses can better prepare and scaffold students for upper-year experiential education practices, as well as on the inherent differences in the purpose of experiential education in first-year and upper-years. There seem to be no distinctions between first-year and upper-year experiential education in the literature, which makes the planning of experiential activities difficult for those implementing EE specifically in first-year. Many of the case studies and exercises described in the literature seem to be more catered toward smaller upper-year courses, which may not be suitable for introductory first-year courses. As such, more focus on the foundations built in first-year through the use of experiential education and on the reasons for including EE in first-year is required for a more in-depth and nuanced review. **This paper aims to inquire further into why EE is important in first-year courses and how it can better prepare students for EE in upper-years.** To do so, the paper aims to answer the following questions, keeping in mind the focus on experiential education in large first-year courses: (1)

What does/can experiential education (EE) look like in large first-year (FY) classes? (2) What is possible to achieve and experience through EE that is not possible with other pedagogical approaches? (3) How can first-year better prepare and scaffold students for 2-4th-year EE courses? (4) What prevents instructors from implementing EE in large FY classes? (5) What makes it possible to do EE in large first-year classes, and what motivates instructors to do so?

This paper builds on existing literature on experiential education by focusing specifically on the first-year experience, with a particular emphasis placed on EE in large first-year classes. It begins with an overview of the methodology used to generate the paper's findings. Subsequently, the paper will aim to answer each of the five aforementioned research questions through an analysis of the paper's key findings. It will conclude with a discussion of the implications of the findings and provide brief recommendations for future resources and research.

2. Methodology

We have conducted 13 semi-structured qualitative interviews with instructors from the Faculty of Arts at the University of British Columbia who had incorporated experiential education in either first-year or large (>50 students) courses. Participants were identified through any mention of experiential education in their faculty biographies on the department website. All departments in the Faculty of Arts were part of the initial environment scan, with each instructor interviewed representing a different department in our study. Though only five instructors had included experiential education in their first-year courses, all of the instructors provided valuable information regarding experiential education in large courses and the scaffolding of experiential education into upper-year courses. The interviews were analyzed by qualitative coding.

Additionally, we sought to gain students' perspectives on experiential education by conducting a focus group with upper-year sociology students. The workshop engaged approximately 30 students, who were asked to reflect on their experiences with experiential education throughout their degree. Their insights are expanded upon further in the second key finding, which answers "What is possible to achieve and experience through EE that is not possible with other pedagogical approaches?" question.

3. Key findings

a) What does/can experiential education (EE) look like in first-year large classes?

When examining instructor understandings of experiential education (EE) in the Faculty of Arts at UBC, the responses varied from either describing EE in very broad terms or focusing on a specific part of EE. Overwhelmingly, most of the instructors interviewed *understood EE as a form of community-engaged learning and/or as an experience that provides real-world*

applications. Rather than using the term 'experiential education,' those instructors referred to their teaching practices as "community engagement," "learning as embedded within the material realities of the world around us," and "learning [that] involves getting students out of the classroom and doing stuff in the broader community." The instructors' understanding of experiential education reflects key themes in the literature, *emphasizing the difficulty of defining the concept due to its variety in practices, terminology, and definitions*. This finding is congruent with the 2020 Grain and Gerhardt report on experiential education at UBC.

Yet, when looking at the examples of EE in first-year courses described by instructors, they consist of mainly *strategy-specific activities* that have been geared towards first-year learning. Strategy specific, in this context, involves activities that develop specific skills (for example, problem-solving, language learning, interpersonal skills, technical skills etc.), project-based learning, experiments, and hands-on activities that vary across departments. The following quotes provide a few examples of first-year experiential activities that have been described by instructors throughout the Faculty of Arts. Though these examples fall within the broader categories of place-based, immersion-based, community-based, student-led, and virtual types of experiential education, they all describe smaller "bite-size" activities that the instructors deemed suitable for first-year learning - which, in this sense, can be considered to be strategy specific. Notably, all of the activities described were short-term and reflected a key common approach in experiential education that involves the instructor intentionally designing a learning activity that allows for authentic experiences, educator-engaged feedback, and student reflection (Kofinas & Tsay, 2021; Mantai & Huber, 2021). For example:

> *"When they start off as beginners, when they learn how to use language to interact with the city, methods of transportation and all of that, they make their way into the city. So it's built up in the unit. Then, the project at the end becomes an experiential learning for us and experiential exercise for us. So we ask them to go out and do a movie about their methods of transportation. It can be on campus, they can be on the bicycle and they can tell what they see."*

> *"And then we organize the session "repas multiculturelle". So everyone comes, everyone from the course - that's 16 sections - and colleagues and peers, and they come, and they have to explain then what the meal is about, the dishes, about where it comes from. Why did they choose that and then they reflect on why we are there. So that's some examples."*

> *"We have an assignment where students are asked to identify Chinese signage around campus or in their life, like in their grocery shopping ... when we ask them to try to find Chinese signage, they go to places like this and find things that they actually interact with in Chinese that they never thought about in terms of Chinese."*

“..one thing that I do encourage students to do is to actually think about where Spanish is around them. So I'll give them little assignments at the 100 level where they're maybe going to commercial drive and ordering a coffee in Spanish at Habana, which is a restaurant where there are many waiters and waitresses that speak Spanish or going downtown to a Mexican restaurant that I know has a staff of native Spanish speakers and asking them to order their food and drinks in Spanish. So little experiences that get them that basically build awareness of where the languages and cultures that they're learning about actively are located in their immediate context.”

