Community-Based Experiential Learning

Since its inception the Learning Exchange has been providing UBC students with experiential learning opportunities in non-profit organizations and inner city schools. The number of students who have been integrating volunteer work and classroom learning (called Community Service Learning or CSL) has been increasing dramatically every year. With many faculties increasingly focused on providing students with research experience, students have also begun doing Community-Based Research (or CBR). Just as CSL responds to priorities the community identifies, CBR addresses research questions that community partners say are important.

- In 2008-2009, 1,675 students engaged in CSL or CBR through the Learning Exchange or the UBC-Community Learning Initiative (a model for course-based CSL or CBR established in 2006 with support from the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation). This represents a 44% increase compared to the previous year.
- Students are now engaged in communities beyond the Downtown Eastside, including rural and First Nations communities.
- About 60% of the students participated in CSL or CBR as part of an academic course.
- The 31 courses that incorporated this kind of community-based experiential learning covered a wide variety of disciplines and subjects, including biology, sociology, and engineering.
- About 50% of the students acted as tutors, coaches, and role models in East Vancouver schools, enhancing the learning environment for more than 3,500 children and youth.
- About 350 UBC students took part in CSL projects in schools during Reading Week (spring break). They were joined by teams of students from the University of Guelph and the University of Calgary. School-based Reading Week CSL projects were led by specially-trained UBC staff members, senior students, and employees of SAP Canada, (formerly Business Objects).

"Academic learning coupled with practical experience creates a powerful tool. The two Community Service Learning garden projects produced things that both enhance the Garden itself and the visitor experience of the Garden. I particularly enjoy the fresh perspectives and fresh energy brought by the students."

- Representative from Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Classical Chinese Garden

"What struck me the most was the enthusiasm and commitment to community work that many students came away with.”
- UBC Instructor

"This experience allowed me to increase my awareness of the diverse communities that are present in Vancouver. By engaging in this activity, I became much more knowledgeable about the world at large.”
- UBC Student

learn, discover, and contribute...
08-2009 Activities

Storefront Programs

“This program gave me the opportunity to learn and help others at the same time. It has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my life.”

- ESL Facilitator

In October 2008 we moved to a larger storefront at 612 Main Street. This new location, in Chinatown and only five blocks away from our original site, gives us more space and the opportunity to re-imagine our presence in the community.

- The larger storefront enabled us to almost double the number of spaces in the ESL Conversation Program supported by HSBC Bank Canada. Last year, 853 spaces were filled by immigrants from all over the world who came to practice their English in the conversation groups facilitated by 55 specially-trained local residents.

- The success of the storefront ESL program has led to the development of a new school-based program partially funded through British Columbia’s Ministry of Education. Seventy-five members of the local community took part in the new ESL program at Strathcona School.

- The Computer Skills Workshops supported by HSBC Bank Canada also engaged more people this year with 202 people taking part in the basic and advanced computer skills workshops, a 17% increase over last year.

Strategic Planning and Development

A comprehensive five-year plan for the advancement of Community Service Learning and Community-Based Research has been completed. The plan aims to enhance students’ learning by engaging them in hands-on activities that make demonstrable contributions to society. The plan outlines strategies that will strengthen UBC’s relationships with community-based organizations and provide centralized support for faculty-driven CSL and CBR initiatives. The plan provides the framework to enable UBC to reach its goal of developing programs that engage 10% of UBC’s student population annually in community-based learning activities. The plan for CSL and CBR complements the other visioning and strategic planning initiatives that UBC is currently finalizing (see www.strategicplan.ubc.ca).

In addition to receiving ongoing support from generous donors such as the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation, SAP Canada, Max Bell Foundation, and the Kautza Foundation, the Learning Exchange was fortunate to receive a renewed commitment from HSBC Bank Canada. Their exceptional gift of $2.17 million to UBC includes $1.75 million for the Learning Exchange to be used over the next seven years. This gift will allow the expanded participation of UBC students and East Vancouver children in school-based literacy, science, and math programs as well as the continuation of the storefront ESL Conversation Program and Computer Skills Workshops.

“I’ve had the good fortune of being able to take three of the Computer Workshops that the Learning Exchange has offered. All at no cost to me. I am so grateful for this opportunity, because I am unemployed. My computer skills are not current with the demands of the job market today. Now, because of the courses at the Learning Exchange, I have a beginner knowledge of these programs and have gained confidence because of these new skills.”

- Computer Skills Learner
Reflections of a Trek student

I first volunteered with the UBC Learning Exchange Trek program during Reading Week. As an international student living on campus, I felt separated from the rest of Vancouver. That changed after participating in the Reading Week program. I realized that I could make a significant difference in my own community by volunteering. The guidance offered by UBC Learning Exchange Trek staff was invaluable. They introduced me to meaningful volunteer positions that fit my interests and schedule. Volunteering has made me see my own potential to make a difference; it’s helped me gain new skills and recognize my own and others’ strengths and abilities. I have a better understanding of the problems faced by so many groups and individuals right here in Vancouver. I’ve been able to put a human face on statistics and stereotypes. The UBC Learning Exchange Trek program offers truly outstanding opportunities for UBC students to become engaged in their community and to make the world a better place.

-UBC Student and Trek Participant

Highlights of Plans for the Coming Year

The new strategic plan for the advancement of CSL and CBR will provide the framework for the continued steady growth in the number of students, instructors, and community organizations involved in community-based experiential learning. More importantly, the plan will provide inspiration as we strive to make the learning experience even more powerful for students and the work done by students even more beneficial for our community partners. Next year, we will also focus on building our capacity to provide increasingly effective centralized support for faculty-based CSL and CBR.

Now that the strategic plan for CSL and CBR is complete, we have begun to focus on a plan for the further evolution of our storefront presence. Our new location provides the impetus to reflect on how the Learning Exchange has grown, what we have learned, and how we can best work with the community to achieve shared goals. New funding from the Face the World Foundation and the Kiatsa Foundation will allow us to explore new ways of engaging Downtown Eastside residents in building social capital in the neighbourhood. The school-based ESL Conversation Program is expanding to two more East Vancouver schools as part of our ongoing collaboration with the Vancouver Board of Education aimed at enabling schools to act as focal points for community-building.

“I feel that empowering residents of this community is essential for allowing people to progress. The less distance between those serving and those being served, the more commonality we can find in each other; I believe this is important to understanding who it is we are and how we can best benefit each other.”

-Learning Exchange Patron, ESL Facilitator, and Intern

www.learningexchange.ubc.ca

Learning Community, with You

The success of the UBC Learning Exchange is entirely dependent upon our working relationships with many people in the community and at UBC. We offer our heartfelt thanks to all of our wonderful community and campus partners, donors, volunteers, and program participants. We look forward to continuing to collaborate with you in the coming year.