



a place of mind

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

UBC LEARNING EXCHANGE UBC-COMMUNITY LEARNING INITIATIVE

annual update
2010-2011



A MILESTONE YEAR

The 2010-11 academic year marked a significant turning point in the evolution of the Learning Exchange. As a result of the 2011 review of the Vice-President, Students (VPS) portfolio, a decision was made to locate Community Service Learning within a newly structured VPS portfolio. As part of this reorganization, the Trek and Reading Week Programs were integrated into the UBC-Community Learning Initiative (UBC-CLI), as one overarching unit within the VPS portfolio, while the Learning Exchange programs and initiatives that are based in the Downtown Eastside remain within the portfolio of the Vice-President, External, Legal, and Community Relations.

Why has this change been so positive? Over the past decade, the Learning Exchange has had two major focuses. The first has been to develop and embed Community Service Learning as an innovative educational approach within the academic fabric of the institution. The second has been to cultivate culturally sensitive community-based educational programs for individuals and groups within Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, to address critical issues. The recent reorganization allows both units to draw on a greater number of resources and capacities at the institution. At the same time, capacity for community-based expertise, knowledge and sensitivity will be embedded throughout more of the University. By bringing CSL activities into closer alignment with other student-centered activities in

the VPS portfolio, the focus on student learning and engagement will be strengthened. The change has also provided an opportunity for the Learning Exchange to re-envision its goals and priorities. The reorganization clearly demonstrates the University's strong support of community engagement priorities that advance the growth of enriched educational experiences for UBC students, while pursuing its vision to engage with community in meaningful and collaborative ways.

In July 2011, after providing dedicated leadership to the Learning Exchange since its inception, Dr. Margo Fryer left her position as Director to take on the new role of Senior Advisor, Student Learning Initiatives. Kathleen Leahy became the Director of the Learning Exchange, and Susan Grossman is now the Director of the UBC-CLI. These changes were enacted in July, and some aspects of their operational implementation continue as of this report. Amid these changes, the 2010-11 year remained a productive one. This report will provide an overview of the accomplishments of the Learning Exchange and the UBC-CLI.

The growth of both initiatives has been made possible by generous gifts from a variety of sources, as well as strong support from the University. While this report will provide some quantitative indicators of success, it will also relate some of the impacts of our work by sharing stories and profiles of success.

UBC LEARNING EXCHANGE: HIGHLIGHTS

The Learning Exchange at Main and Keefer continued to provide a welcoming, informal and lively focal point in the Downtown Eastside for people—many who have been marginalized—by enabling them to comfortably re-engage, at their own pace, in a variety of learning and leadership experiences. For instance, many residents came in to access the internet, then joined in informal conversations or Learning Exchange events, and eventually took on roles as facilitators in the ESL or computer programs.

The Learning Exchange also continued to provide a place where the campus community could connect with local people and organizations, as part of a course, or as part of a community-university engagement project around particular issues, like food security.



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- The ESL Conversation Program had over 900 learners involved this year, enabling immigrants to participate more actively in Canadian life, and trained over 90 residents to act as facilitators of the ESL groups, helping to increase understanding of important societal issues facing immigrants and marginalized communities, while increasing community capacity to act for positive change.
- The Computer Drop-In and Computer Skills Programs increased online access by training over 300 individuals in basic and advanced computer skills, while giving free computer access to up to 40 individuals per day, helping to ensure that marginalized citizens can more fully access and participate in what has become an essential part of everyday life.
- Last year, about 30% of the people who attended the afternoon drop-in and about 10% of the volunteers trained to facilitate the Contributing Through Computers initiative were Aboriginal.
- UBC students and faculty used the Learning Exchange as an off-campus entry point to connect with residents for a range of projects including Occupational Therapy students who helped initiate a digital story telling group, graduate students in Science who facilitated the tutorial component of UBC's Science 101 program on site, and individual students who assisted in the ESL program through co-curricular community service learning.

COMPUTER ACCESS AND TRAINING

While the afternoon Drop-In remains an integral part of the neighbourhood's digital access, the morning computer sessions supported by HSBC Bank Canada have become livelier and more effective. One significant development is the addition of a SmartBoard, an interactive electronic whiteboard that allows learners to clearly see demonstrations before they practice on their individual computers. More importantly, residents being trained in the Contributing Through Computers initiative now volunteer in the Learning Exchange computer sessions, offering one-to-one support while developing their own skills and confidence.

