DEC Executive Briefing #020 | August 2025

Experiential Learning Reimagined: Designing Education for the Future of Work

Executive Summary

Employers are increasingly calling for graduates who are workforce- and future-ready, yet many argue that higher education has not kept pace with industry needs. There is also a concern that the nature of work is changing faster than ever creating a growing gap between what is taught and what is lived the lived experience in the workplace.

This makes it critical for institutions to revisit and strengthen their approaches to experiential learning in order to better prepare students for the world of work.

This report, *Experiential Learning Reimagined* reviewed 137 global experiential learning practices across 27 countries, **identifying 16 emerging models of experiential learning.**

These models span multiple levels of practice, including:

- **Curriculum redesign** to embed experiential learning across programmes
- **Course-level innovations,** ranging from creation-centred courses to three distinct models of company-based projects
- **Technology-enabled simulations** that deliver scalable and immersive education opportunities and skills training

Each form of experiential learning offers distinct benefits and challenges. To build an effective strategy, institutions should evaluate these models in terms of impact on student outcomes, resource demands, and alignment with institutional priorities. By doing so, institutions can design a well-rounded experiential learning portfolio that better equips graduates to thrive in a fast changing workforce.

1. Experiential Learning in Higher Education

Bridging the Experiential Learning Gap

Employers Perceived Gaps

72% of employers believe AI adoption will **reduce headcount** in the workplace

80% of employers say **higher education is not keeping up** with industry change.

75% of employers think graduates entering the workforce **lack strong communication and collaboration skills**

Experiential Learning Status Quo

01
Uneven Quality

Internship and project opportunities differ greatly leaving some students with meaningful experiences and others with limited outcomes.

02
Equity Gaps

Experiential learning often demands significant resources making it difficult to scale and leaving many students—particularly those in remote settings—without access.

03
Fragmented Variety

Experiential learning spans many formats but lacks coherence and clear measures of impact across programmes.

04
Superficiality

Projects often become attendance exercises with little accountability or real-world consequence, failing to reflect the complexity of reality.

Source: Digital Education Council AI in the Workplace 2025

Diverse Experiential Learning Formats

Orchestrating Experiential Learning

Experiential learning takes many forms, spanning every level of study and dimension of student life.

The idea is not to simply create well-designed but isolated activities. The key is orchestrating these formats so that experiential learning happens consistently, from small embedded exercises to large-scale projects, building a diverse and continuous learning journey.

Core Format	Description	Focus
Curriculum-Integrated	Degree structures that are intentionally designed to enable experiential learning, from full programmes to specialisations where applied learning is central.	Build coherence across the curriculum
Course-Embedded	Individual courses embed applied projects, case studies, or client challenges, ensuring experiential learning is consistently part of classroom teaching.	Apply classroom learning directly to practice
Simulations	Controlled environments such as VR, role-play, or digital platforms immerse students in real-world scenarios, while enhancing scalability and authenticity.	Practice skills safely and repeatedly
Industry & Challenge	Internships, live client projects, and competitions that bring students into intensive work with external partners, complementing academic study.	Experience authentic workplace demands
Community & Practice	Service learning, civic engagement, and workshops help students grow as well-rounded practitioners while developing targeted skills.	Develop target skills while creating impact
Immersion & Exchange	Field trips and cross-cultural exchanges expose students to new environments, fostering learning through lived experience.	Expand perspectives and adaptability

