

UGANDA MARTYRS UNIVERSITY



Experiential Learning Policy

February 2025

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Definition of Terms

Stakeholders: Refer to all those that contribute to UMU's activities not limited to Students, Staff, Management Committee, Council Members, contractors, and partners. For this policy, the community shall also include farmers, youth, urban, peri-urban and rural cooperatives and churches.

Experiential learning: is a pedagogical approach that emphasizes learning through direct experience, enabling students to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world contexts. This type of learning helps students develop practical skills, critical thinking, and self-reflection by actively participating in activities that mirror real-life experiences. Examples include classroom activities (class projects and laboratory activities), internships, service learning, fieldwork, work placements or practicums, volunteer work, research projects, simulations (such as those in healthcare or clerkships), and apprenticeships.

Forms of Experiential Learning

- a) **Internship:** An internship is a structured learning experience in a professional setting that allows students to apply their academic knowledge in a real-world workplace environment. Internships can be paid or unpaid and vary in duration, typically lasting from a few weeks to several months. They provide students with hands-on experience, opportunities to explore potential careers and industries, and a chance to develop both technical and soft skills.
- b) **Service learning:** Service learning integrates community service with academic coursework, allowing students to apply what they have learned in the classroom to address real-world issues while contributing to the public good. These projects typically focus on tackling social, environmental, or community-based challenges. Through reflection, students connect their community service experiences with course content and their personal development. Service-learning fosters active and responsible citizenship, encouraging students to engage meaningfully with their communities.
- c) **Field-work:** Fieldwork involves the direct observation and participation in real-world activities related to a student's academic discipline. For example, students might participate in field visits where they engage in practical tasks relevant to their

field of study. These tasks would help to identify challenges, learn from practitioners and to support them in addressing them. Or it may include gathering data, conducting interviews, or observing real-world phenomena.

- d) **Practicum:** is a short-term, supervised, hands-on experience that allows students to practice their skills in a controlled professional setting. Practicums are often required as part of degree programs in fields such as healthcare, education, agriculture, business and social work. They provide students with the opportunity to develop specific skills necessary for professional practice. They also provide their hosts with closer engagement with the university and new knowledge and innovations being generated. Through mentorship, students work closely with experienced professionals to gain valuable insights and feedback. This experience often involves direct interaction with clients, patients, farmers or community members, enhancing both their practical skills and professional competence.
- e) **Study abroad programme:** allows students to complete part of their academic coursework in another country, often immersing them in a different culture. These programs typically include both academic classes and experiential learning opportunities. Participating in study abroad programs enable students to gain exposure to different cultures, languages, and international perspectives. This experience enhances their global awareness and cross-cultural communication skills. In some cases, study abroad programs also incorporate internships, volunteer work, or research opportunities.
- f) **Research projects:** involves students engaging in original research or inquiry within their academic field. Students may work independently but are strongly encouraged to collaborate with faculty members and other stakeholders to carry out the research. Students apply research methodologies to explore unanswered questions or solve real-world problems.
- g) **Capstone projects:** Capstone projects are culminating academic assignments undertaken either during or at the end of the degree program. They require students to integrate and apply their learning to address real-world problems or challenges, normally in collaboration with external partners including affected communities. In a capstone project, students draw on knowledge gained throughout their entire course of study to complete a comprehensive, multifaceted project. These projects usually focus on solving a specific problem or answering a research question that

has been identified with core stakeholders. Students then present their work to faculty, peers, or external stakeholders for evaluation.

- h) Simulations and Role-Playing:** Simulations and role-playing exercises replicate real-world scenarios, enabling students to practice skills within a controlled environment. These activities are commonly used in fields such as business, agriculture, healthcare, and law. Simulations create realistic, immersive settings where students must make decisions and solve problems in real time. They facilitate skill development by allowing students to enhance decision-making, teamwork, and communication in a risk-free context. Additionally, simulations provide a safe space for practice; mistakes made during these exercises have no real-world consequences, encouraging learning through trial and error. For instance, a law student might participate in a mock trial, assuming the role of a lawyer, presenting evidence, and arguing a case before a panel of judges.
- i) Volunteer Work:** Volunteer work involves students contributing their time and skills to support nonprofit organizations, community groups, or social causes. This form of experiential learning fosters social responsibility and allows students to make meaningful contributions to their communities.

