

# A Framework for Supporting Experiential Learning at McMaster University

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## Summary

This project involves developing an online database that will facilitate communication about existing and potential experiential opportunities for students. Our group will coordinate with other University stakeholders including faculty, students and the community to design a web platform for course projects. In addition we will also compile and develop a dynamic compendium of experiential learning courses at the university.



DeGroote students Kailee Jamieson and Ryan Moran pose with their winning prize; a 2013 Chevrolet Sparks. The car is awarded to the winner of the 2012 Canada's Next Top Ad Exec competition. This annual competition, which started in 2007, is one of the many experiential learning initiatives spearheaded by Mandeep Malik from the DeGroote School of Business.

## Definitions

There are several definitions for **experiential learning**. We chose to use the following definition:

*A [...] curriculum-related endeavor which is interactive (other than between teacher and pupil) and is characterized by variability and uncertainty.*<sup>1</sup>

The above definition stressed several aspects of experiential learning:

**Curriculum-related:** The instructor is expected to have spent time to design the experiential learning activity to better fit the theoretical components of the course.

**Participative:** The student should be involved in the experiential learning activity.

**Interactive:** The interactions goes beyond the classical student/instructor interaction to involve student/student, student/client, or student/environment/community interactions.

**Rounded experience:** The student is expected to not only engage his or her cognitive abilities but as well his behavioral and management skills.

**Variability and Uncertainty:** The experiential learning activity should generate enough ambiguity to test the student's abilities in dealing with non-structured assignments. Such activity would invite creativity and variety in the students' solutions.

<sup>1</sup>Source: Carter, Philip, James Hickman, Philip McDonald, Robert Patton, and Donald C. Powell (1986). Memorandum on Applied and Experiential Learning Curriculum Development. AACSB Task Force Report, p. 3.



The McMaster Community Engagement and Volunteer Fair is an annual event to showcase experiential learning initiatives and connect the university with its community.

## Survey

A survey was sent to all six faculties at McMaster University for distribution to all instructors. LimeSurvey was used and we received 85 total response, including 25 that are incomplete. There were participants from five faculties. In particular, 25 respondents have expressed interest in attending a focus group on experiential learning. Survey results will be shared in an upcoming focus group and the final report. Below we include the major survey questions:

- I use the following experiential learning tools in my course. Select all that apply.
  - Simulation Game
  - Case study
  - Role-playing exercises
  - Real life project from a company/organization
  - Field trips
  - Plant tours
  - Other, please specify .....
- Please list all the courses or course numbers for which you use experiential learning. If you want to be totally anonymous you may skip this question.
- Thinking about the course with the highest experiential learning component, how much weight do you assign to the experiential learning component of your course.
  - Less than 10%
  - 10-20 %
  - 20-30%
  - More than 30%
- We would like to understand why you do not use experiential learning in your courses. Please select all that apply.
  - I do not believe that experiential learning contributes significantly to students learning
  - I do not think experiential learning is suitable for my discipline
  - I do not have time and support to design an experiential learning component
  - Other, please specify:.....
- We plan to hold a focus group and/or workshop on experiential learning initiatives at McMaster, please indicate your interest in participating in such a focus group/ workshop:
  - I would like to attend as a panel member to share my experience with experiential learning
  - I would like to attend to learn more about experiential learning
  - I suggest you include this topic, please specify: \_\_\_\_\_
- We plan to set up a web platform where community organizations can post projects for instructors to use in their courses. What features of such a platform would you find useful and would encourage you to adapt experiential learning in your courses (open ended question)



The Engineering Centre for Experiential Learning Initiative is a building for students designed and managed by students. It will serve as a living laboratory for students experiential learning activities and services.