Experiential Learning Innovation Landscape

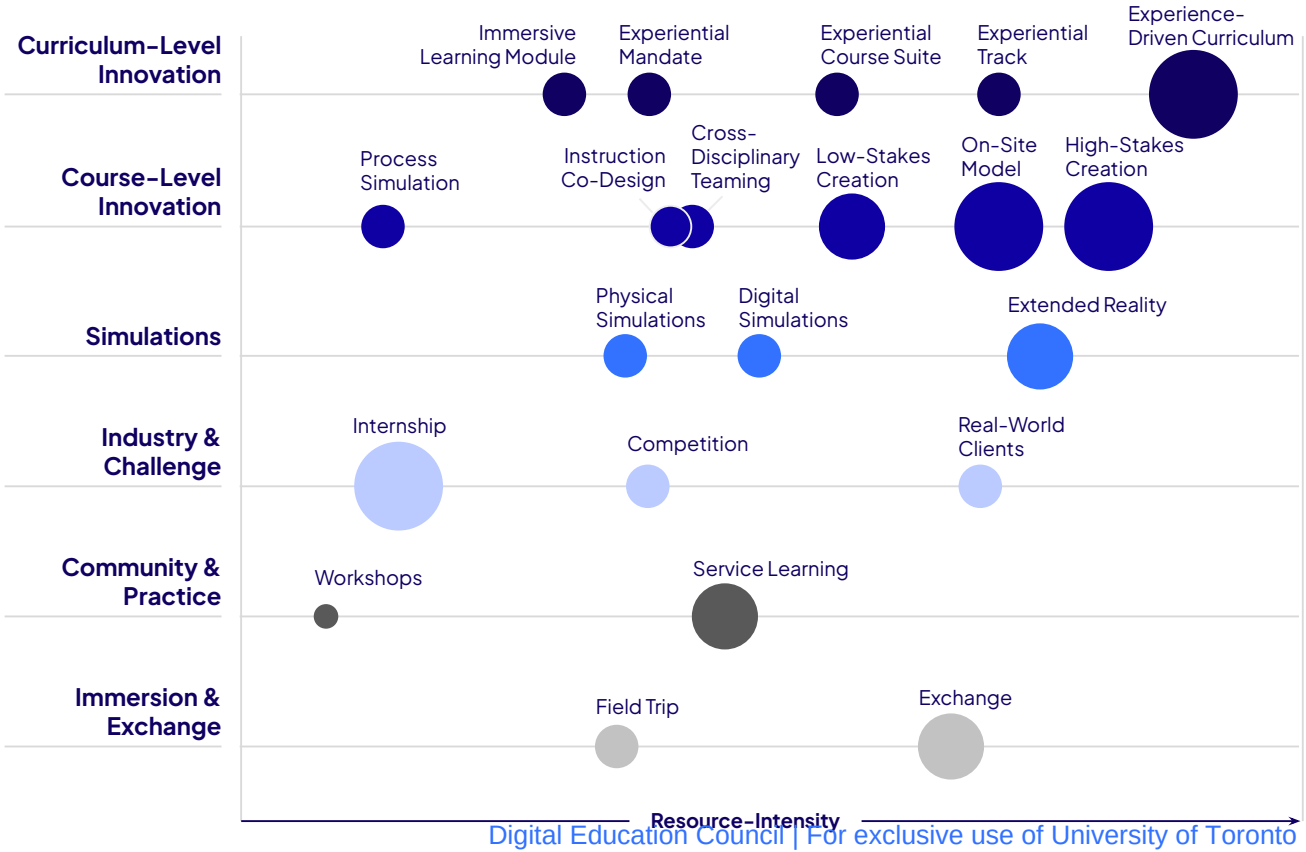
Core Format	Models						
		Intense Experiential Learning Approach					
Curriculum-Level Innovation	1 Immersive Learning Module	2 Experiential Track	3 Experience-Driven Curriculum	4 Experiential Course Suite	5 Experiential Mandate Model		
		Experiential Creation Approach			Applied Company Project		
Course-Level Innovation	6 Process Simulation	7 Low-Stakes Creation	8 High-Stakes Creation	9 Cross-Disciplinary Teaming	10 Instruction Co-Design	11 On-Site Model	
Simulations	Physical Simulations	12 Digital Simulations	13 Extended Reality				
Industry & Challenge	Internship	14 Competition	Real-World Clients				
Community & Practice	15 16 Service Learning	Workshops					
Immersion & Exchange	Exchange	Field Trip					

16 Emerging Models of Experiential Learning

Institutions worldwide are reimagining experiential learning with new formats that make education more applied and impactful, from restructured curricula to technology-enabled simulations.

This report highlights **16 emerging models** that illustrate how experiential learning is evolving and where it may be headed next.

The Experiential Learning Innovation Landscape



Impact

- Extensive
- High
- Medium
- Low

Prioritising What Works

Experiential learning models vary in impact and resource demand. Institutions can prioritise high-impact options—those offering strong real-world exposure and significant skill development—when they require relatively low resources, plan strategically for complex models with long-term value, and phase out resource-heavy initiatives with limited returns.

2. Curriculum-Level Innovation

Intense Experiential Learning Approach

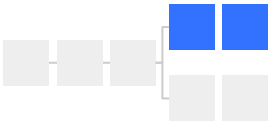
Core Idea

Design intensive experiential learning units with **high frequency, variety, and depth of applied activities** embedded into the curriculum. Intensity can range from short immersive modules to fully restructured degree programmes.

