A. Background and Definitions

Experiential and Work Integrated Learning is an integral component of a Niagara College education and an important element of practical training that meets employer needs. There are several different types of experiences offered at Niagara College that support the integrated nature of curriculum. Work Integrated Learning has been identified as a formal subset of the broader concept experiential learning. In reports such as; Building a Workforce for Tomorrow (Conway, 2016) and Work Integrated Learning in Ontario’s Postsecondary Sector: The Experience of Ontario Graduates (HEQCO, 2013) these concepts have been identified as an essential component to a postsecondary educational experience.

**Applied Research Projects:** Applied research projects provide students the opportunity to integrate theory and practice through projects that address specific business or industry problems. Such projects can be course-based and a formal requirement within a program of instruction, or institutional research-based as an opportunity for students within specific programs.

**Apprenticeship:** A formal agreement between a student, the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development (MAESD), an employer, and a recognized training delivery agent. Training combines learning on the job with classroom instruction, leading to a certificate of apprenticeship, commonly done in a block or day-release model.

**Co-Curricular:** Formally recognized volunteer experiences completed by students and validated by the College. Such experiences can provide an opportunity to enhance vocational or one of the essential employability skills (6), as well as creating an exposure to the themes (5) within the general education framework. Such experiences are recorded on the individual student’s co-curricular college document.

**Cooperative Education (Co-op):** Academic study that alternates with paid work experience developed and/or approved by the College. A program that formally integrates a student’s academic studies with work experience in cooperative employer organizations. Students generally receive remuneration for the work, and the student’s performance on the job is supervised and evaluated by the employer. Such opportunities are offered in a block delivery, and structured work-study sequences generally end with an academic semester.
Experiential learning: The process of learning, developing, and applying knowledge, skills and abilities within a practical setting, so that students can learn while doing. In partnership with employers, community organization, and campus groups, this may include apprenticeship training, co-op placements, mentoring, volunteering, service learning and internships.

Field Experience: Practical experience in a real work setting. These opportunities may include workplace activities, simulated activities or virtual activities for educational purposes whereby the student gains experience in a specific field or career area. They are commonly referred to as Placement or Practicum in Programs of Instruction. They may be a mandatory component of the program of instruction, a partnership activity with a business, or a complementary activity. Such experiences are normally unpaid. The duration varies by program, and they are accomplished through block and concurrent delivery.

Internship: Program-related experience in a professional work environment that is focused on the integration of theory and practice. Such experiences are normally unpaid. These opportunities are generally for a defined number of hours and can occur as single blocks within a program (alternating with academic semesters) or at the end of a program (capstone).

Mandatory Professional Practice: Work hours needed to obtain a license to practice, or professional designation, or to register with a regulatory college/professional association. They are commonly referred to as Clinical Placement or Practicum in Programs of Instruction, and are simulated or workplace-based experiences through which students can demonstrate the attainment of professional competencies.

Program of Instruction: A group of related courses leading to a diploma, certificate, degree or other credential awarded by the College Board of Governors.

Service Learning: Student projects to address identified community needs or global issues. Experiences can be delivered as field experience, co-ops, internships or applied research projects. These opportunities can be graded, or receive no academic recognition.

Work Integrated Learning: A formal program or arrangement between partners to enable students to learn while working on the job. This activity is commonly associated with an academic Program of Instruction.
B. Purpose

To ensure that all Niagara College learners are provided with practical as well as theoretical training. That learners experience the integration of practice and theory through exposure to real or simulated workplace settings, as well as opportunities to enhance their essential employability skills and exposure to a broad range of opportunities.

C. Policy Statements

1. Niagara College is committed to providing students with outstanding applied education. Accordingly, the college will ensure that all students will have access to experiential learning opportunities both within their programs, and across the broader college community.

2. The College will ensure that students have access to experiential learning opportunities that facilitate the practical application of theoretical learning.

3. All programs at Niagara College will identify the experiential learning opportunities that are within their program of instruction.

4. During the program review process, each program will reflect on the integration of practice and theory within their program and how such experiences can be enhanced for students.

D. Related Documents

Policies: NC800 Progression and Graduation

Procedures: NC800 Academic Exit
            NC800 Co-Curricular Record Program
            NC800 Co-op Education Programs