## Courses Compendium

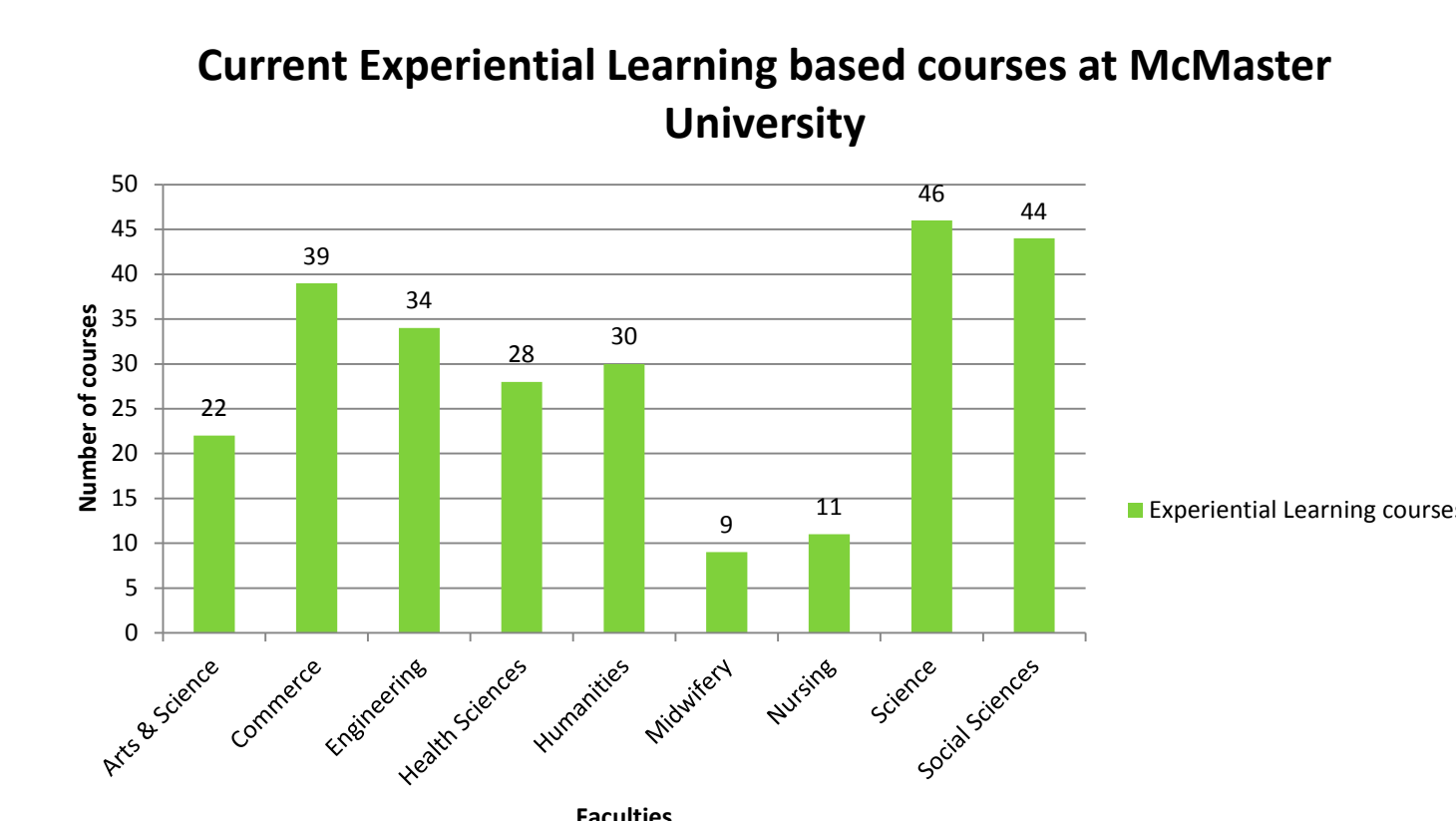
Course	Instructor	Faculty	Weight	Type	In or Outside Class
Comm 2003	Dr. Scott	Commerce	0.25	Classroom (Strength/Service Learning activities)	In-Class
Comm 2043	Dr. Stephanie Dr. Paquet, Mr. Sorensen & Dr. Hager	Commerce	0.2	Business Assessment & Enterprise Research Planning	In-Class
Comm 2063	Dr. Mark, Dr. McClelland & Dr. Chapp	Commerce	0.25	Analysis of Canadian company and industry	In-Class
Comm 2113	Dr. Chan	Commerce	entire course	Experiential learning	In-Class
Comm 2043	Dr. Wang and Dr. Tsai	Commerce	entire course	Experiential learning	In-Class
Comm 2023	Dr. Tsai	Commerce	entire course	Experiential learning	In-Class
Comm 2083	Dr. McClelland & Dr. Hager	Commerce	0.15	Interactive Learning	In-Class
Comm 2023	Dr. Mark, Dr. Hager, Dr. Wu, & Dr. Hager	Commerce	0.30	Experiential learning	Both