Volunteers in Contributing Through Computers are also reaching out around the Downtown Eastside to help to reduce the 'digital divide', facilitating sessions in six other community organizations last year, with more partnerships in development. By learning how to lead basic computer tutorials, local residents are enabling agencies—such as libraries, housing associations and community non-profit

organizations—to more fully utilize public computer labs by providing support to novice users. Since the computer training workshops at the Learning



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Exchange have been oversubscribed for the past few years, Contributing Through Computers is another way to develop capacity within individuals, and contribute to the broader social sustainability of the community.



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Increased computer skills activity has also drawn more new people into the afternoon Computer Drop-In. Daily, up to 40 people drop in to discuss current events, conduct job searches, work on school assignments, and access computers to connect with family and friends, and work on creative projects. Notably, diversity in the drop-in is increasing, with more women and ESL learners using the resources available.

SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY: CONTRIBUTING THROUGH COMPUTERS

Ron Sander was one of the first volunteers to be trained as a facilitator in year one of the three-year Contributing Through Computers initiative, which brings community members together to learn to lead computer workshops. The idea behind the initiative is that everyone benefits by building knowledge, skills, and self-confidence, in addition to fostering a heightened sense of belonging and community. “Volunteering is a two-way street. When you help other people, you enrich your own life... you learn from those you teach,” says Ron.



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After completing his training, Ron related how excited he was to learn how to share his knowledge with others. “...Over the years [I’ve] developed an

Ron’s dedication and hard work, he has gone on to secure paid employment with the Union Gospel Mission, an organization that is currently working on setting up a new computer lab in its new building.

“Volunteering is a two-way street. When you help other people, you enrich your own life ...”

extensive knowledge base in a number of subjects. Unfortunately, this knowledge, for the most part, is locked in my head.... Volunteering with this program has given me an avenue that allows me to exercise my gifts and knowledge....” In fact, as a result of

The Learning Exchange is pleased to partner with Vancouver Foundation and the Carraresi Foundation on Contributing Through Computers, so that local residents like Ron are able to further contribute to the well-being of the community. As Ron said, “There are incredible opportunities in the Downtown Eastside...for maintaining and sustaining a community where life is worth living.”

UBC LEARNING EXCHANGE

GOING BEYOND LIMITS TOGETHER

Sue, a retired woman living in seniors housing in Chinatown, says that years of working as a seamstress—sewing the heavy material of lumberjack shirts—is what caused the mobility problems she has in her hands. Sue initially came to the Learning Exchange to improve her English. Like many seniors in Chinatown, it was during retirement that Sue was able to find time to work on her language skills.

Sue was aware that the Learning Exchange also offered computer sessions, but felt that they were not for her, doubting her ability to manipulate a mouse and keyboard, and concerned that her English

would not be good enough to follow technical instruction. Nevertheless, after watching a computer workshop run by the Learning Exchange for women at Tradeworks, a local organization that provides job related skills training, Sue felt ready to try a beginner’s computer workshop.



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It turned out to be a good decision. To her delight, Sue found that she could use the standard track-pad on a computer laptop quite easily. She also found unexpected support from John, who was being trained to lead computer skills workshops, at the same time that she signed up to learn computer skills. John, initially shy and sometimes apt to over-explain ideas to groups of learners due to nervousness, transformed when working one-on-one with Sue. He was able to relax and put into practice the concepts discussed in his facilitator training—finding analogies that explained things in a way that resonated with the learner. It helped greatly that John could go over tricky points in Cantonese, too. This relationship paved the way for Sue to register for an advanced computer workshop without a second thought, and provided the confidence John needed to realize his strength of helping people one-on-one as he continues to facilitate computer learning.

**Participant names have been changed, and are not pictured.*

ESL CONVERSATION GROUPS

The ESL Conversation Program supported by HSBC Bank Canada has two core goals: to offer effective language practice to Canadian immigrants and citizens; and to develop the capacities of Downtown Eastside volunteers who facilitate the sessions. While the program continues to be overwhelmingly popular and successful—with hundreds of learners and up to 30 volunteer facilitators in a typical term—it also continues to explore new possibilities and develop in new directions.

