

Student Experience Design (SXD) Lab

FIT Grant Final Report

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Introduction: This project has been like no other. It experienced the global pandemic, the move to learning fully online, and then just when the project was able to test several on-campus activities the Fraser Valley flood occurred resulting in another pivot. The students and faculty involved have continuously demonstrated flexibility, creativity, and responsiveness. These three skills, often championed by employers as imperatives, were tested by everyone involved in this project. This gave students and faculty the opportunity to reflect on the importance of having these skills and how well Arts' students are positioned to demonstrate these skills to employers and community partners.

The FIT students and faculty greatly appreciated UFV's support with extending budget and reporting deadlines. Without this flexibility aspects of the project would have been cancelled. However, because of this support deliverables were revised to fit the context and unexpected opportunities were found. The FIT grant provided the seed funding to launch several other related initiatives that brought in a little over \$300,000.00 in external funding from:

- ACE-WIL BC Phase One
- ACE-WIL BC Phase Two
- SSHRC funding
- CiCan Career Launcher Grants (three grants in total)
- Business and Higher Education Roundtable Work Integrated Learning
- Canada Comeback Challenge

Overview: The **original** purpose of this FIT grant was to create a Student Experience Design Lab, following the eCampus Ontario model <https://sxdlab.ecampusontario.ca>.

Using this model students, with support from faculty, were empowered to lead open innovation projects to address complex problems facing learning at UFV and learning for the future world of work.

Early in the project students identified that not being able to align their classroom learning to their post-university career goals was the most frustrating part of their education. This was especially true for international students. All students reported not having career related work experiences as their greatest challenge and were keen to explore innovative ways to improve this situation.

As a result, the focus of the SXD lab become about exploring innovative solutions to improving this situation and on how best to equip students with the skills and experiences they needed beyond their formal course work. Work Integrated Learning (WIL) and career skill development infused into the university learning environment became the focus. The original proposed objectives of this FIT grant were met, but with some revision in terms of focus and scope. The original objectives were:

Students and faculty that participate in the SXD Lab would:

1. Generate ideas related to teaching and learning about knowledge practice learning, and innovation practices.

2. Curate essential information and resources needed to establish a human-centred design lab
3. Propose challenges for the SxD lab team to solve that include for example (i.e., problems with current practices, technology in the learning space, barriers to learning, career development strategies, pain points in a student learning journey, and opportunities for workplace/community skill building)
4. Facilitate a discovery session for proposed projects
5. Engage in Indigenous ways of knowing as part of discovery
6. Articulate how internationalization is applied to project scope
7. Select 1-3 projects to explore over the length of the FIT Grant
8. Define the problem, scope, and context for each project
9. Establish SxD design team(s)
10. Establish working protocols for multifaceted and complex problem solving

In addition, James Mandigo approved revising the project to include learning more about the implementation of digital badging.

Revised Objectives:

Prior to the Covid campus closure objectives 1-4 as previously reported were met. However, as the SxD lab narrowed its focus and adapted to the uncertainty of the online world it was reworked to become the *Arts Worx* initiative. The students branded this initiative as *Arts Worx* to draw attention, through a play on words that Arts graduates contribute to the workplace. In other words, Arts (goes to work). Alternative projects were created to address both the Covid limitations, and the scope of the project as defined by the students. The remaining objectives were met in more of an applied manner than a theoretically/research examination/evaluation manner and provided examples that were used to attract further funding. The online environment and the requirement to pivot offered opportunities to “test drive” a variety of strategies. As a result, the SxD lab transformed into the *Arts Worx* initiative and became more of a “test kitchen” – than having a focus on researching the impact of students working in the capacity of an SxD lab.

