What is the Experiential Learning Program?

The International Development Studies Experiential Learning Program was founded in 2006 to provide students with the opportunity to reflect on the global/local and theory/practice dynamics in a hands-on setting. While other programs and departments use terms such as internship, volunteer or co-op placements, the International Development Studies department has adopted the term experiential learning to reflect the interplay between academic and practical skills development that this program offers. Coursework is combined with volunteer placements, providing students with the academic space to critically reflect upon their experiences. The volunteer placements allow students to work with organizations in Canada or abroad and to gain skills and experience in the fields of community development and international development.

Classes and Registration

What classes are offered through the program?

INTD 3107: Experiential Learning Canada

The Canadian component of experiential learning combines classroom learning with volunteer work experience in a community organization in Halifax or other parts of Canada. You are required to volunteer for a minimum of 60 hours (cumulative) between September and April. This works out to approximately 2.5 hours a week. In addition to this work, you are required to complete attend occasional class meetings, assigned readings and three academic assignments (a mid-term report, a reflective paper, and a final academic paper). The Canadian component of experiential learning focuses on the themes of community development, public engagement and volunteerism.

INTD 3109: Experiential Learning—International

The International component of the experiential learning combines international volunteer experience with academic requirements. The international component of experiential learning focuses on the broad theme of global citizenship and critically explores the idea of ‘voluntourism.’ Students are required to volunteer for a minimum of 3 weeks at a particular placement overseas, with exception given to students completing volunteer placements in Canada’s Arctic regions. In addition to your placement, you are required to complete class readings, three assignments and to participate when the class meets. The three academic assignments include a portfolio, academic and reflections paper, which must be completed.
Who can enroll in the program?

The experiential learning program is open to all students at Dalhousie, Kings St. Mary’s students who have completed INTD2001 or INTD2002. Permission need to be obtained from the instructor if you do not have these prerequisites. Students participating in programs such as Canada World Youth can also get academic credit through the Experiential Learning Abroad program.

How do I enroll?

Students can register for this course like any other course at Dalhousie University. Students taking this course as part of their studies at another university will be required to enroll (temporarily) at Dalhousie University in order to register for the course.

For Experiential learning Canada the student must enroll in the consecutive X/Y classes in order to receive their full credit. All 60 hours must be completed within the two consecutive semesters to ensure your credit.

What preparation do I need for this program/a placement?

No formal training or particular level of experience is required for enrollment in the program. Each student is expected to locate a placement that best matches their individual skill set, level of experience, and interests. It is the responsibility of the student to find a placement, not the responsibility of the IDS faculty or staff. Students should also do their best to match their personal skills with the needs of the organization. General skills that may be helpful include sensitivity to diverse experiences, the ability to take initiative, flexibility, and general awareness of what it is like to work for a community organization or NGO.

What type of work will I be required to do on my placement?

The type of work that you will be doing depends upon the placement that you acquire. Host organizations are able to either list a specific position with itemized tasks that the volunteer will do, or they can list a more general posting and fit the work to the volunteer’s background. In the past student volunteers have been involved in a variety of tasks such as organizing international visitors, preparing public education events, assisting with conferences or workshops, and fundraising activities, to name a few.

How do I find a placement? Students must make their own experiential learning arrangements with host organizations. The process involves four steps:

1. Identifying an organization
2. Submit an application to the programme and complete all necessary police and security
3. Being accepted by the organization
4. Notify the Experiential Learning Coordinator about the placement

You may have already identified an organization for which you would like to volunteer. If so, please notify us of the contact information for that organization so we can keep their contact details in our database.

After reading these job descriptions, you will apply individually to the placements as you would for any job, sending along a cover letter and resume to the contact person listed in the job description. You can apply for as many of these as you want, keeping in mind that most organizations will only have room for one or two students at a particular placement. Once you’ve identified your preferred volunteer placement, students make individual arrangements with the organization (interviews, hours available, etc). Many placements require police background checks. The cost of this is roughly $30. Be sure to obtain a receipt as many organizations reimburse you for this expense. These placements should be very flexible and most organizations have left the job description partially vague on purpose in order to accommodate a wider range of backgrounds and personalities, so be up-front with your interests, likes/dislikes and any particular skills you might have. After a placement has been filled, the host organization will notify the successful applicant. Once you find out where you will be volunteering, complete the form provided at the back of the syllabus. All placements must be arranged by mid-September, although some organizations may want you to start earlier and this will also be noted in the job description.

When searching for a placement, it is important to follow your own interests. Try to locate an organization that matches your interests and then once you secure a placement with them, reiterate your interests so that you can be placed on tasks that will be exciting for you. This will be the best situation for both you and for the organization. Most organizations will have a website with more general information. Otherwise, do not hesitate to contact the organization for more information – in most cases they will be happy to provide you with a pamphlet or speak with you about the organization. Some good questions to ask include: what is their mandate, what have they achieved in the past, what are they working on right now and where are they hoping to go in the future? If the organization seems of interest to you, look into the details of their volunteer placements – do they accept volunteers? Have they hosted volunteers in the past? If so, for what type of work? Is there a minimum time frame? What sort of experience is needed? Are references or background (police) checks required?