For example, an exciting initiative last year was the establishment of ‘curriculum development committees’ which brought together over 30 ESL learners and ESL facilitators to co-create curriculum resources tailored to both learner and facilitator needs and interests. This effort was supported by a part-time UBC staff member who engaged people in developing the initiative, resulting in the creation of lessons for beginner and intermediate levels. Due to the success of the experience and strong participant turnout, the committees continue to work together on developing lesson materials for advanced ESL

learners. The improved lesson materials are available to other organizations and, in one case, another community organization adopted the lesson-planning model, recognizing its power to engage and stimulate learning and cooperation. This participatory project demonstrates how social sustainability is strengthened when people work together to achieve shared goals.

“I learned that when you give and serve others, you gain so much back. It makes you feel good.”

- ESL Facilitator

Also last year, at the suggestion of a volunteer, an ESL Creative Writing group was established and has also surpassed expectations. A public reading of writing pieces at the Learning Exchange generated enough interest and praise to lead to plans to stage a reading

of works in this year’s Heart of the City Festival, and to involvement of UBC Creative Writing students in further developing the writing group. These initiatives are examples of how the Learning Exchange is bringing people together—people who might not otherwise work together—tapping into previously unacknowledged talent and creating new results.



UBC LEARNING EXCHANGE

LEARNING CAN TAKE UBC STUDENTS BY SURPRISE

There's a learning opportunity in every experience—a chance to grow, to think differently about the world around us, our community and the people who live in it, even about ourselves. For Deborah Chen, a fourth year UBC undergraduate student in Medical Laboratory Science, this proved true, when in her third year Deborah volunteered at the Learning Exchange to assist with the ESL conversation program and found she learned as much about herself as she did about others.

Years earlier, an ESL student herself, Deborah understood the challenges faced by ESL learners when she acknowledged “how difficult it was for me to overcome my [language] fears.” Initially, Deborah was part of a small group session with participants practicing their English through conversation, discussing topics such as life in Vancouver and favourite holidays. Through that class, Deborah met George—a keenly motivated surgeon from China trying to pass English exams to qualify him as a surgeon in Canada. They began working together at the Learning Exchange, practicing medical terminology and mock interviews. Deborah then further expanded her role, facilitating a larger group session for English language beginners—a totally different

experience. “Being able to facilitate the learning process is a very rewarding process... [The learners'] progress is your reward, and another way of giving back to the community,” which Deborah calls “a place of exchange.”

There were many things Deborah found rewarding about working with ESL learners. “It was the interactions and the experiences and the way [the learners] indirectly teach you about life, themselves and their culture,” says Deborah, adding that their stories, the hardships they faced and how they tackled those hardships really rang true for her. Deborah acknowledged that facilitating is challenging, but says it was “an opportunity to teach, and an opportunity to learn *how* to teach,” including the need to be creative and adaptable. Through facilitating, she also came to better appreciate the value of her own education, seeing the enthusiasm of the ESL session participants. “They are doing this for free,” said Deborah, “and they are so eager to learn. Whereas I am paying for my education. And sometimes you see people falling asleep or on their phones [during class] ... I've learned the intrinsic value of learning, which was a really big lesson for me.”



UBC-COMMUNITY LEARNING INITIATIVE: HIGHLIGHTS

Since 2006, the UBC-CLI has been facilitating the engagement of undergraduate and graduate students in community-based experiential learning (CBEL) opportunities including community service learning and community based research. This past year, a total of 2598 UBC students participated in these opportunities, including 1642 students in curricular-based opportunities, a 22% increase from the previous academic year. Co-curricular opportunities accounted for 956 students.

The work of the UBC-CLI is completed in collaboration with partners across the University and community networks throughout the province. Much of our work in schools is supported by HSBC Bank Canada. The following are highlights from these important collaborative relationships:

