



University
of Windsor



Kindling “Ignite”: A Post-Secondary Experiential Learning Employment Program

Presented by:

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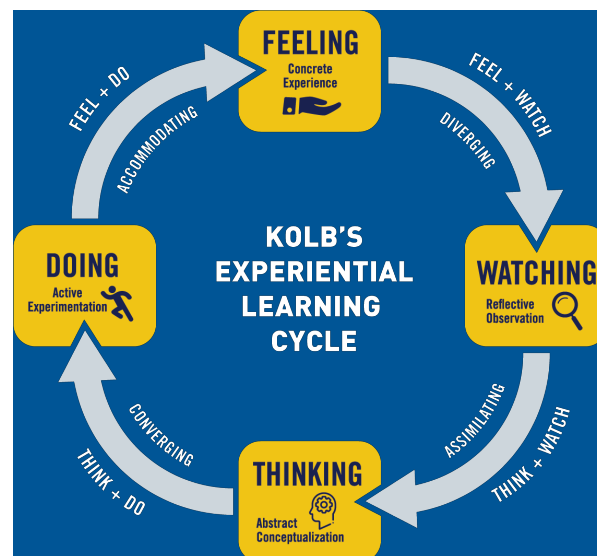
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University of Windsor, Career Development & Experiential Learning

Learning Outcomes

- Define experiential learning and its importance in enhancing career development
- Apply experiential learning strategies to campus employment programs
- Examine experiential learning's impact on the employability of international students

In 2017, the University of Windsor re-designed its on-campus work study program to focus on the principles of experiential learning. Experiential learning, as conceptualized by Kolb (2014), is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience and reflecting on that experience. The goal of this change was to increase the engagement and satisfaction of students, and ultimately their employability.



Through paid work experience, Ignite provides students with the opportunity to develop their:



Knowledge



Skills



Experience

Our Journey: The Why & How

- The original model
- Driving forces and motivators behind decision
- Inspiration from other institutions

“Programizing” Work Study: Key Program Elements



Learning Outcomes &
Competency Development



Orientation



Ongoing Communication



Professional Development
Sessions



Reflection



Mandatory Check-In Sessions

Stage 1: 2017-2018

- Program Coordinator
- Open to international students
- Heavy emphasis on campus promotion and marketing
- Educational resources for students and employers

Stage 2: 2018-2019

- Transition to wage subsidy model
- Job evaluation
- Changes in student eligibility
- Earlier student start date and hiring process

Lessons Learned: Challenges

- Student and supervisor resistance to change
- Imbalance between supply and demand

Successes

- Growth in:
 - Quality of placements
 - Variety of positions
 - Campus awareness
 - Interest on campus from new departments and faculties
- Confirmed perceived value in Ignite program for international students

Case Study: Ignite's Impact on Employability of International Students



We wanted to examine how our on-campus work experience program and enhanced program elements influence international student employability, by examining this issue over multiple participant groups.

International students often struggle with their employability because of challenges managing the cross-cultural transition to a new culture, learning in a new cultural context, and transferring international experience to work setting in a host or home country (Arthur, 2007).

Quantitative research was undertaken to better understand if participation in Ignite helped international students transition to the workforce. An electronic survey was distributed to current (n=204) and past (n= 92) program participants that attended the University while on a study permit. Survey responses were anonymous.

Results

International students view their participation in Ignite as a way to help them develop foundational skills and competencies that will help them transition to the workforce.

The level of satisfaction and self-identified skill development was higher with Ignite students who have experienced the new program with the added focus on experiential learning.

Question: My Ignite job is helping me develop my _____ skills (Y/N)			
	Previous Students (Y)	Current Students (Y)	Difference (+/-)
Oral & Written Communication	74%	89%	+15
Critical Thinking & Problem Solving	78%	86%	+8
Work Ethic	85%	92%	+7

A variety of skills and competencies were presented in the survey, including oral and written communication, critical thinking and problem solving, teamwork and collaboration, inter-cultural communication, work ethic, professionalism, and customer service. There was an increase across all skills presented for current students who participated in the enhanced program with experiential learning elements.

Reason for Increase

- Improved quality and variety of placements
- Reflection is working: students are more educated and can recognize and articulate what skills they developed in their Ignite role

Student Testimonials

At the end of their employment, students are asked to do a final performance evaluation with their supervisor, and a final reflection about their Ignite experience. Here's what some of our students had to say...

"My supervisor's evaluation of my ability to be a dependable person definitely changed the way I view myself. Personally, I found the work environment and people to be amazing, so it had never really felt like I was putting in so much extra work."

"My career options have been expanded as I learned to appreciate the student success aspect of my role. I have had the chance to develop most of my skills listed on the check-in forms that I can apply to my career as well as my future endeavours."

"I feel more confident and comfortable working in professional environments. I have learnt Canadian work culture and habits, improved my computer skills and time management skills. Now I feel I can work anywhere irrespective for comfort zone without restricting myself."

"The marketing skills I gained from Ignite will help me be more competitive and talented in future situations. The content that I will create in the future will be more creative and appealing to employers, and consumers overall."

"I now have experience that helped me get my co-op placement job. I will essentially be doing the exact same thing at my new job which is amazing. The Ignite program really helped me a lot."

"I was preparing for a [job] interview and coincidentally had my final review scheduled a few days before with [my supervisor]. She pointed out to me my transferable skills and helped me prepare for an interview. It allowed to see me how the things I did were applicable to other jobs. [My supervisor] allowed me to see my potential and has allowed me to see many skills. My resume has had a lot added to it in terms of conferences/workshops/skill development."

References

- Arthur, N. (2007). Career planning and decision-making needs of international students. In H. Singaravelu & M. Pope (Eds.), *A handbook for counselling international students in the United States* (pp. 37-56). Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association.
- Kolb, D. A. (2014). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development* (2nd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education.