

What is hands-on learning?

Definition of hands-on learning (experiential education)

At UVic, we call experiential education “hands-on learning”. We use the Association for Experiential Education’s definition:

“Experiential education is a philosophy that informs many methodologies in which educators purposefully engage with learners in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develop skills, clarify values, and develop people’s capacity to contribute to their communities.”

Key aspects of hands-on learning

Experience	Curriculum integration	Student outcomes	Reflection
+ Direct, hands-on involvement + Meaningful and substantial + Linked to curriculum	+ Learning outcomes (competencies) + Assessment + Reconnect experience to program	+ Skills, knowledge and attributes + Capacity to contribute	+ Ongoing and meaningful

Types of hands-on learning: a glossary

Clinic – Provides practice-based work experience under the supervision of an experienced registered or licensed professional. Unlike practica, which require practice-based work for discipline-specific professional licensure or certification, clinics provide practice-based work experience, but these work experience hours are not required for professional certification.

Community Service Learning – Integrates voluntary, unpaid community service that addresses community needs into a credit-bearing course with an explicit educational framework that includes student reflection on the volunteer experience. Reflection enhances understanding of civic engagement and builds connections between the experience and course content. Typically, the first four weeks of the course are spent in the classroom learning relevant theory. The following seven weeks are spent doing 30-40 hours of volunteer service. The final two weeks are again spent in the classroom and include reflection and relation of the experience back to theory.

Consulting project – Involves student interactions working with a client or organization in order to identify and analyze issues or opportunities within the organization and develop a solution or strategy for moving forward.

Co-op – Consists of alternating academic terms and paid work terms, where work terms provide experience in a workplace setting related to the student’s field of study. The number of required work terms varies by program; however, the time spent in work terms must be at least 30% of the time spent in academic study.

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Course-based – Incorporates intensive hands-on learning into the academic classroom setting. This hands-on learning can occur in various ways, including engagement with primary source documents and artifacts, participation in simulations or community-based interactions with members of the external community who come into the classroom as guest speakers or presenters. While other types of experiential education may also utilize in-class activities, course-based experiences include in-class activities not captured within the scope of these other categories.

Creative or physical practice – Enables skill development in a particular area through intensive practice-based experiences that rely heavily on student participation in and experimentation with course concepts. These courses develop various skills in areas of art, music, theatre, creative writing, dance and physical activities (such as soccer, swimming, softball, etc.).

Creative performance or exhibit – Involves an individual or team-produced dramatic, artistic, or musical performance, exhibit, or display that is presented to an audience consisting of members other than or in addition to the course instructor and classmates. Creative performances, unlike creative projects, involve student interactions with members of the external community. This performance constitutes a central component of the course.

Creative or design project – Involves an individual or team-produced project as a central component of the course. Projects provide experience in the design process, from identifying needs or problems and determining solutions to prototyping and testing designs. These projects take many forms: artistic, dramatic, or musical projects, graphic design projects or engineering design projects, for example.

Field experience – Requires time spent on course-related experiences and assignments in settings other than the typical academic classroom (which includes the lecture hall, laboratory and seminar or workshop setting). Field experiences may be directed or mediated by the instructor and include a range of time-intensive endeavours that require varying levels of student interaction. For example, field experiences include short-term field trips, fieldwork and observational activities such as classroom observations or attending a performance. Field experiences may or may not involve student interaction with members of the external community. Note that as distinctive types of experience, field schools and field placements are classified separately from other field experiences.

Field placement – Provides students with an intensive work experience in a setting relevant to their field of study. Field placements need not require supervision of a registered or licensed professional and the completed work experience hours are not required for professional certification. Field placements account for work-integrated educational experiences not encompassed by other forms, such as co-op, clinic, practicum and internship.

Field school – Takes students out of the typical academic classroom (which includes the lecture hall, laboratory and seminar or workshop setting) and into the field for hands-on study or application of course concepts in a context-relevant environment. Field schools offer an intensive, immersive experience and are often at least three weeks in duration.

Internship – Offers a discipline-specific, supervised, structured, full-time work experience or practice placement of substantial duration. Internships may occur in the middle of an academic program or after all academic coursework has been completed but prior to graduation. Internships can be of any length, but are typically four, eight, or twelve months long.

Lab – Provides hands-on application of course concepts in a controlled environment, including activities such as observing, measuring, testing and experimenting. Labs are often scientific or technological in nature; however, other types of labs also exist, such as language labs in the humanities. A lab is a distinct course component, separate from a lecture, seminar or workshop.

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Practicum – Involves work experience under the supervision of an experienced registered or licensed professional in any discipline that requires practice-based work experience for professional licensure or certification. Practica are generally unpaid, and, as the work is done in a supervised setting, students do not have their own workload/caseload.

Professional or technical skill development – Offers intensive, hands-on experience in the development of professional or technical skills, providing discipline-specific preparation for academic or professional careers. This includes, for example, career education and preparation courses, courses that prepare academics to teach in a university setting or discipline-specific writing courses (other than creative writing courses) in areas like legal, scientific or technical writing.

Publication or conference presentation – Includes presenting an original paper in a formal academic conference or colloquium setting, publishing an original work and/or contributing to a publication in an editorial capacity.

Research project – Involves, as a major course component, a process of substantial discovery, synthesis and/or application of information to solving a particular problem in an original way. The research process can be undertaken independently or in teams. The application of research may be community-based. Although consulting, creative or design projects may involve research, these are seen as distinctive types of experiential education and are classified separately.

Study abroad or exchange – Entails participation in at least one term of coursework at an international institution. While “exchange” indicates that both the international institution and UVic send and receive students to and from each other, “study abroad” does not indicate a reciprocal agreement, and UVic acts as a sending institution only (not also as a receiving institution).

Work experience – Intersperses one or two paid work terms into an academic program, where work terms provide experience in a workplace setting related to the student’s field of study. Work experience is a modified, smaller-scale version of co-op.