Three Intense Experiential Learning Models

1 Immersive Learning Module

A theme-based short-term immersive learning experience with a cluster of linked courses and embedded experiential elements aligned.



2 Experiential Track

A multi-semester pathway embedded within a broader degree, combining sequenced coursework, applied projects, and industry engagement.

3 Experience-Driven Curriculum

A fully restructured degree programme with experiential learning embedded across all academic years, centred on real-world problem solving.

	1 Immersive Learning Module	2 Experiential Track	3 Experience-Driven Curriculum
Best For	• **Rapid, targeted skill development** • Piloting new experiential learning models without full curriculum overhaul	• **Developing specialised expertise** • Scaling experiential learning through multi-semester integration	• **Broad comprehensive applied skills** • Positioning institutions as leaders in experiential, practice-based education
Strength	• Quick to design and launch • Flexible format that can be adapted to different disciplines and contexts	• Flexibility to align with career interests • Offers a structured, progress-based pathway	• Continuous real-world exposure and engagement with external stakeholders • Graduates gain broad applied skills and strong professional networks

Curriculum

Intense experiential learning unit

Intense Experiential Learning Approach: Immersive Learning Module

1

Immersive Learning Module

Design Methodology

1. **Identify a real-world, relevant theme** that addresses authentic challenges or opportunities.
2. **Develop a series of interrelated courses and activities** aligned to the theme.
3. **Integrate experiential components** such as field trips, real-world projects, simulations, or community engagement.

Case Study

Duke University **Duke Immerse: Course, Travel & Research**

A semester-long, theme-based cluster of four linked courses with integrated fieldwork (local, national, or international).

Define a theme
Adaptable across disciplines

Each semester is built around a distinct theme. Past themes include *Civil Discourse and Democracy, Sustainability: Ocean-based Solutions, and Imagining the Future of Food.*

Develop Interlinks Courses
Designed to address a focused issue

Four coordinated courses explore the semester's theme from multiple angles. Example from the Oceans, Humans & Environmental Health programme:

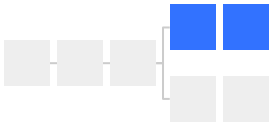
1. Sensory Physiology and Behavior of Marine Animals
2. Oceans, Humans and Environmental Health
3. Coastal and Marine Pollution
4. Independent Study

Integrate Experiential Components
In and beyond the classroom

Learning combines laboratory work, field research, and travel. For example, students in the Oceans, Humans & Environmental Health programme take part in a 10-day field experience in Quito, Ecuador, and the Galapagos Islands.

Intense Experiential Learning Approach: Experiential Track

2



Experiential Track

Design Methodology

- **1. Select students** through a competitive application to ensure strong motivation
- **2. Sequence theory with applied projects,** deepening mastery over multiple semesters.
- **3. Include high-stakes application points** such as competitions and client projects with industry engagement.
- **4. Pair participants with industry mentors** for personalised feedback and guidance,
- **5. Award credentials** to distinguish graduates in the job market.

Case Study

Clemson University **Sales Innovation Programme (SIP)**

A three-semester programme combining foundational training, applied client projects, and capstone challenges to prepare students for competitive sales careers.

Build Core Skills
Semester 1

Students build core competencies in consultative selling, needs assessment, and relationship management, reinforced through workshops and early industry feedback.

Apply in Real Projects
Semester 2

Students complete sector-specific client projects such as healthcare and technology, culminating in the *Otis Elevator Pitch Showdown* judged by industry executives.

Throughout the semester, they receive coaching from corporate sales leaders to refine strategy, communication style, and deal-closing skills.

Simulate the Full Sales Cycle
Semester 3

In the final semester, teams compete in the *Tiger Paw Classic*, simulating the entire B2B sales process with corporate representatives and presenting final recommendations to judging panels. Successful graduates earn the Sales Innovation Certificate,

Intense Experiential Learning Approach: Experience-Driven Curriculum

3

Experience-Driven Curriculum

Design Methodology

1. **Map the student journey** and identify where experiential learning can be embedded
2. **Sequence intense experiential touchpoints** from early project exposure to advanced interdisciplinary, industry-facing work.
3. **Use varied formats** such as fieldwork, industry projects, and exchanges to diversify experiences.
4. **Incorporate industry touchpoints,** including mentorship and project feedback.

Case Study

Worcester Polytechnic Institute **Project-Based Education**

A four-year curriculum where students advance from introductory problem-solving to professional-level projects, with experiential learning embedded in every stage.