It should be noted that the emphasis placed on reflection is prominent in other examples of experiential learning projects that took students outside of the classroom. For example:

"We did a project that was called something like Global Stories of Belonging, which was getting students to go out in their own communities wherever they were, think about the place that they belonged in their city and write about that either critically or in different ways about the idea of belonging to their place"

"They go on a walking tour of the Downtown Eastside in Vancouver, which is the history of the growth of Vancouver around the Canadian Pacific Railway. So it's self-guided through an app. They go with one or two other friend classmates, and it's an audio and then they have little quizzes along the way, and they engage with the environment and then they do a reflective essay, photo essay on that."

“They have reflection assignments where they have to write a kind of a diet journal reflecting on pretty much every episode of interaction they have with the work and with the organization. And that's just a reflection is always good, right, to really question what you're thinking and really find evidence to back up the ideas you're coming up with.”

Examples of community-engaged experiential education in first-year revolved around making contact with various community partners, whether it be through short meetings organized by instructors, having guest speakers from communities visit students in class or producing material that would be useful to community partners. Those instructors describe experiential education activities in first-year as being stepping stones to interact more broadly and deeper with communities later on in upper-years. For example:

“And then we also have another colleague, [REDACTED], who has a program called [REDACTED] in our unit that sort of scaffolds experiential learning across the Spanish discipline. And so she organizes events that connect the community to our students or she builds partnerships with local or international organizations where our students can use translation skills to produce something that is of value for, you know, for the world,

really. So she did a project that basically translated materials for women about breast cancer awareness and things like that into Spanish. So producing materials that have staying power and that are relevant for community members and things like that."

"Our intro courses are designed where you get 3 hours of lecture a week and then you also have one hour of discussion. So I have the students see they can either opt to do the discussion where they write a research paper or they can do a community engagement learning option, in which case they work for 1 to 2 hours at a community organization in Vancouver."

"It's a monthly speaker series where we bring someone in from the community they can talk to all CAP (Coordinated Arts Program) students [which] are invited to attend, and instructors are invited to work with the speaker and their topic in any way that they want in any capacity."

As some instructors described, experiential education, especially experiences that involve more meaningful interactions with other people, requires student preparation. This is most evident in the following example of a community-engaged experiential activity:

"We asked them to actually go into a classroom filled with native speakers of Chinese and randomly pick someone to conduct a little conversation. While we prepared this, we had cheat sheets. We've done a lot of preparation before they went into it. And students reported that the hardest part is actually going to that classroom because… even though UBC has so many students from a Chinese-speaking background, they've never approached one. Throughout their learning, even if they have a classmate in another course, they've never spoken to them using Chinese."

While the experience was intended to immerse students into the language, the instructor describes prior student preparation in the form of "cheat sheets." Similarly, another instructor described experiential education activities as part of "training" the students and developing valuable skills, before they are able to participate in more intensive experiential education, such as co-op. Notably, examples of experiential education described by the instructors interviewed excluded more extensive projects that required deeper engagement, more time commitment and higher skill levels (e.g. international experiences, field trips, interviews and more direct involvement with community partners), which were prevalent in upper-year EE examples. Instructors rationalized the level of complexity in their experiential education activities in first-year as being appropriate for first-year students who are new to the university setting. For example:

"You don't want to throw a first-year student into like a co-op situation if they have no training, right? And you can do, like there are lots of pedagogical interventions in a first-year classroom where you can spend like your hour and a half long class doing

really valuable things like role-playing exercises. Or you can do like theatre games or you can, you know, there are really cool, interesting ways to teach that are experiential, that don't involve any external anybody external to the classroom."

"So experiential learning right away in a first-year course can start from I will develop that later, but it can be very simple. But then it increases in complexity throughout your two, three and three and four. So immersing them in projects right away and in their first year, mostly collaborative projects so that they are not alone to brainstorm or they have to do something on campus"

In this way, many instructors viewed the purpose of experiential education in first-year courses as "training" and "preparation," either for upper-year EE experiences or for the real world, where students learn valuable skills and collaborate with their peers. Most activities were deeply embedded in real-world applications that allowed students to think, reflect, and apply their knowledge to real-world experiences. Instructors in our study strategically chose experiential activities that they deemed appropriate for first-year students in order to build the foundation for their learning experiences later on. Instructors excluded any elaborate EE experiences that wouldn't have been appropriate for first-year learning since there seems to be a recognition that one "can't have the same kind of reciprocation as you would… with someone in first year as you would with an upper-level student." At the same time, the instructors' choice of activities also reflected some of the challenges they faced with conducting experiential education in large classes (as most 100-level courses in the Faculty of Arts at UBC consist of 50+ students), which will be explored in the later sections of this report.