- **Faculty of Applied Science:** course-based participation in CBEL tripled to 469 students, up from 150 in the previous year. In one course, students partnered with the Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis Society of British Columbia to modify an Android tablet computer to help people living with ALS retrieve, hold, and navigate readable content. The students also helped develop software for this device.
- **Faculty of Arts:** instructors from across the 12 disciplines implemented CBEL in second, third and fourth year courses. Students in a Geography course partnered with the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives to produce a report about the implementation of living wage policies in jurisdictions outside the Lower Mainland. This work involved identifying evaluation methodologies and compiling evidence about the impact of these policies on poverty reduction and the economy in general.
- **Sauder School of Business:** CBEL activities focused on continuing to strengthen and grow partnerships with the establishment of collaborative relationships in Port Alberni and Tofino. Marketing students formulated a communications strategy focused on raising awareness of the Alberni Valley's historic and recreational tourism assets, and developed a multi-faceted marketing campaign.
- **Faculty of Land and Food Systems:** continued engagement of a high proportion of students in CBEL activities. Students worked with the Fraser Health Authority to map the food environment around Fraser North Schools. Mapped locations included schools, fast food outlets, supermarkets, restaurants, coffee shops and bakeries. Students were then able to assess the state of food availability and accessibility around the studied schools.
- **Vancouver elementary and high schools:** through a long-standing partnership with the Vancouver School Board (VSB), UBC students acted as tutors and mentors to over 3,000 inner-city children and youth.
- In all, UBC students worked with a total of 90 non-profit organizations, 23 public schools, and 21 small to medium-sized businesses.

LEARNING IN THE FIELD: BRINGING THEORY TO LIFE IN THE COMMUNITY

Amanda Cheong, fourth-year Honours student in Sociology, UBC Faculty of Arts, believed in experiential learning before she came to the University. In her second year of study at UBC, she participated in a community-based research experience that marked a turning point in her academic career.

An initiative developed in partnership with the UBC-Community Learning Initiative, UBC faculty members, and community partner organizations, the Immigrant Vancouver Ethnographic Field School (IVEFS) is a six-week collaboration led by Sociology Professor Jennifer Chun and Anthropology Professor Alexia Bloch. IVEFS offered Amanda an opportunity to apply her academic knowledge and learn from immigrant community issues.

Based out of Gordon Neighborhood House in Vancouver's West End, Amanda initially learned theory on community development, immigration, transnationalism, and qualitative research methodology. She then carried out research, particularly

“IVEFS taught me the value of being flexible and open to learning opportunities . . . how to talk to people in the community and elicit responses . . . I learned how to communicate my research.”

- Amanda Cheong

evaluation surveys of programs and services offered at Gordon Neighborhood House. “What I was learning in the classroom gave me a theoretical framework, which allowed me to make sense of what I was seeing and doing in the field.”



While conducting research, Amanda met immigrant families from diverse backgrounds and built strong connections with them. Through this process, she became interested in immigrant parents, ethnic identity, and the language acquisition of their children. Her experience confirmed that “you have to be accountable to the population you immerse yourself in”.

Encouraged by her experience and supported by her continued working relationships with faculty members and the UBC-Community Learning Initiative, Amanda hopes to continue bringing about positive change through research. She has since decided to pursue graduate school and is preparing to lead a Student-Directed Seminar with a community service learning component in January 2012.

What would she tell fellow students who are considering a community-based experiential learning opportunity? “It’s a unique experience and you shouldn’t pass it up!”

* Amanda is not pictured.

HOW COMMUNITY-BASED EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING SUPPORTS COMMUNITY CAPACITY



This past year, the UBC-CLI sought to identify ways to more broadly support initiatives emerging from the community with the intention of creating a model that is sustainable, creates conditions for innovation, and enables community partners to have an equal stake in both the initiation and development of these relationships. Funds were provided to pilot a small number of community-driven engagement initiatives, each chosen for its potential to lead to a lasting impact in the community, engage various actors from both the community and the University, and lead to the creation of partnerships that did not require the UBC-CLI to remain central to its long-term success.

In one pilot initiative, the YWCA Rooftop Food Garden developed a business plan to create a network of community food gardens that provide

food and jobs to low-income individuals and families. An intern, funded by the UBC-CLI but housed at the garden, drafted a timeline outlining the history of the YWCA Rooftop Food Garden, including key decisions made, which will assist others seeking to create a similar model. The intern also prepared a detailed business plan, which included an executive summary highlighting critical elements of the planned community garden network, the HarvestShare Network. Now, students from Sauder are conducting market research to identify characteristics of potential business partners for the Network and developing an effective marketing strategy. By the end of the project, the students will provide a step-by-step guide for the YWCA Metro Vancouver Fund Development group to acquire space and funding for new gardens.