For additional information or assistance with placements, feel free to contact the student assistant or the course instructor anytime.
When should I try to secure a placement?
You should identify your placement as early as possible. Often times, there are background checks that need to be completed prior to volunteering with an organization and these take time. If you are enrolled in the Canadian section of the course, you should begin the work on securing your placement in early August with an expected start date for early September. For the Canadian section, placements must be secured (and placement forms submitted to the instructor) by September 19th.

Can I use a volunteer position that I already have?
Yes, if you are currently volunteering with an organization inform them of your participation in the course. Complete the information form found in the syllabus, and you’re all set. Be sure that your organization can guarantee 60 hours for your between September and April.

Can I complete the course in one semester?
No. It is not recommended that students attempt a 60 volunteer placement in one semester. Moreover, our seminars run the full year and attendance it mandatory.

Am I evaluated on my performance as a volunteer?
No. Your entire grade is based on your academic engagement with your peers, instructor and written assignments. The volunteer placement is the basic entry requirement for the course, not an evaluation criteria.

Are internships or paid employment also considered?
At this time, only volunteer positions will be considered for the Experiential Learning program.

Fees and Funding

Are there any costs involved in the program?
There is an auxillary fee of $75 per course that applies to all students in both Experiential Learning programs. This money is used to administer the Experiential Learning Program, facilitate communication with hosting organizations, provide information and resources to students and to keep track of placements and volunteers.

Students are also expected to pay regular course fees to Dalhousie University and to purchase required readings materials, when indicated in the course syllabus.

Students that plan to undertake the Experiential Learning Abroad course are expected to plan for any associated costs with their time abroad.
Is there any funding available for travel and accommodation for placements abroad?

The department of International Development Studies does not offer additional funding for student placements abroad. Students are encouraged to seek out their own funding for travel and work abroad. The Dalhousie International Student and Exchange Services has an international travel fund – SWIF. Information and an application can be found here (http://internationalstudentservices.dal.ca/fundingopportunities.htm)

What do I do if I have further questions regarding the program?

Please contact the program coordinator, Marian MacKinnon at ids@dal.ca or the course instructor.

RECENT PLACEMENT SITES:

Spryfield Elementry
http://www.cses.ednet.ns.ca/

Turning Leaf / The Art of Living
https://www.facebook.com/pages/Turning-Leaf-Centre/146614668694658

Veith House
http://www.veithhouse.ns.ca/

Discovery Centre
http://www.discoverycentre.ns.ca/
ISIS
http://www.isisns.ca/

NSPiRG
http://www.nspirg.org/

Girl Guides of Canada
http://www.girlguides.ns.ca/

Oxfam
http://www.oxfam.ca/who-we-are/regional-offices/maritimes

ACIC
http://www.acic-caci.org/opp_intern.html

Capital Health
http://www.capitalhealth.org/

The Canadian Cancer Society
http://www.cancer.ca/nova%20scotia/about%20us/contact%20us.aspx
POSSIBLE PLACEMENT SITES

Atlantic Council for International Cooperation  www.acic-caci.org  902-431-2311
Clean Nova Scotia  www.clean.ns.ca  902-420-3474
Dalhousie Integrated Sustainability Initiative  sustaindl@canada.com
Halifax Immigrant Learning Centre  www.hilc.ns.ca  902-443-2937
Avalon Sexual Assault Centre  www.avaloncentre.ca/sane.htm  902-422-4240
World University Services of Canada  www.wusc.ca
Halifax Coalition Against Poverty (HCAP)  www.hfxcap.ca/  902-444-5060
Frontier College  http://www.frontiercollege.ca/  902-425-1517

OTHER LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS OF INTEREST

UNICEF  www.unicef.ca  902-422-6000
Ecology Action Centre  www.ecologyaction.ca  902-429-2202
Nova Scotia-Gambia Association  www.novascotiagambia.ca  902-423-1360
Atlantic Centre of Excellence for Women’s Health (ACEWH)  www.acewh.dal.ca  902-494-7849
Canadian Crossroads International  www.cciorg.ca  902-422-2933
Canadian Red Cross  www.redcross.ca  902-424-1419
Development and Peace (CCODP)  www.devp.org  902-422-8428
YMCA Halifax-Dartmouth  www.ymcahrm.ns.ca  902-457-9622

The Society for Corporate Environmental and Social Responsibility (CESR) (at Dalhousie)
cesr.dsu.dal.ca/  902-441-6756

Halifax Member of Parliament Megan Leslie has frequent newsletters that list volunteer placements around the HRM. To sign up to her newsletters email her: Megan.Leslie.C1@parl.gc.ca