While the literature review identified a gap in knowledge on the inherent differences in the purpose of experiential education in first-year and upper years, instructors in this study purposefully distinguished between experiential education activities suitable for first-year students. As such, a wider discussion on scaffolding experiential education and gradually increasing the scope of EE opportunities available for students as they proceed throughout their degrees is needed. This conversation will be expanded upon in our third key finding.

b) What is possible to achieve and experience through EE that is not possible with other pedagogical approaches?

Through professors' interviews and upper-year sociology students' focus groups, it was possible to gain some perspective on the benefits of experiential education over other methods of learning, specifically in terms of its pedagogical advantages and the benefits of promoting equity. This section will be divided into two main subsections. First, a brief analysis of instructors' perspectives on the pedagogical **benefits** of experiential education will be provided, as well as **the feedback** they have heard from students that have participated in EE and the ways in which EE can be used to promote Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. Subsequently, we will analyze the

findings of a student focus group that we conducted in an upper-level sociology class and discuss students' perspectives on the benefits of EE.

Instructors' perspectives

When asking UBCV faculty about the difference between EE and lecture-based courses, most responses reflect the findings in our literature review regarding the development of specific knowledge and skills that can be "generalizable, [useful, and easily integrated] to other aspects of their education" and their lives (Blunsdon et al., 2003). Our interviews with instructors allowed us to identify the specific skills and knowledge, such as technical writing, interpersonal skills, communication skills and intercultural competencies, that EE can equip students with.

Skill development to real-world applications of EE

By far, the most commonly cited benefit of experiential education by faculty is the diverse set of skills that students are able to develop through EE opportunities. These skills can broadly be divided into two categories; hard (or technical) and soft skills. With regards to the development of hard skills acquired during EE, instructors indicated that they are dependent on the subject taught. For instance, when asked about the skills that students are able to develop in their upper-level EE, a political science professor noted how:

> *"[creating] a policy memo for something that [a community partner] is trying to pitch to government actors… [writing] a grant application [and], fundraising…"*

are some good examples of skills needed in a political science career that sometimes are not acquired in lecture-based courses. Similarly, another professor explained how the general development of hard skills through EE could greatly help students in their future career endeavours:

> *"...there is a lot of evidence to suggest that students who have experiential education opportunities in university have higher employability outcomes, have higher salary outcomes after the university degrees because of…the practical skills that [they] get when [they] do some of these opportunities."*

However, benefits on students' future careers and employment (which are the most used evidence to justify the implementation of EE) are just one of the many ways that EE ties knowledge and skills learned in a course into bigger real-world applications. Many of these real-world applications that faculty talked about are centred around civic-mindedness and recognizing the connections between one's personal experience, the university, and the

community at large. It is in this part of the conversation where soft skills, or emotional intelligence skills (by far the most commonly noted skills that students obtain during EE in our interviews), take the central role in what is possible to achieve with EE in comparison to other types of learning. When asked about the overall goals of experiential education, one instructor noted that through EE:

> *"...[instructors] want [their] students to think about the relationship between the university and the broader world."*

For example, another professor spoke specifically on the development of interpersonal skills during group work between students and/or community partners, stating that:

> *"... a big [skill], because [students] have done experiential education often in pairs or teams..is interpersonal communication skills and project planning. So written communication skills, oral communication skills and thinking about [one's] audience [are some specific examples of this]... [Students start thinking if they are] just talking to [their] team members or are [they] talking to a partner who has a different orientation and maybe different background and language?"*

In this case, in addition to general interpersonal skills, this professor is speaking specifically to the intercultural competencies that can develop from engaging in EE. By implementing EE, students start to think about how they can use what they learn outside the university as well as what knowledge they can acquire beyond the boundaries of the classroom. This is what some professors referred to and explained as the development of civic-mindedness. One instructor stated that experiential education could:

> *"set [students] up to be civically engaged and community-engaged throughout their career[s] ...[beyond UBC]"*

Another professor stated that EE could help students:

> *"think of learning as embedded within the material realities of the world around us, it will then make a much more conscientious and concerned and and activated students and sort of civic-minded, civic-minded students that that kind of exposure in a first-year course is going to make all the difference to that student's academic career and probably help or motivate them to seek out more courses like this later on."*

Moreover, when discussing the impact of EE in the creation of the student's personal experience, the concept of positionality ("beyond a simple intellectual exercise") was highly mentioned by most professors. This ties into another pedagogical benefit that was identified by professors; experiential education can serve to challenge one's way of thinking to a point where confusing the student can be instrumental in their university development. For instance, a professor mentioned how:

> *"Confusion is what we want university students to experience because they need to understand that…they should never have, just like one dominant paradigm of how to view the world. They need to understand the options on the table and then come up with the pair and choose the paradigm or the base, the values that suit them."*

There are many ways in which students can explore this confusion or challenge their ways of thinking through experiential education, including through:

> *"...[challenging] their ideas… in some way, their preconceived biases" by prompt[ing] students to think a little bit more deeply about their own engagement with certain kinds of topics."*