STUDENT GRANTS PRODUCE TANGIBLE KNOWLEDGE AND COLLABORATIVE COMMUNITY ACTION

Further capacity building efforts included the provision of asset-based community development grant awards to 10 students through the UBC-CLI Summer Grant and Chapman Programs. In one project, a student worked in partnership with BC Multicultural Health Services Society on the Umbrella Mobile Health Clinic (UMHC) initiative to respond to the difficulties that immigrants, refugees and temporary foreign workers face in accessing primary health care services. The project aimed to improve the health security of migrant farm workers by doing site visits in a van/truck, which was converted into a

medical clinic. The student promoted health security through workshops (held in the waiting-tent) on nutrition, hygiene and pesticide safety. In another example, a student worked with the Beauty Night Society (BNS) to make the BNS training program more accessible to current volunteers, some of whom are residents of the Downtown Eastside and previous recipients of BNS services. The project aimed to promote opportunities for participants to invest the skills they acquired through the program back into Beauty Nights.

STUDENT LEARNING

The UBC-CLI also collaborated with the Office of Planning and Institutional Research (PAIR) to assess the student learning outcomes of community service learning (CSL). Student survey data shows statistically significant evidence that students who do CSL as part of an undergraduate academic course show improved proficiency in:

- **Exploring and appreciating sustainability in its many forms**
- **Taking personal social responsibility**
- **Motivating and leading others toward a goal**
- **Working as a team member and developing interpersonal skills**
- **Appreciating racial, ethnic, cultural, and global diversity**
- **Understanding and appreciating Aboriginal cultures**

The data also suggests that participation in CSL results in improved proficiencies, over and above participation in traditional volunteering activities.

With support from the UBC-CLI's Manager of Research and Evaluation, a working group will be formed to more broadly understand the outcomes for students engaged in community-based experiential learning. This working group will partner with the Faculties to ensure the outcomes measured align with Faculty priorities for their students, with the intention to consult Faculty representatives at key milestone points throughout the working group process.

NEW DIRECTIONS: THE NEXT EVOLUTION

UBC LEARNING EXCHANGE

The Learning Exchange will continue to pursue several specific priorities for the coming year, including the further development of Contributing Through Computers to reach more Downtown Eastside residents and community organizations, the launch of a new and more engaging website, and the expansion of activities arising from our ESL Conversation Program, such as the Tandem Language Learning project—a language exchange program in response to both resident and UBC student interest. Efforts are also underway to link patrons in our programs to Robson Square, fostering connections between two of UBC’s uniquely tailored, urban adult learning environments.

The Learning Exchange is well placed to collaboratively advance the goals of UBC’s Community Engagement strategy and commitments in *Place and Promise*, including Aboriginal engagement and

intercultural understanding. The Learning Exchange’s strong track record and its connections to a wide variety of citizens and organizations provide a valuable foundation for further innovation. We will continue to foster and grow connections between students, faculty, community organizations and residents in the Downtown Eastside as they address important social, economic and cultural issues together.

To further realize our potential, academic leadership and increased integration of the work of the Learning Exchange into the academic fabric of the University is required. In collaboration with the Provost and Vice President Academic, we will engage in a process to re-envision and re-focus the efforts of the Learning Exchange, and to identify and recruit an Academic Director. This new role will contribute greatly to the next stage of our evolution.

UBC-COMMUNITY LEARNING INITIATIVE

The transition of the UBC-CLI into the VP Students portfolio marks the advent of a new phase in the evolution of the University’s deepening commitment to student learning and community engagement. Situating the UBC-CLI in a portfolio that already focuses its efforts on enriched educational experiences including internships, study abroad, leadership opportunities, and the myriad of other ways that community-based experiential learning (CBEL) is enacted across the University, provides the possibility of infusing all CBEL efforts with those components that have made CSL such an effective tool in fostering student learning and contributing to sustained community engagement. It also enables the exploration of the contours of the student’s and, importantly, the community’s experience.

Going forward, the UBC-CLI team will expand efforts to support emergent initiatives from the community, including creating a new staff role centered on community capacity building. The Manager of

Community Based Partnerships will focus on the identification of synergistic opportunities emerging from within and between partner relationships, and connecting key stakeholders to one another.

Further approaches planned to increase CBEL opportunities include convening discussions with community partners, students, and faculty that lead to organic collaborations resulting in action on important and complex community priorities. Also, the UBC-CLI will work with other units on campus, including Student Development, Go Global, and Career Services, to leverage students’ capacities to build community-based partnerships and increase infrastructure for student and community initiated efforts. The result is that a far greater number of University resources can be leveraged in building on community-based efforts. This return on investment in our students and our communities is one that extends well beyond what the UBC-CLI can achieve alone.



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