Acronyms

UMU - Uganda Martyrs University

1.0 Introduction

The Experiential Learning Policy sets a foundational standard for all departments, faculties, schools, and institutes within UMU to implement experiential learning through direct experiences. This approach enables students to apply theoretical knowledge in practical settings, enhancing their overall educational experiences.

2.0 Purpose of the policy

This policy provides a framework for the implementation of experiential learning at UMU. It aims to enhance student learning by developing critical thinking and problem-solving skills through hands-on experiences as well as many other soft skills critical to success as professionals. It also allows the university to have a stronger presence in

society, raises its visibility and provides information that is important for adapting learning and research to address current challenges.

3.0 Rationale of the Policy

Experiential learning offers numerous benefits, including improved focus and the application of critical thinking and problem-solving skills - competencies highly valued by employers when assessing graduates. However, traditional teacher-centered methods, which rely heavily on tools such as PowerPoint presentations, lecture notes, and handouts, often emphasize theoretical knowledge delivery and overlook key aspects of the modern University student's learning process.

Many UMU students enter the classroom with preconceived worldviews and are emotionally attached to their perspectives, which may need to be reconsidered and refined. Additionally, while some students possess relevant knowledge and skills before starting a course, others may not. Therefore, the University's educational experience should bridge the gap between theoretical learning and real-life applications, ensuring that all students benefit from a more holistic and practical learning approach.

4.0 Objectives of the policy

The objectives of the policy are to;

1. Guide the development, improvement and implementation of experiential learning as a component of UMU academic programmes.
2. Provide students with opportunities to apply theoretical knowledge in practical settings.
3. Develop students' critical thinking, problem-solving and professional skills.
4. Describe processes involved in the management of experiential learning including the roles and responsibilities of all participants.
5. Ensure compliance with the quality assurance standards set by professional bodies aligning with the UMU Vision, Mission and Strategic objectives.
6. Provide a framework that supports related policies essential for the effective functioning of experiential learning, such as those on Internship and Community Engagement.

7. Develop partnership with Stakeholders to support experiential learning initiatives.

5.0 Scope of the Policy

The policy applies to all academic programmes and all staff and consultants facilitating the learning processes at UMU. The experiential learning activities may include internship, practicum, fieldwork, school practice, apprenticeships, simulations, case studies, professional development events, service/volunteering learning, research, and virtual reality experiences in the classroom, among others.

6.0 Policy Statement

The Experiential Learning Policy underscores Uganda Martyrs University commitment of providing students with diverse, meaningful and high-quality learning experiences that bridge theory and practice. By incorporating various types of experiential learning, UMU ensures that students are well prepared for professional careers and equipped to contribute to society. Through continuous evaluation, and feedback from all stakeholders, this policy aims to create dynamic and evolving frameworks for experiential learning opportunities.

7.0 Guiding Principles for implementing this policy

7.1 Principles of Experiential Learning

The following are the guiding principles of experiential learning at UMU;

- a) Knowledge is constructed: each learner builds unique knowledge based on their experiences.
- b) Learning is a social activity: collaboration and interaction enhance understanding.
- c) Learning is active: learners must engage in discussions and activities to derive meaning, and to recognize that they are not "blank slates."
- d) Learning is contextual: knowledge is best understood within the context of real-life experiences.
- e) Learning exists in the mind: active engagement and reflection are vital for knowledge retention.
- f) Individual perspectives vary: each learner contributes and takes away different insights from educational activities.

- g) Diversity and inclusion: experiential learning opportunities should be inclusive and accessible to all students respecting diverse background, perspective and experiences.