> *"...[preparing] students adequately to start thinking about their role in the community, to think about their position, their privileges, potentially, the biases that they may bring into the classroom to think about what it means to be a responsible community member, but also [for students] coming into a community to learn and respect the expertise of community members, to not come in with a saviour complex, and then in turn, to actually engage in this project."*

Finally, a commonly cited pedagogical benefit of EE is the way that it engages students to stay motivated in their classes by creating a more academically enriching experience that results in a more memorable type of education. One professor, when comparing the memorability of more experiential classes versus non-EE courses, stated that:

> *[speaking about non-EE courses] "[students] don't register [the content] too much. But if you presented this gendered approach, for example, or 'the visibility for everyone approach'…they would remember because they can relate to that."*

Especially in connection to first-year experiences, a professor explained how EE courses:

> *"equip students with the knowledge and the tools to retain or maintain that engagement past first-year, sort of like get them at the beginning so that they're attuned and aware of these of these issues and of these modes of learning and doing throughout their time at UBC."*
>
> *"[In general, EE] make[s] much more conscientious and concerned and activated students… [where] that kind of exposure in a first-year course is going to make all the difference to that student's academic career and probably help or motivate them to seek out more courses like this later on."*

In this case, by using an approach that students were able to apply to their everyday lives, they were able to better retain the course content.

Student's perspective

Much of our data on students' perspectives of experiential education comes from a focus group that we conducted with approximately 30 upper-year sociology students. In the workshop, the students (who were also studying experiential education in their class at the time) were asked to reflect on their own experiences with EE throughout their degrees at UBCV. When asked about its pedagogical benefits, students highlighted how EE could solve the negative aspects of "normal" lectures. For some students, lecture-based classes are more restrictive in terms of the type of material they study, the space where learning happens, and how learning is evaluated. Instead, EE allows them to have more choices on how and what they learn, which makes the process more accessible, interesting, and fun.

Furthermore, students discussed the benefits of the inclusivity aspects of EE. Largely, as a result of EE's allowances for students to draw upon their own experiences, students felt as though EE allows more non-Eurocentric and non-cis male-centric voices and perspectives to be highlighted and taken more into consideration in the process of knowledge-making inside and outside the classroom. For students, the implementation of EE works as a way to unveil and shift the existing power dynamics in academia. Similarly to what a professor noted, EE can be

> *"quite critical to decolonizing the classroom space" where "the instructor is [used to be perceived as] the sole authority of information."*

With EE, courses are more easily adaptable to different learning styles than traditional lecture-based education.

Another interesting benefit of EE that was mentioned by students was the ability to make and learn from mistakes. Students felt as though experiential education allowed them to more

easily experiment with course content and take risks that they normally would not take in more traditional educational settings. To that effect, one student referred to experiential education at UBC as the "university version of preschool," meaning that experiential education gives students the ability to play around with the skills and knowledge they learn, even if it results in them making some mistakes.

In the long run, similar to what professors shared about EE being a memorable experience, students talked about how EE, through all these different benefits, even though it might slow down the process of learning, make students more able to remember what they learn in a long term basis instead of temporary memorizing things for a paper or an exam like they usually do when doing a lecture-based course. Overall, according to students, EE does not have to be the only way of learning, but it complements and fills in the gaps of other pedagogical approaches to better prepare for their experience in UBCV, careers, and other important aspects of their lives.

c) How can first-year better prepare and scaffold students for 2-4th year EE courses?

One key objective of this project has been to find out the extent to which first-year experiential education can help prepare students to take advantage of such opportunities later on in their degrees. Our findings seem to indicate that exposing students to experiential education as early as possible can help them build the strong foundations necessary to take full advantage of the more extensive hands-on educational opportunities that they may encounter in the final years of their undergraduate degrees. Experiential education can serve as an effective introduction to their discipline of choice, teach students skills and knowledge that will be more easily retained throughout the course of their degree and help students build a strong sense of identity as members of the wider academic community.

First year experiential education as an introduction to the discipline

Many of the interviewed professors, regardless of whether they teach experiential education at the first-year level or not, stated that a student's first year of their degree should serve as an introduction to their academic discipline of choice. Of the professors who do employ experiential education in the first year, the general consensus seems to be that experiential education is an effective way to expose students to a discipline and introduce the skills needed to succeed in an academic environment. One professor, in particular, stated that first-year experiential education could serve as a way to:

> *"...introduce [first-year students] to the discipline, but also to introduce them to…critical thinking, academic integrity in being an active, independent learner,*

taking responsibility for their own learning and their own scheduling and timetable and assignments."

Additionally, students entering their first year of university right after secondary school often face learning curves in the transitionary period from a high school student to a university student. Some professors who do not teach experiential education at the first-year level state that this prevents them from introducing their first-year students to experiential education early on. They expressed that first-year students often lack the skills and maturity needed to handle experiential education in the same way that third and fourth-year students can. However, other professors state that first-year experiential education can be crucial in helping students through that transitionary period and equipping them with the tools they need to succeed in upper-year experiential courses (and in upper years more generally).