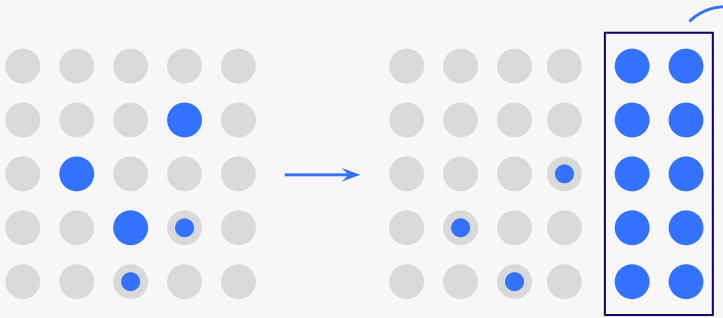
Exposure Year 1	***Great Problems Seminar:*** Students work in teams on global challenges aligned with the UN SDGs, building collaboration and communication skills.
Independent Creation Year 2	***Humanities & Arts Capstone:*** Students design and complete a self-directed creative or research project integrating arts and humanities, culminating in a seminar or practicum.
Interdisciplinary Application Year 3	***Interactive Qualifying Project:*** Students take on interdisciplinary projects at the intersection of technology and society, addressing issues such as sustainability, education, and technology policy.
Professional Execution Year 4	***Major Qualifying Project:*** Students complete a professional-level research or design project within their major, often with industry partners and IP development support.

Experiential Course Suite Model

4 **Core Idea**

A curriculum design approach that creates **a dedicated set of courses** focused entirely on applied, real-world learning, allowing students to choose and sequence experiences aligned to their career goals. The Suite model does not necessarily require institutions to create new courses; instead, they can restructure existing ones, highlighting those with experiential focus to give students clearer choices.

Traditional Curriculum Design
Experiential learning appears sporadically, offered as standalone programmes or embedded within courses.



Experiential Course Suite
Experiential learning courses are intentionally designed, clearly labelled, and offered as a dedicated portfolio for students to select from.

Design Methodology

1. **Develop a suite of courses** purpose-built around applied, real-world learning, with clear experiential components (e.g., projects, fieldwork, client collaboration).
2. **Organise these courses into a dedicated, visible suite** within the curriculum, giving students clear pathways to choose and sequence experiences aligned to their goals.
3. **Oversee the suite** at the departmental or institutional level to maintain consistency, alignment with programme objectives, and synergy across offerings.

Experiential Course Suite Model: Case Studies

Case study

Experiential Course Suite Model

Stellenbosch University

Stellenbosch compiled an Experiential Education Prospectus, featuring experiential learning courses and programmes across departments and faculties, giving students a curated set of options to choose from.

8 Categories of Experiential Learning at Stellenbosch

Academic Leadership	Students take ownership of their learning through research and knowledge application.
Intercultural Engagement	Active engagement with other cultures.
Mental Health and Wellbeing	Achieving balance of mind and body through social, emotional, and cognitive skills for healthy living.
Personal Leadership	Supports students build personal leadership.
Scholarship Awards and Service Recognition	Acknowledges student accomplishments and awards.
Social Impact	Recognises student initiatives addressing community needs.
Sport & Wellbeing	Rewards active participation in sports and wellness.
Student Leadership	Leading peers by inspiring, motivating, and driving change within the student community.

Case study

Experiential Course Suite Model

Kellogg School of Management

Kellogg offers a structured set of courses dedicated to applied learning, ranging from short simulations to fully immersive client projects. Students choose their preferred format and level of immersion.

4 Categories of Experiential Learning Courses at Kellogg

Simulation/Exercise	Market simulations or structured exercises (e.g., Impact Investing and Sustainable Finance).
Self-Defined Project	Student-designed ventures or research (e.g., New Venture Development).
Client Project	Industry challenges embedded in a course (e.g., Startup Branding).
Lab Course	Working on-site with company (e.g., Venture Lab).

Experiential Mandate Model

5 **Core Idea**

Experiential learning is established as a **graduation requirement**, ensuring every student completes applied learning before finishing their degree. This can be structured as a fixed requirement (specific courses/modules) or a flexible system (points or badges earned through varied activities).

Fixed Course Requirement

Students must complete one or more dedicated experiential learning courses chosen from an approved list.

Case Study

University of California San Diego Sixth College requires students to take a four-unit experiential course in one of five tracks: Community Engagement, Internship and Apprenticeship, Research and Design, Art and Performance, or Global Experience.