Arts Worx or the ***test kitchen*** accomplished the following:

1. Creation of the [Career Chats Video Series](#) This series was facilitated, using an SxD lab model like eCampus Ontario and was produced by students. The lead editor was an international student that was able to secure a career related full-time job upon graduation because of his work on this project. This project has also fueled two student lead research projects.
2. Completion of six hack-a-thons (one in person prior to Covid and five virtually). These provided 53 students virtual WIL opportunities to engage in solving workplace challenges in a variety of contexts. These included:
 - a. Corporate branding
 - b. Explainer video production
 - c. Customer engagement strategizing
 - d. Blog and promotion writing
 - e. Vlog production
 - f. Community outreach

3. Facilitation of a Digital Storytelling badge in History. The digital badge was well attended with 28 participates. History is now waiting for UFV to finalize its process for offering micro-credentials before developing additional badges, but they are ready when the university is.
4. Scalable experiential learning for the College of Arts was established. It was determined that Work Integrated Learning (WIL) would have the greatest impact for the largest number of students. As a result, the College of Arts successful applied for each of the funding grants listed in the introduction. These grants will produce 1000 WIL experiences for Arts students in 2022-2023 and will secure ongoing WIL experiences for future years.
5. Creation of a sustainable way forward to create on-campus high impact WIL experiences students. This is being done by establishing a student Design Hub that will be facilitated by MEDA students, as well as shifting how SOCA manages the S'eliyemetaxwtexw Art Gallery. Both the gallery and the hub will be managed and run by students as “businesses”. This will provide first-to-fourth year students with WIL experiences on-campus as well as providing the community with access to services and programming.
6. Participation with the [Canada Comeback Challenge \(C3\)](#) Using examples from the virtual hack-a-thons that the students and faculty experimented with as part of *Arts Worx*, UFV was invited to participate in the C3 challenge. Sixty-eight students and 11 faculty are participating.
7. Creation of the Career and Learning for Life (CALL) Research Consortium. Five faculty members have established a research consortium with a focus on Labour Market, strategic career development, and curriculum development related to Canada’s [Skills for Success](#).

Funding Overview: All funds awarded through the FIT program were used to:

1. support faculty mentoring students or designing innovative projects
2. purchase industry standard software that students needed to produce explainer videos for business/community partners
3. fund honorariums for students involved in each of the projects. The students were extremely grateful to be paid for their work.

Approximately 80% of the funding directly went to students.

Lessons Learned:

The most significant impact or result of this FIT grant was identifying promising practices for engaging students, faculty, and community/employer partners into WIL and securing external sources of funding. The following outlines the specific lessons learned about how best to structure WIL and address the expressed needs of students.

1. Students are highly capable of contributing to the needs of employers and community partners, however, they have very challenging work/life schedules that make it difficult, if not impossible, for them to randomly participate in co-curricular or WIL activities. They also cannot afford to take on activities or experiences on a voluntary basis. For students to engage they need either course credit or paid work.

2. Creating paid opportunities was essential to ensuring student engagement. However, employers and community partners lack information about how to apply for wage subsidy opportunities that could help them create paid opportunities for students.
3. Students and employers need faculty to help students acknowledge how their learning in class transfers to workplace tasks. It was identified that education about the [Skills for Success](#) was needed for both students and employers. Students were not sure how to articulate they have these skills and employers were not sure where or how to recruit talent with these skills.
4. Working in relationship was essential to skill development and engagement. This was more challenging in the online environment than the impromptu opportunities that faculty have with students in person. Both the students and faculty reported this was the greatest challenge of being remote. This type of learning was often lost in the online environment.
5. Participating in virtual communities and WIL challenges worked well when the students already had established relationships with faculty. However, skill development and participation were not as effective online when a strong sense of belonging and community was not present.
6. On-campus WIL opportunities are an excellent way to introduce international and Indigenous students to experiences that help build their career skills.
7. The College of Arts can manage a design hub and the art gallery using a cost-recovery model that provides either credit practicum placements or paid WIL opportunities on-campus.
8. Arts faculty are very well positioned to bring the latest research related to the use of labour market information, the Canadian skills shortage, and the preparation of future ready graduates to programming and curriculum planning tables.

Action Forward: As a result of revising the original objectives and taking a “test kitchen” approach to trying a variety of approaches for addressing the career preparation challenges of students the College of Arts is better informed about how to embed WIL into curriculum and programming renewal, as well as positioned to strategically apply for external WIL funding.

The Arts Worx team and the College of Arts would like to thank the FIT program for its flexible administration of the grant. The FIT program has supported students in a significant way!