Finally, as previously mentioned, instructors expressed the belief that students who participate in experiential education are often able to more easily retain the information learned from that experience. This would mean that first-year students who participate in experiential education would not only be exposed to the skills and knowledge needed to succeed in the latter years of their degree, but they would also be more likely to remember that information for those future years.

First year experiential education and identity formation

Instructors stated that first-year experiential education could help students feel more secure in their identities as members of a wider academic community. As stated in the previous section, first-year students can find the transition from high school to university to be rather difficult and in addition to building skills, instructors believe that experiential education can help students ground themselves in their new environment. When asked what an ideal first-year experiential education opportunity should look like, an instructor stated that:

"... ideally…experiential learning for the first year would almost be something that's very similar to [the] Jump Start program. It would be a bridge to connect first-year student[s] to the university. And…by letting them experience what the university is like, this may be by learning…. to explore… different parts of campus, but also to experience different roles. As a first-year student, we usually think about experiencing the physical aspect of things, but not so much about experiencing different identities."

This instructor then goes on to state that:

"... ideally [during] the first year…experiential learning experience, [students] would be exposed to some of the identit[ies] that they may assume in the future as a

mini researcher, as a mini employee, like a staff member, or even as a mini lecturer in the classroom…."

In this case, the identity formation is twofold; students are more readily exposed to the tangible resources and opportunities available to them at UBC, which helps to solidify their identities as UBC students, but they are also exposed to the wider possibilities that are available to them in both academic and professional worlds, which help them to establish their identities as young academics and working adults.

Experiential education in upper years

When asked about the difference between experiential education in lower years and upper years, most professors agreed that third and fourth-year experiential education involves a much deeper engagement with theoretical concepts as well as a much more significant contribution to the discipline (often a tangible deliverable to a community partner). As such, full and meaningful participation in these opportunities requires students to possess a certain degree of maturity, self-confidence and prior skills and knowledge. As mentioned earlier, first-year can be an ideal time to introduce students to experiential education so that they may undergo the growth necessary to take full advantage of the more in-depth opportunities they may encounter later in their undergraduate journeys.

d) What prevents instructors from implementing EE in large first-year courses?

The barriers that prevent instructors from implementing experiential education in large first-year courses can largely be divided into two broad categories; institutional or university-specific barriers and equity-related barriers. The structure of the university tends to favour traditional lecture-based styles of learning (especially in first and second year) can make it difficult for professors to implement EE into their large first-year courses, especially when professors and students occupy a variety of marginalized intersections. This section will begin with addressing the institutional barriers to the implementation of EE, followed by a discussion of the equity-related barriers experienced by both instructors and students.

Institutional Barriers

Resources

In our research on the institutional barriers to the implementation of experiential education in large first-year classes, two main categories of obstacles emerged: a lack of resources and the overall structure of classes at UBC. We will begin by addressing the first identified barrier.

Instructors identified two main types of resources to which they lack access; financial and human resources. With regard to financial resources, one of the most commonly cited concerns was a lack of sustainable funding for certain experiential education opportunities. Instructors pointed to the temporariness of grant funding as a hindrance to the incorporation of experiential education into their classes. Moreover, because of its "messy" nature, as a professor explained, EE "falls under almost every person's and office portfolio at UBCV." However, this is the main reason why EE "has fallen through the cracks for a long time because no one Vice-President Academic portfolio [wants to] see it as their responsibility" because of the amount of effort and financial resources this would need.

Additionally, similar to the findings from the 2020 Grain and Gerhard report, professors repeatedly pointed out that there is a lack of monetary rewards from the university for the implementation of experiential education, despite its many pedagogical benefits. Specifically, this can disproportionately affect marginalized scholars, who are more likely to engage in experiential education. As the implementation of experiential education pedagogy is not valued differentially from any other pedagogy, the additional time and multidimensional labour inputs provided by professors, is not compensated. This lack of compensation can be seen in course load allocations, financial compensation (for lectures or sessionals) and in the promotion and tenure process. The failure to acknowledge & compensate for increased inputs, particularly for marginalized faculty members, discourage them from engaging in EE at UBCV (Grain and Gerhard, 2020). A professor expanded on this, saying that:

> *"...experiential education is not typically rewarded monetarily or in terms of career progression at UBC and in a lot of institutions. So again, you have with this picture I painted, you have the perpetuation of privilege, where the… white males,[and] cis scholars …who are in the research stream, tenured positions who don't [care] about teaching in experiential ways."*

These concerns will be expanded upon further in our discussion on equity-related barriers.

Human resources were the other main resource-related barrier mentioned by professors. Almost all instructors that discussed a lack of human resources expressed the desire for more

teaching assistants, especially in larger first-year classes. One professor, when asked about the factors that prevent them from implementing EE in their large first-year classes, stated that:

> *"... [professors] don't have the… bandwidth to do [EE] for [lower level] psychology classes when there are so many students…We simply don't have the TA support…[they] teach 400 students a term… [They] don't have the bandwidth and foresight to look through four hundred-something reflections repeatedly over the course of the term."*

The concerns of this particular professor also center around the overall structure of their first-year classes, concerns that will be addressed in a later section.