**Methodology:** the preliminary data on a number of courses that include experiential learning component across all six faculties was recorded in an excel spreadsheet using the 'McMaster Undergraduate Calendar – Course Listings' which is available online. All the courses listed on the McMaster Undergraduate Calendar were assessed on the basis of some search terms (included below). However, there are many courses that do not appear to have experiential learning component included in them on the McMaster Undergraduate Calendar but their course outline may provide a better description of the course. For this purpose, course outlines were examined for faculties of Business and Social Sciences to determine more courses that offer experiential learning as part of the teaching process. The information was taken from the respective faculties' websites where the course outlines are made available online to everyone. Please note this data does not represent an exhaustive list of all courses at McMaster University that offer experiential learning initiatives; this was done as a preliminary search to have a better perspective of the type of experiential learning courses and initiatives that are available on campus. Part of our project is to create a live compendium of such courses where instructors would have the ability to update it with their own course data.

**Search Terms:** the terms used to determine experiential learning component in a course are as follows: 'field placement', 'field trip', 'experiential learning', 'independent study', 'field camp', 'capstone project', 'thesis', 'problem-based learning', 'simulation cases', 'inquiry', 'on-field experience', 'real world applications', 'experiment', 'internship', 'placement', 'community based research', 'practical learning', 'practicum', 'case study', 'engagement', 'pedagogical learning' and 'practical exercises'. These terms were selected to include a wide variety of courses across faculties that offer existing experiential learning initiatives at McMaster University. All the terms indicate a type of learning that is beyond the traditional lecture style learning with examinations and assignments.

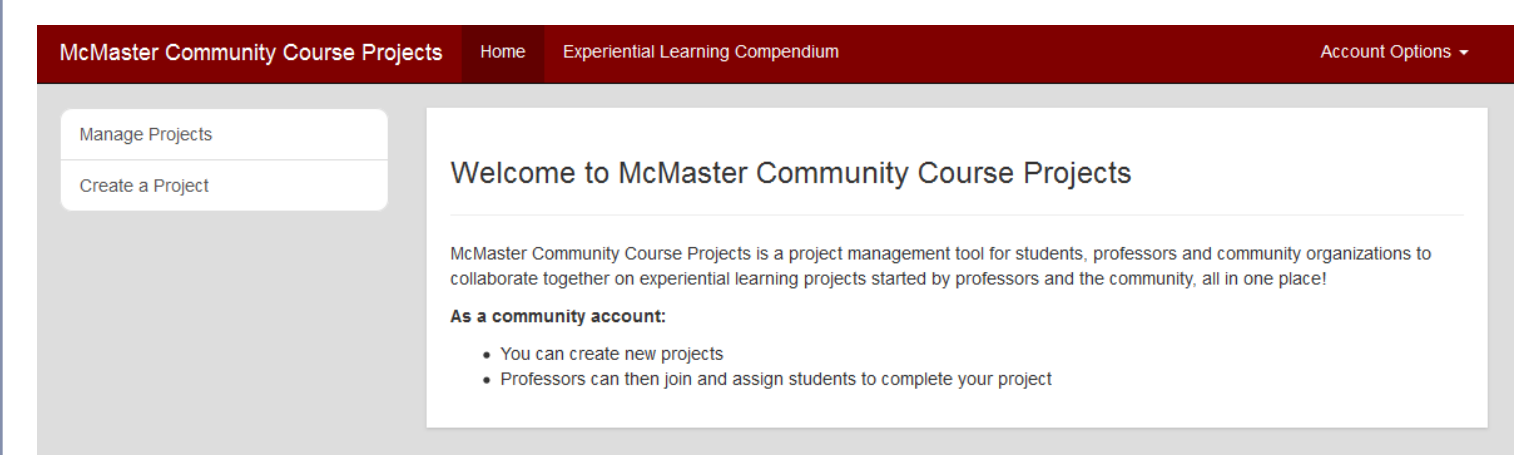
**When data was generated:** the data from the McMaster Undergraduate Calendar was generated between February and May 2013. The data from the course outlines was later added on in September 2013. Initially, Faculty of Business was documented at six courses that offer experiential learning. However, after taking into consideration the course outlines, the number of courses for the Faculty of Business increased to 39 courses. This is just to highlight the additional courses with experiential learning component that were found using the course outlines from the faculty website.