A curated list of approved courses is provided to guide fulfillment of the requirement.

Flexible Point/Badge System

Students earn credits, points, or badges by completing approved experiential activities across their degree.

Case Study

Providence College Friar Leadership & Immersion Program (FLIP) requires that first-year business students must earn two badges — *Business Exploration and Cultural Agility* — to progress.

The *Business Exploration Badge* requires at least 250 FLIP points, gained through experiential activities such as the Business Involvement Fair, Career Expo, or Study Abroad Fair. The *Cultural Agility Badge* is earned by completing two interactive workshops on diversity and cross-cultural collaboration.

3. Course-Level Innovation

Experiential Creation Approach

Core Idea

These models redesign individual courses to emphasise **real-world application and creation**. They range along a spectrum of impact—from immersive experiences that build understanding, to process-based simulations, to courses where students create prototypes or ventures, and finally to high-stakes projects that result in enduring real-world outputs.

Three Key Experiential Creation Models

Low — **Tangibility, Stakes, Impact** — **High**

6 Process Simulation

Courses simulate or guide students through real-world processes (e.g., venture building, agile project management) to understand the "how," without requiring a tangible final product.

BEST FOR
Practicing methods, frameworks, and decision-making processes

7 Low-Stakes Creation

Students develop tangible outputs (ventures, prototypes, or business ideas) that can operate in the real world but with controlled risk, with limited stakeholder involvement

BEST FOR
Experimenting with ideas and testing feasibility

8 High-Stakes Creation

Students create outcomes that have enduring, real-world use and impact, often with professional standards and accountability.

BEST FOR
Delivering professional-grade outcomes with tangible, lasting impact

Experiential Creation Approach: Process Simulation

Experiential Creation Approach 6
Process Simulation

Design Methodology	Case Study Stanford University **Lean Launchpad**	University of Potsdam **Agile Software Development**
1. Choose a real-world framework or process to simulate	**Lean Startup methodology**, with emphasis on customer discovery, evidence-based entrepreneurship, and product-market fit.	**Agile software development,** with Scrum methodology used first, followed by a transition to the Kanban method in the final week.
2. Translate the framework into a course sequence	The course is built around **weekly sprints**, each tackling a section of the Business Model Canvas. In each sprint, students conduct customer interviews.	Students complete **four 2-week Scrum sprints,** each following the full sprint cycle (planning, weekly stand-ups, reviews, retrospectives).
3. Guide students through structured cycles mirroring the real process	Each week, students are required to talk to 10-15 customers, refine their hypotheses, and iterate their business model. The cycle of test → learn → present → pivot is repeated across the semester.	During each sprint teams manage a backlog, deliver working features, and reflect in retrospectives. Tutors observe stand-ups, ensuring teams follow the methodology.
4. Students showcase final outputs, demonstrating mastery of the process.	Teams give a final presentation of their validated business model, showing evidence of iteration and customer validation, rather than just a polished idea.	Teams finish with a final system demo of their working product and a reflection on their agile journey.

Experiential Creation Approach: Low-Stake Creation

Experiential Creation Approach 7
Low-Stakes Creation

Design Methodology	Case Study University of Adelaide **Tech eChallenge**	Monash University **Research, Experiment, Discovery Programme**
1. Identify the creation focus (e.g., prototype, concept, or venture, with clear emphasis on exploration	**Students form tech-based ideas** and shape them into commercially viable product concepts.	**Students immerse in research experimentation** tackling global issues (e.g., climate, security), aiming to generate prototypes or insights.
2. Design course structure by sequencing workshops or labs around core creation steps	4-month course with weekly specialised workshops on value propositions, UX/UI, proofs-of-concept, and pitching. Supported by an online platform with resources and readings.	Intensive 3-week structure with guided experimentation, research design support, and inclusive mentoring from staff and partners.
3. Guide students through iterative cycles of designing, testing, and refining with structured checkpoints	Teams iteratively develop their business models, test feasibility and desirability, and refine concepts with support from industry mentors and entrepreneurs.	Students are placed in interdisciplinary teams to conduct experiments, critically analyse findings, and iterate on experiments
4. End with a presentation, pitch, or showcase where students share outputs and reflections	Students pitch to a judging panel for feedback and prizes (~$8,000 AUD), with winners advancing to ThincLab for incubation support.	Students present reports, prototypes, reflections, and strategy presentations