Class structures

The second main institutional barrier to the implementation of EE in large first-year classes centred around the structure of classes. Broadly speaking, these hindrances can be divided into three main concerns; class sizes, time constraints and assessment. The issue of class sizes started to be addressed in the previous subsection on resources. As found in our literature review, large first-year classes often have hundreds of students, which makes it logistically quite difficult to do more labour-intensive experiential education (especially when there is a lack of TA support).

Regarding time constraints, certain professors indicated in their interviews that the traditional three-credit, semester-long course structure does not always allow adequate time for experientially-focused classes. For first years specifically, professors referred to the rigidity of traditional timetable scheduling, which is usually a Monday, Wednesday and Friday 50 mins class at a time. Some of these professors expressed the belief that year-long, six-credit courses would be ideal for experiential education first-year courses. A good example of this is some of the classes offered by the UBC Coordinated Arts Program that take two consecutive terms to be completed. For students, time constraints usually relate to EE courses not fitting into their schedules with other types of courses. Some of them commented that due to the nature of EE, it requires more time commitment than normal classes, which might stop the student from wanting to take the course or do well in their assignments. Moreover, students add that sometimes taking EE courses might even delay graduation for some.

Another important thing that students referred to was the difficulty in finding and identifying courses that include a EE methodology when deciding the structure of their timetables. One of the main problems is the inability to look at this type of information (if the course has EE content) in their Student Service Center account (SSC), as well as the difficulty in checking the course syllabus with time to see how it goes beyond lecture-based standards. Moreover, sometimes EE courses are not always advertised on social media, which leads to a

lack of accessibility to find these types of opportunities. The usual options to find EE courses are based on word-of-mouth information or accessing websites like *Rate My Professors*. In general, students mentioned how, unfortunately, taking an EE course can be a hit or miss for them. In the case of first-year students, a professor mentioned how

> *"There is a real lack of communication to first-year students around what is possible for them [in their undergraduate education]"* when making decisions.

Finally, a very common concern for both professors and students, with regard to class structures, centred around the assessment of EE. Students explained how uncertainty surrounding how marking is going to happen while doing EE (especially the first year) could prevent students from taking the risks needed to engage deeply in course assignments. Some students shared examples of being excited about the output for an EE assignment and then receiving a bad grade back. Even though EE offers more flexibility in the type of course assignments (to the extent that students can create their own method of showing how and what they learned in class), students felt that the general focus on grades culture created a lot of anxiety and friction when facing an unknown and different type of marking, in particular when working on groups.

When reflecting on the challenges they face in assessing their student's work in experientially-oriented classes, one professor stated that:

> *"[They] see challenges both in the design of how to assess students' experiential learning and then also in the actual grading process itself, which is really time-consuming. So [in] the design piece, [they] feel like it's contradictory to be 'like have this experience and find all this unique meaning, but then I'm going to grade you on it.' And so [they] haven't really been able to reconcile that in a way that [they're] happy with. And [they] think that students also find it kind of frustrating. So [they] would like some more in different approaches to designing that assessment piece, and [they] would like those supports to be specific to [one's] level of the students and also the discipline or at least the faculty."*

In this case, this professor is struggling to reconcile the fact that they have to apply a traditional style of assessment to an experiential class while also not wanting their assessment to potentially invalidate the experiences of the students in their class. They state that different assessment approaches are needed in different academic contexts, something that non-experiential education often struggles to make room for. Other professors also expressed this concern, stating that standardization in learning outcomes, though necessary in certain situations, can make experiential education difficult to implement overall.

Equity Barriers

Instructor-related equity issues

As previously stated, instructors from marginalized backgrounds tend to take on much of the responsibility of implementing experiential education. This is consistent with the Grain and Gerhard report that states that "women and- often racialized and Indigenous scholars- tend to take on the additional workload of EE." (Grain and Gerhard, 2020, pg.9). Anecdotal evidence also suggests that these instructors are less likely to have the job security of their more privileged counterparts (pg.12). As stated by one professor,

> *"The faculty members often who are doing the most incredible work in experiential education, not always, but often are the young, sorry, junior scholars who are in precariously employed type faculty roles. Maybe they're not tenure track; maybe they're not. Maybe they're just contract based. They are often women scholars; they are often racialized scholars, queer and gender nonconforming scholars."*

Given the labour-intensive nature of experiential education and the fact that the marginalized scholars who often implement experiential education, may not be in tenure track positions, there is a very apparent inequity in the division of the burden of the implementation of EE. Individuals who are in lecturer roles, or are alternatively precariously employed, have a higher teaching load to ensure their own financial stability.

Student-related inequities

Interviewed professors, when asked about equity-related barriers in the implementation of experiential education, largely discussed the hindrances that students face when deciding to take an experientially-focused class. Professors identified accessibility issues, time constraints and responsibilities outside of school, economic constraints, language, and cultural barriers as obstacles that students face that may dissuade them from taking part in experiential education opportunities. There seems to be an overlap in the barriers facing both students and professors in the implementation of experiential education (e.g. identity-related barriers, time and financial constraints), suggesting that many of these concerns can be addressed simultaneously. However, it is important to note that while many of these issues can be ameliorated through action at the university level, the equity-related issues faced by both students and professors are issues affecting society at large and would likely require addressing from forces outside of UBC.