7.2 Implementation strategies

a. Programme Design and Development

Faculty, in collaboration with departments and external partners, shall design experiential learning opportunities that integrate theoretical learning with real-world experiences. Clear guidelines and structures shall be established for each type of experiential learning opportunity, ensuring they are well-supported and academically rigorous.

b. Support and Resources

UMU shall allocate resources to support experiential learning, including funding, advising, and training. Students and staff shall have access to the necessary resources, such as career services, retreats, orientation workshops and support to overcome barriers to participation. Centers such as incubation centres and entrepreneurship centres shall be established to support students.

c. Partnership Development

UMU shall foster partnerships with a variety of external organizations, including businesses, nonprofit organisations, and government agencies, to offer students diverse and meaningful learning opportunities.

d. Training for Faculty and Staff

Faculty and staff involved in experiential learning shall receive professional development training on best practices, learning outcomes and assessment strategies. Regular workshops and seminars shall be organized for Faculty and staff to stay up to date on innovative experiential learning methodologies.

7.3 Evaluation and Development

7.3.1 Assessment of Student Learning

The effectiveness of experiential learning shall be evaluated through assessments of student learning outcomes. These assessments may include portfolios, reflection papers, presentations, and practical evaluations.

7.3.2 Programme Evaluation

The faculty shall periodically review learning programmes to ensure the inclusion and effectiveness of experiential components by gathering feedback from students, faculty, and other stakeholders. This feedback shall be used to improve and refine these opportunities.

7.3.3 Continuous Improvement

Data from assessments and evaluations shall inform continuous improvements to the experiential learning policy and programme offerings, ensuring that students receive high-quality, impactful learning experiences.

7.4 Procedure

The Kolb experiential learning model shall serve as the foundation for the learning process, encompassing the following stages: concrete experience, reflective observation, active experimentation and abstract conceptualization.

7.4.1 Real Experience

Course facilitators shall provide experiences that directly engage students.

These experiential activities shall include field trips, lab sessions, simulations, internships, practicum placements, volunteering, service learning, study abroad and any other activity that fulfills the requirements of experiential learning.

- i. Course facilitators shall create a safe learning environment, where students feel comfortable experimenting and making mistakes.
- ii. Clear instructions shall be given to students explaining the objectives and expectations of the activities.
- iii. Student engagement shall be actively encouraged by fostering enthusiasm and participation through hands-on involvement with support from the faculty.
- iv. The course facilitators shall prompt students to observe and note significant moments during the experience.

7.4.2 Reflection

The course facilitator shall guide students in critically reflecting on their experiences by;

- Facilitating debriefing sessions and organizing group discussions where students can share their experiences and insights.

- Encouraging deep thinking with open-ended questions like, “What did you notice?” or “What surprised you?”
- Offering structured prompts or templates for reflective journals or essays.
- Encouraging learners to share their own reflections on similar experiences to illustrate the process.
- Promoting sharing and discussion of different perspectives in small groups.

7.4.3 Theoretical Conceptualization

The course facilitators shall guide students to connect their reflections to theoretical concepts through;

- i. Linking experiences to relevant theories or frameworks during class discussions.
- ii. Facilitating concept mapping to guide students in creating visual representations of how concepts relate to their experiences.
- iii. Encourage students to find academic sources that relate to their reflections.
- iv. Provide detailed explanations and examples of theoretical models.
- v. Promote critical thinking by challenging students to question and analyze their assumptions and beliefs.

7.4.4 Active Experimentation

The facilitator shall support students in applying their newly acquired knowledge by;

- i. Creating assignments or projects that require applying theoretical knowledge to real-world situations.
- ii. Providing guidance and feedback during the development and testing of ideas or prototypes.
- iii. Setting up scenarios or role-plays where students can practice applying concepts.
- iv. Offer specific, actionable feedback to help students refine their approaches
- v. Encourage Risk-Taking and Innovation by supporting creative problem-solving and acknowledge efforts, even when experiments don’t succeed as planned.
- vi. Guiding student in developing and pitching their business/project plans based on lessons learned.

7.5 Roles and Responsibilities of the Stakeholders

7.5.1 Students shall;

- i. Actively engage in learning opportunities and take ownership of their learning process.
- ii. Reflect on experiences to deepen understanding and facilitate personal growth.
- iii. Adhere to academic and behavioral standards in all experiential learning environments.