Experiential Creation Approach: High-Stake Creation

Experiential Creation Approach
High-Stakes Creation

8

Design Methodology	Case Study Babson College **Foundations of Management & Entrepreneurship**	University of Kansas **Studio 804**
1.Identify real-world problems or clients, and set project goals.	In the Fall semester, form teams of 10–14 students. Each team identifies unmet market needs via observation + research.	A small group of architecture graduate students select a client/project; define building needs through context and site analysis.
2. Refine ideas into viable solutions, integrate feasibility and sustainability planning, secure funding, materials, and approvals.	Develop value propositions, pitch in the 3-minute Rocket Pitch, and conduct feasibility checks. Prepare launch plan and secure up to US$3,000 funding.	Design project through schematic to construction documents. Students manage budgets, acquire materials, and secure zoning/code approvals.
3. Execute the project and iterate continuously based on customer, client, or inspection feedback.	Launch businesses in Spring semester; manage sales, marketing, operations; adapt strategies based on performance.	Students construct the building over 9 months; adapt in real time to inspections, codes, and construction challenges.
4. Conclude with project delivery, liquidation, or handover. Reflect on lessons, capture impact, and document outcomes.	Liquidate ventures; donate profits (50% to charity, 50% to Babson). Reflection on leadership and venture outcomes.	Complete and hand over building; students graduate with portfolio and real-world sustainable design experience.

Applied Company Project

Core Idea

Doing projects with companies on real-world challenges has long been a hallmark of experiential learning. The emerging innovation lies in three areas: the composition of student teams, the organisation of instruction teams, and the depth of engagement.

Key Innovations

9 Cross-Disciplinary Teaming Model

Students are deliberately placed in teams that cut across disciplines, mirroring the interdisciplinary challenges faced by industry and society.

Technical University of Munich **Quantum Entrepreneurship Lab**: Students are placed in cross-disciplinary teams. Technical students explore industry-relevant research while business students pursue a parallel commercialisation track. They then merge mid-semester to deliver a technical report and a pitch.

10 Instruction Co-Design Model

Innovation comes from the teaching team: researchers, instructional designers, and professionals co-design and deliver courses, ensuring authentic problem framing.

TBS Education **Business Design Sprint**: An interdisciplinary team of faculty, instructional designers, and business professionals co-created a business challenge with a local company, engaging students in finding solutions and developing an intrapreneurial mindset.

11 On-Site Model

Students move beyond classroom projects to embed themselves within companies. This model blurs the line between coursework and workplace by placing students onsite or inside firms.

Tecnologico de Monterrey **Design and Improvement of Logistic Systems Course**: Students partner with companies to redesign supply chains for circularity, with regular site visits and company contact.
Minnesota State University **Iron Range Engineering Programme**: A work-based model where students spend part of the course taking on paid roles at partner sites.

4. Simulations

Simulations Modalities

Physical Simulations

Live Role-Play
Learners interact with trained actors or peers simulating real-world roles.

Simulation Mannequins
Used mainly in medical education, ranging from CPR dummies to high-fidelity mannequins.

Simulation Rooms
Purpose-built spaces replicating real settings (hospitals, courtrooms, control rooms).

Digital Simulations (Screen-Based)

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Desktop Simulation
Screen-based simulations where learners engage with scenarios through structured interactions.

Visualisation Tools
Interactive 3D models that let learners explore complex systems or structures.

Virtual World
Persistent, avatar-based environments for team-based learning and collaboration.

Extended Reality(XR)

Virtual Reality (VR) – Full
Fully immersive simulations with vision, sound, haptics, and spatial movement.

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Virtual Reality (VR) – Lite
Moderately immersive VR via desktop VR or basic headsets; less sensory integration.

Augmented Reality (AR)
Digital content overlaid on the physical world through devices.

Mixed Reality (MR)
Combines AR with real-time interaction between physical and digital objects.

Desktop Simulation: AI-Enhanced Learning

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Desktop Simulation Design Methodology

1. **Set up scenario and flow**, define the case context, roles, and event sequence with branching.
2. **Set decision points and consequences** by building critical learner choices that trigger realistic system reactions or branching outcomes.
3. **Run simulations with facilitation** by having the instructor guide progress, if applicable and ensure technical elements run smoothly.
4. **Conduct debrief and reflection** by analysing learner performance and linking decisions back to theory and practice.

The **Next Era of Assessment Report** by the Digital Education Council highlights practical ways to use AI-powered conversational agent simulations to enhance student learning.