**Reading the graph:** the graph represents a summary of the data recorded from the McMaster Undergraduate Calendar and course outlines from the faculties' websites. The vertical axis represent the number of courses that offer some kind of experiential learning as part of the course assessment and the horizontal axis represent the six faculties at McMaster University. For the purposes of clarity, a table is also attached that summarizes the graph and the preliminary search in numbers.

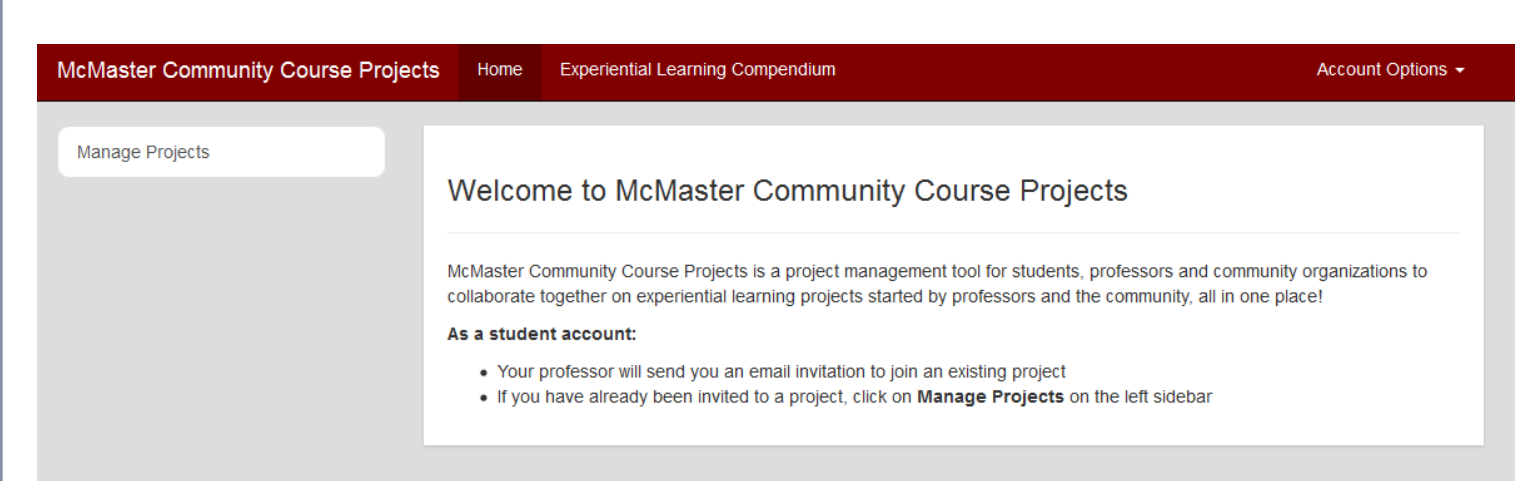


## Web Platform

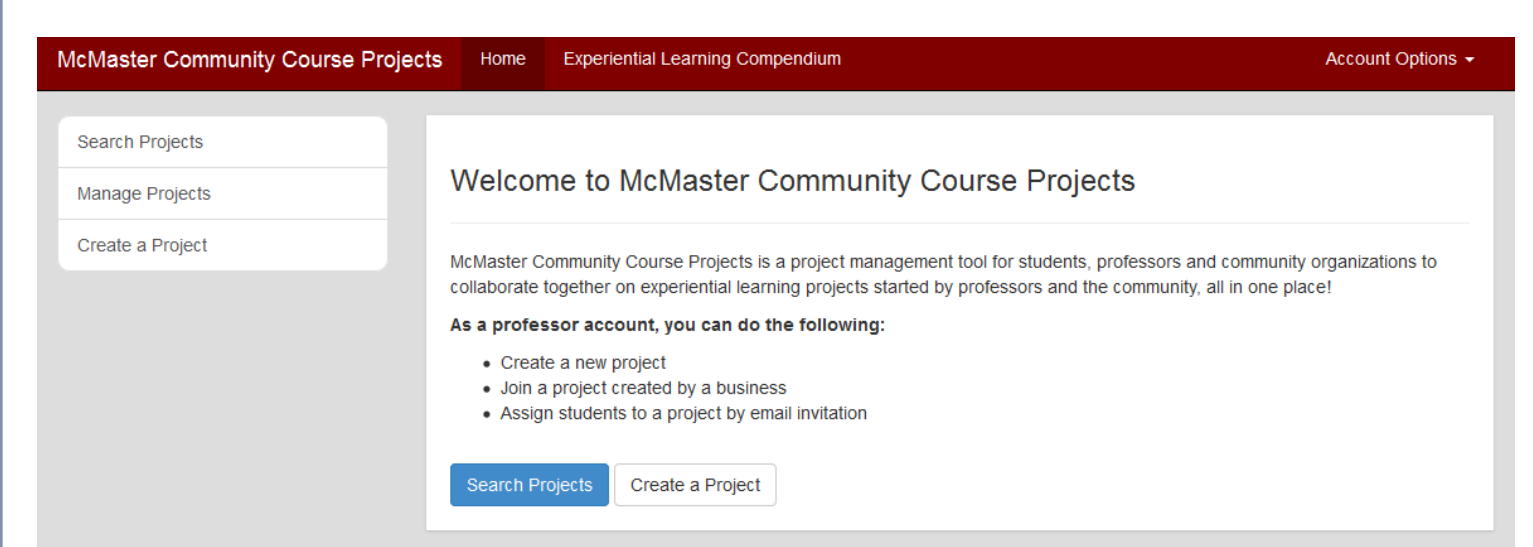
Community Access (see live demo)



Student Access (see live demo)



Professor Access (see live demo)



## Students Involvement

*"Forward With Integrity is a very ambitious endeavor and it was both a privilege and a learning experience to be able to contribute towards the project "A Framework for Supporting Experiential Learning at McMaster University" during the summer"*

Christian Baciu, Economics

*"It has been a great learning experience working on this Forward With Integrity proposal and I feel very fortunate to have been part of such a project that aims to enhance student experience at McMaster University by making it easier for Professors and Business Organizations to collaborate on experiential education projects. I am very excited for the launch of this project and when students will be able to use it because I know how much it will benefit us as students."*

Hooria Raza, Economics

## Next Steps

- Focus group meeting
- Beta testing of web platform in current courses
- Hosting web platform on a university server

## Acknowledgement

We would like to thank all those who have helped and supported us during this project. In particular we would like to acknowledge the participation and support of the following from the university and community:

- Career Services and Experiential Education departments across faculties
- DeGroote School of Business
- Faculty of Social Sciences, Experiential Education, Internship Program
- Forward with Integrity (FWI) offices
- FWI- Student Innovation Lab
- Innovation Factory
- McMaster Research Ethics Board
- McMaster Industry Liaison Office
- McMaster Institute for Innovation and Excellence in Teaching and Learning
- McMaster University Libraries
- Walter G. Booth School of Engineering Practice
- Work Study Program

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