7.5.2 Faculty, Academic Advisors/Mentors

The faculty and academic advisors shall;

- i. Develop, design, and supervise experiential learning opportunities that align with course objectives and learning
- ii. outcomes.
- iii. Provide guidance and mentorship to students during experiential learning activities.
- iv. Encourage critical reflection and help students synthesize experiential learning with academic content.
- v. Ensure that students' learning experiences meet academic rigor and standards.

7.5.3 UMU Leadership and Administration

The UMU leadership shall;

- i. Provide strategic direction and resources to support experiential education initiatives.
- ii. Ensure that policies, procedures, and practices are in place to facilitate high-quality experiential learning opportunities.
- iii. Initiate & foster partnerships with external organizations (businesses, nonprofit organisations and government agencies) to enhance student learning opportunities.
- iv. Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the experiential education programme institution-wide.

7.5.4 Community and Industry Partners

Community and industry partners with an MOU with UMU shall;

- i. Collaborate with the University to provide students with relevant, high-quality, and ethical experiential learning opportunities.

- ii. Offer mentorship, resources, and expertise that enhance students' learning experiences.
- iii. Provide feedback on student performance and the overall effectiveness of the programme.

7.6 Support Structures

Students shall have access to support structures within UMU like the Incubation hub (refer to the Entrepreneurship Policy) and Life Skills hub. The Life Skills hub shall;

- i. Assist students in finding and securing experiential learning opportunities.
- ii. Provide resources to support students' personal and professional development, such as resume building, interview preparation, and career counseling.
- iii. Ensure that students have access to emotional and psychological support during their experiential learning activities, if needed.

8.0 Legal Framework and other complementary policies

The policy operates within the legal and regulatory framework governing higher education in Uganda. This framework ensures that the policy aligns with national education standards, institutional mandates, and broader socio-economic goals. This policy is guided by key policy frameworks, including:

- i. The Higher Education Policy (2006): Supports quality and relevance in higher education, emphasizing employability, critical thinking, and societal impact.
- ii. The Uganda Vision 2040: Promotes education as a driver of socio-economic transformation and human capital development.
- iii. The National Development Plan (NDP III): Stresses the need for skills development, innovation, and education that addresses real-world challenges.
- iv. The Universities and Other Tertiary Institutions Act (2001, amended 2006): Provides the legal foundation for higher education governance, including curriculum design and quality assurance mechanisms.
- v. National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) regulations: Ensures curricula meet national standards and align with transformative learning objectives, including competency-based education and ethical considerations.
- vi. Employment Act (2006): The policy incorporates elements of workplace learning (internships and experiential education).

- vii. Uganda's international commitments, including the East African Community (EAC) Higher Education Protocol: Facilitates regional integration in education, ensuring that Ugandan graduates possess competencies aligned with regional labour market needs.
- viii. UN Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education): Supports Uganda's commitment to inclusive, equitable, and quality education that promotes lifelong learning opportunities
- ix. The UMU internship policy
- x. The UMU Entrepreneurship Education policy
- xi. All other relevant UMU policies linked to the experiential learning policy

9.0 Accounting Officer

The overall accounting officer for this policy shall be the Deputy Vice Chancellor.

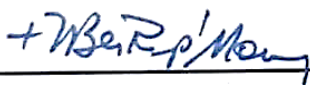
10.0 Responsible University Officer/Chair of policy implementation committee

The responsible officer shall be the Deputy Vice Chancellor.

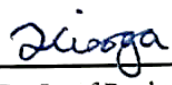
11.0 Review Period

This policy was approved by the **101st University Council meeting** that sat on **8th February 2025**.

After every five (5) years, this policy shall be reviewed in tandem with the University practice on review of policies. Once the senate adopts the proposed amendments, they shall be sent to the University Council for approval.



Most Rev. Raphael p'Mony Wokorach, MCCJ
Chairperson, UMU Council



Rev. Dr. Josef Buchana Kisoga
Secretary, UMU Council