AI In Desktop Simulation

AI Capability
How institutions are utilising AI in desktop simulation

Adaptive Scenario Generation
AI creates dynamic, branching scenarios tailored to a learner's progress and choices.

AI Conversational Agents
Simulated characters respond contextually with natural language and realistic behavior.

Real-Time, Personalised Feedback
AI assesses performance on the go and adjusts difficulty or direction according to performance data.

AI Assistant for Decision Making
AI guides students to evaluate decisions and provides hints or frameworks to guide thinking.

Virtual Reality (VR) in Experiential Learning

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	VR for…	What It Enables	Example Use Cases
	**Immersive Learning Environments**	Places students inside reconstructed or imagined worlds for understanding of history, culture, or environments.	• Experience historical events • Explore fiction natural worlds such as outer space • Explore cultural heritage sites
	**Concept Visualisation**	Transforms abstract or complex concepts into interactive 3D experiences.	• Manipulate molecules • Observe electromagnetic fields • Explore the human body in 3D
	**Laboratory Substitution**	Provides safe, accessible substitutes for expensive labs, remote fieldwork, or dangerous settings.	• Conduct biology experiments in a virtual lab • Virtual surgery • Simulate chemistry reactions
	**Design & Prototyping**	Enables students to create and test prototypes in 3D before physical construction.	• Walk through architectural designs • Test mechanical systems • Build and refine product prototypes
	**Professional Practice**	Simulates workplace settings to practice professional tasks and skills.	• Perform hospital ward rounds • Conduct virtual underwater welding • Handle customer service scenarios
	**Soft Skills Training**	Provides safe environments to practice communication and interpersonal skills.	• Roleplay difficult conversations • Practice negotiation • Build teamwork and leadership skills

5. Complementary Experiential Learning Formats

Competition as a Form of Experiential Learning

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Student-Defined, Open Scope

Students choose and justify their own challenge, taking full ownership from idea to execution

1. **Invite students to propose** self-identified opportunities and review feasibility with faculty and industry mentors.
2. **Enable interdisciplinary teams** through mixers, skill-matching tools, and design-thinking workshops
3. **Provide broad mentor access across sectors** with guidance on key issues such as intellectual property and venture readiness.
4. **Structure feedback loops** with multiple pitch rounds to mixed-discipline panels for pivots and refinements.
5. **Create post-competition pathways** by linking viable projects to incubators, seed funding, and external partners.

BEST FOR

Fostering entrepreneurial initiative and opportunity recognition

Theme-Guided, Team-Scoped

Organisers set the mission; teams define a specific problem within that focus area

1. **Define and communicate the theme** with a clear focus (e.g., SDGs, circular economy).
2. **Guide problem selection** through workshops, field visits, or research sprints.
3. **Equip teams with resources** such as labs, maker spaces, datasets, and ethical oversight to ensure rigorous, responsible development.
4. **Align judging to thematic impact** by using domain experts and criteria tied to theme objectives.
5. **Match winning projects with implementation partners** via sponsors, policy channels, or grants for continuity.

BEST FOR

Channeling creativity toward a mission or discipline priority

Case-Given, Fixed Brief

Every team works on the same predefined challenge under identical constraints

1. **Release a common case** and give all teams the same time-boxed challenge with clear deliverables and constraints.
2. **Train in structured analysis** through orientation on frameworks, tools, and performance standards.
3. **Run time-bound sprints** where teams design, test, and adjust solutions within fixed parameters.
4. **Simulate high-stakes evaluation** with board-level or technical pitches to expert panels.
5. **Capture and share learning** in debrief sessions to review decisions, and transferable skills for future application.

BEST FOR

Sharpening rapid analysis, synthesis, and performance under constraints

Experiential Service Learning

1. **Preparation & Orientation**: Faculty, programme staff, or student-led committees run needs-assessment, ethics training, and context briefings to ground students before entering the field.

2. **Partner Co-Design & Project Planning:** Community partners, faculty, or students jointly develop learning + impact outcomes, formalised in MOUs or affiliation agreements that specify roles, risk management, and evaluation metrics.

3. **Action & Iterative Engagement** – students implement service projects on-site (or hybrid), with ongoing feedback from mentors or partners; field activities often integrate classroom theory, site visits and hands-on problem-solving.

4. **Reflection, Evaluation & Continuation** – structured reflection sessions and multi-perspective impact assessment close the loop while findings feed into capstones, public showcases and next-cycle improvements.