When asking students about the type of inequities they encounter while taking EE courses, they also referred to the unequal weight on students that have jobs or commitments outside of school as well as commuting times when EE is conducted outside of class time,

including instructors' office hours. Moreover, a student explained how you not only need financial capital to have time to do EE but also the need of social capital to maintain the interest of faculty in your process. For example, a few students referred to the need for social capital when they go through EE due to the higher need to talk with professors to receive better guidance and feedback. This same social capital is needed when navigating the institution in search of EE opportunities, which, as mentioned before, is already a problem for students (specifically first-year students) due to the lack of mechanisms and platforms to inform and identify courses with EE.

Another important contribution to the equity conversation was around reflection activities, which were referred to, by both professors and students, as a constant and principal component of EE. For students, specifically marginalized students, some professors do not realize that EE reflections related to inequalities can sometimes be a lot to process. Due to the nature of reflection, where students can weave course content and activities to their past experiences and life in general, some students feel that, when presented with a reflection assignment, it was expected for them to talk about their personal details and work from a trauma perspective because as they share more personal information professors tend to give higher grades. Students highlighted that their level of trust and confidence to share in their reflections also depends on the relations of power between professors and students. Even though awareness of positionality is one of the benefits that EE brings to students, students mentioned that professors should also consider their own positionality when grading reflective work while using a trauma-informed approach.

e) What makes it possible to do EE in large first-year classes? What motivates instructors to do EE in large first-year courses?

In order to understand how instructors can be best supported, it is important to note some of the facilitators that either motivate, support, or might facilitate instructors in the design, development, and execution of experiential education. The facilitators mostly revolved around institutional and social factors, as well as some of the key pedagogical benefits of EE that instructors have identified. This section will first **identify some of the motivators** and **existing factors that help facilitate EE, specifically in large first-year** courses. Then, **suggestions and recommendations** for resources and other support systems described by instructors will be discussed in order to understand the next steps for improvement.

Institutional facilitators and suggestions

Class structure

When asking professors what make or think will make implementing EE run smoother in large first-year classes, faculty indicated that, in general, it is important to have a clear learning objective (in the syllabus or given in class) that answers students' questions about why they are doing specific EE activities aside from being fun or "looking good" in a resume. Moreover, they explained the importance for professors to acknowledge that their students are just beginning their learning and places in their disciplines and recognize that students come from various backgrounds and thus will need different types of accommodations to get involved in EE. In terms of assessment, a professor shared how when creating assignments, they think:

> *"How I would have benefited as a student, and so on…I try and turn those [thoughts] into assignments, experiences, or pieces of my courses"*

Another essential approach for assignments shared by professors was making EE activities optional. This might help both students and any other community partners the class is working with. However, for large first-year classes, most faculty indicated that they "discourage" the idea of students working directly with organizations. Instead, as mentioned at the beginning of this report, they prefer (bite-sized) activities that expose students to something small or specific, and then, instead of acting on it (or being a more immersive interaction), they will get them to deeply reflect around that small activity and share back their experiences with the class; which at the end also turns out to be more scalable later on.

Aside from starting small projects to introduce and test how EE might work in a large first-year class (before designing an entire course around EE), professors referred to time as one of the aspects that have helped them implement EE in their courses. Having the chance to teach a full-year class (two terms) has made a huge difference for some professors. For example, a professor that has taught EE in first-year classes explained how:

> *A "six-credit [(two terms)] course allowed us the time and space to establish a firm foundation on which to build and for students to slowly accrue these kinds of skills and consideration that are involved in engaging with especially vulnerable community members."*

In this case, the two-term course allowed first-year students to establish the foundations to get a bit more involved and confident when working with community-engagement opportunities, or simply deeper reflective learning in non-community engaged activities. On the other hand, for another professor, when faculty needs to decide the amount of time to give to an EE component in class that is just a one-term 3 credit course, they describe how professors:

> *"Should treat…[EE] like it's a text like it's a book, and that's how much space it should take up in the syllabus, and that's how much space it should take up in the students' life."*

Resources and allies

When talking about essential ways to facilitate the implementation of EE, instructors repeatedly mentioned the need for undergraduate and graduate teaching assistant support during and outside class as well as the right set of tools to incorporate and explore EE. For some instructors, TAs would need to accompany professors from the preparation phase to end-of-term evaluations when focus groups or interviews can be made to analyze the impact of EE. According to professors, the support of the "heads of schools and head of each department" could be translated into creating specific job positions for the assistance of EE in large first-year courses. Moreover, professors explained that when planning a EE course component, it is also important to know where and what type of tools are available. These tools might look like specific apps or licenses as well as literature to communicate to students the idea and importance of EE.

Professors also explained that another major source of support to implement EE in their courses is the collaboration from other offices and organizations at UBCV. For instance, the Center for Community-Engaged Learning was mentioned several times by different professors, as well as the Office of Regional and International Community Engagement, Arts ISIT, and the Centre for Teaching, Learning and Technology (CTLT). However, these valuable collaborations also include an additional workload for the instructors.

Workload recognition

Some professors also indicated a desire for their work to be institutionally recognized in the form of monetary bonuses, awards and other miscellaneous forms of recognition. The Village (described below) would provide professors with the acknowledgement that they desire for the immense labour that often goes into the implementation of experiential education.

Social support

Most professors explained that many of the challenges they face when trying to implement EE are rooted in the isolation (or lack of a systematic overview of teaching) that they are pushed to teach in their departments, specifically when implementing EE. Faculty expressed how nice it would be to have a space "where to talk with other instructors about what they're doing to see examples of how other first-year instructors are doing [EE, and see] who can support [them]." For example, a professors explains how having a supportive community of colleagues to learn from has been vital for them to implement EE

The Village

When asked about both the social and institutional facilitators that help in the design and execution of experiential education opportunities, almost all instructors alluded to the need for a network of support, a network that we have affectionately named "The Village." The Village includes other experiential educators that can share knowledge and resources, administrative support for the execution of experiential education, mainly in the form of human resources such as Teaching Assistants and Academic Assistants, as well as support from offices and organizations across UBC, such as the Office for Regional and International Community Engagement and the UBC Centre for Community Engaged Learning.

4. Discussion and Future Resources Needed

Implications of our findings

Overall, experiential education presents many pedagogical benefits for students. Still, its incorporation in classes can be rather cumbersome for instructors, especially since the instructors that take the most initiative in implementing EE often face increased barriers related to the marginalized positions from which they are teaching. We will conclude our paper with a list of recommendations based on our key findings for additional resources to make EE more accessible for both professors and students.

Resources for instructors

As mentioned previously, a lack of human support in the design and implementation of experiential education was one of the most commonly cited barriers faced by professors who wish to incorporate more EE into their classes. Thus, we recommend that professors interested in EE have access to more Teaching and Academic Assistants that can help them with the creation and execution of EE. Since these assistants will also be students themselves, this would provide these students with experiential opportunities of their own. Additionally, instructors noted that having a network of support from other professors interested in EE is a major facilitator in the implementation of EE. As such, we recommend that UBC have more opportunities for these educators to connect with one another, including through conferences, mailing lists and fellowship opportunities.

Another major area of concern for instructors was the assessment of EE. Grading in experiential education can be a source of anxiety for both professors and students alike. We recommend that resources be developed that can help professors (especially those who are new to EE) navigate how to assess EE in an educational system that prioritizes traditional

lecture-based learning. This can be done through a variety of mediums, including workshops, professional development courses and/or written material. Beyond information on grading, these resources could include information on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Access in EE, addressing how to make EE more accessible for students with varying accessibility needs, how to make safe spaces for students and how to include DEI in course content.

Finally, professors expressed a desire for more institutional recognition for the work they do in experiential education. This could come in the form of monetary recognition (e.g. bonuses/supplement implementation funds for professors who incorporate EE into their courses), teaching awards for EE professors, having the incorporation of EE count towards one's consideration for tenure and including questions on EE incorporation in student evaluations.

Resources for Students

Our key findings indicated that there are many barriers that prevent students from taking full advantage of the opportunities for experiential education that are available to them, namely awareness, financial and time constraints. To address the former concern, we recommend that lower or no-cost EE opportunities be made available to all students, as well as provide more robust subsidies for larger-scale, more expensive opportunities (such as Go Global) for students who otherwise would not be able to afford them. The issue of time constraints affects students that have responsibilities outside of school, which disproportionately affects marginalized students. As such, we recommend that UBC include more 6-credit, year-long EE courses, in line with recommendations from our interviewed professors. This would allow the course content to be less compressed, meaning that less work needs to be done outside of class, which would be beneficial to both students and professors alike.

Limitations of our Study and Recommendations for Future Research

In our research, we focused primarily on the perspective of professors, as our goal was to look at the facilitators and barriers to the implementation of experiential education. However, as was made clear by this study, professors are not the only ones responsible for the design and execution of EE; Teaching Assistants, Academic Assistants, community partners and campus organizations all play a significant role in the incorporation of EE both inside and outside of the lecture hall. As such, it may be beneficial for future research to include more of these perspectives.

Another limitation of our study is that many of the instructors that we interviewed did not teach experiential education in first-year classes. Of the ones who did fall into this category,

there was an overrepresentation of professors from cohort-based programs with smaller class sizes, such as language instruction courses and CAP. Given the many barriers to teaching EE in larger first-year classes, this limitation may be rather difficult to overcome in the near future.

Finally, though this study was designed to focus on the implementation of EE, it may have been useful to engage more with students to more deeply explore the direct impacts of that implementation. While we were able to address this concern somewhat through our workshop with upper-year sociology students, more engagement with students (especially first and second-year students) may be needed in order to fully understand how EE can impact a student's educational experience.

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