Five Key Models

1 Course-Embedded Service-Learning

Service projects built into regular semester courses and graded as part of coursework

- Align community partner timelines with the semester syllabus.
- Integrate project assessment into existing course rubrics.

2 Faculty-Led Immersive Trips

Short-term field immersions (1–3 weeks) added to a pre-trip seminar

- Provide pre-departure training and field preparation.
- Secure travel bursaries or funding for equitable participation.

3 Full-Time Civic Fellowships / Internships

Standalone summer/winter placements with stipends for deep individual immersion

- Allocate central funding for student stipends.
- Establish dedicated mentor coordination for host sites.

Emerging Models

4 Residential Living Learning Communities [15]

Students live together for a year while co-running sustained service projects

- Maintain facilities that enable co-living and project work.
- Provide 24/7 staff or faculty oversight within the community.

5 Long-Term Community Partnerships [16]

Cohorts work with the same community over time for sustained impact

- Employ on-site liaison staff to coordinate with local partners.
- Plan for faculty succession to ensure project continuity.

Experiential Service Learning: Case Studies

Case study

Residential Living Learning Communities

Michigan Community Scholars Program (MCSP)

MCSP is a social-justice-oriented residential learning community at the University of Michigan. It combines in-residence seminars, civic engagement, dialogue, leadership opportunities, service-learning, and wellness programming to integrate learning, living, and civic action.

Start with a civic vision Preparation & Orientation	Anchor the programme in a mission to model a diverse, democratic, small-college community where living, learning, and service are integrated
Make the residence the classroom Partner Co-Design & Project Planning	Hold seminars, project meetings, and study groups in West Quad, using shared spaces designed for both living and project work. The residence itself becomes a 24/7 learning and collaboration hub.
Integrate Service and Mentorship into Daily Learning Action & Iterative Engagement	Co-design and sustain service projects with faculty, staff, and students shaping courses, leadership roles, and community initiatives, supported by dedicated funding and in-residence guidance year-round.
Reflect as you live Reflection, Evaluation & Continuation	Integrate structured dialogue in weekly seminars and spontaneous reflection in shared spaces, so processing experiences becomes a natural part of community life.

Case study

Long-Term Community Partnerships

University of St.Gallen SIMagination Challenge

This core experiential course at the University of St. Gallen challenges diverse student teams to co-create and implement international, socially impactful initiatives with local communities. Through intergenerational handovers, it combines service learning with sustained partnerships across cohorts.

Vision for Lasting Impact Preparation & Orientation	Set clear goals for lasting impact and ensure initiative continuity through structured handovers, so each cohort builds on previous gains, while fostering new initiatives.
Build Local Partnerships Partner Co-Design & Project Planning	Student teams source partnerships or continue partnering with communities and NGOs, ensuring engagement continues across cohorts.
Operation and On-Site Learning Action & Iterative Engagement	Student teams run all aspects of the project—including marketing, fundraising, and operations—with each cohort travelling onsite to support initiatives and face real-world challenges, backed by institutional funding.
Continue & Reflect Reflection, Evaluation & Continuation	Projects evolve through feedback where these insights are fed into the next cohort's plans so each generation builds on the last.

Additional Experiential Learning Models at a Glance

Internships

Students gain workplace exposure through temporary placements.

Emerging Modality	Virtual internships, micro internships
Challenge	Uneven quality; Inequitable access; Depence on students
Key Success Factor	Strong employer partnerships; Bridging students and employers

Workshops

Short, intensive sessions to build targeted skills.

Emerging Modality	Hybrid/online workshops, peer-led or industry-led formats
Challenge	One-off events; Weak continuity; Little outcome tracking
Key Success Factor	Linking output to coursework or ongoing projects

Real-World Clients

Students solve practical problems for external stakeholders.

Emerging Modality	Client consulting
Challenge	Lack of seriousness from both clients and students
Key Success Factor	Faculty facilitation; Set formal agreements

Field Trips

Site visits offering contextual learning beyond the classroom.

Emerging Modality	Virtual field trips, multi-day immersive experiences
Challenge	Costly; Surface-level impact; Edu-tourism risk
Key Success Factor	Integrate into course objectives with pre-brief and post reflection

Exchange

Students study abroad for cultural and academic immersion.

Emerging Modality	Short-term exchanges, blended/virtual exchange models
Challenge	Inequitable access; Superficial immersion; Unfair grade transfer
Key Success Factor	Structured exchange requirements; Scholarships

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