

Experiential Learning: Creating Meaningful Opportunities

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## **Abstract**

This study examined the practice and implementation of undergraduate student internships in Ontario, Canada. A literature review revealed that implementation of internships at the undergraduate level in Ontario varies within campuses by faculty and department and also across the university spectrum, partly due to a lack of consistency and structure guiding internship practice in Ontario. Moreover, a lack of general consensus among participating stakeholders concerning the philosophy and approach to internship further complicates and varies its practice. While some departments and universities have started to embrace and implement more experiential learning opportunities into their curriculum, the practice of undergraduate internships is struggling to gain acceptance and validity in others. Using the theory of experiential learning as presented by Dewey (1938) and Kolb (1984) as theoretical frameworks, this research project developed an internship implementation strategy to provide structure and guidance to the practice of internships in Ontario's undergraduate university curriculum.

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## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY**

This study explores the use of student internships to incorporate experiential learning opportunities into Ontario universities at the undergraduate level in order to merge theory, practice, and community needs. Dewey (1938) believes that traditional education is problematic as it lacks opportunities to create and build on experiences; this is because what students learn and experience “in the way of knowledge and skill in one situation becomes an instrument of understanding and dealing effectively with the situations which follow” (p. 45). Similarly, Kuh (2013) believes that it is important for postsecondary students to acquire these meaningful experiences both inside and outside of the classroom. Student internships provide this opportunity to gain experience and help ease the transition from the academic world into the professional field (Matthew, Taylor, & Ellis, 2012; O’Neil, 2010). Internships are also an opportunity to merge academic theory and professional practice (Callanan & Benzig, 2004; Simons et al., 2012; Stirling et al., 2014) while also addressing the needs of the greater community to enable students in higher education to gain valuable experience and become active and engaged members of society (Bringle & Hatcher, 2009; Carter, 2013).

This project therefore focuses on internships as an opportunity for undergraduate university students to engage in experiential learning. I use the experiential learning models by Dewey (1938) and Kolb (1984) as theoretical frameworks to guide the development of the internship integration strategy and outline ways in which a strategy for structured internship opportunities can be integrated into Ontario universities.

### **Background to the Problem**

Work-integrated learning (WIL) opportunities are a primary site for the

integration of experiential learning in postsecondary education with internship participation steadily increasing (Eyler, 2009). The Canadian Council on Learning (CCL, 2008) reports that there are many opportunities for postsecondary students to participate in a variety of experiential learning programs across Canada yet many positions are left unfilled. Although Madden (2014) asserts that postsecondary students in Ontario are presently accessing WIL opportunities such as internships at a much higher rate than ever, Declou, Peters, and Sattler (2013) stress that these opportunities vary across different programs and universities in the province. Seifert and Burrows (2013) also add that Ontario universities face a challenge with increased participation and access to new programs which include increasing and ensuring quality service. Stirling et al. (2014) further add that the lack of structure, consistency, and understanding of what constitutes student internships in Ontario affects its practice; therefore, existing “programmes require several improvements with respect to design and delivery to provide an optimal learning experience” (p. 3).

Furthermore, the variation and diversity of positive and negative experiences across undergraduate internship programs in Ontario leads to concerns about program quality and effectiveness (Madden, 2014; Stirling et al., 2014). For example, O’Neil (2010) asserts that while some students believe the internship process is beneficial and contributes to high-impact learning, others have found that “their internships lacked direction and meaningful work” (p. 4). Gardner and Bartkus (2014) in turn explain that internship laws and practices tend to vary widely between countries and even within the same country. Even within a college or university, internship practices can differ between departments. Additionally, the quality of internship offerings

that employers provide can range widely with some students immersed in significant learning experiences while others engage in more menial tasks. The lack of clearly defined and generally accepted guidelines in more formally established programs (such as cooperative education) presents a challenge for internship program administrators. In essence, there is a need for more consistency in internship practices (p. 47)

In combination with this lack of consistency, O'Neil (2010) also adds that "not all campuses or academic departments will require internships of their students or offer course credit for all internships that students complete" (p. 7). For example, participation in an internship placement is more common in vocational programs (Wan, Yang, Cheng, & Su, 2013) such as business (Callanan & Benzig, 2004; Gault, Leach, & Duey, 2010), teacher education (CCL, 2008; Maxwell, 2012), and law (Dehaas, 2013; Lipman, 2003). But in contrast, internships are less common and may not be mandatory requirements in the fields of the arts, social sciences, and sciences (Eyler 2009; Katula & Threnhauser, 1999; Sgroi & Ryniker, 2002; Wagner, 2000). Also, students enrolled in programs such as the creative and performing arts face more challenges in acquiring internship opportunities because their potential career paths are not as definitive and linear (Daniel & Daniel, 2013). Eyler (2009) asserts that although more common in vocational and professionally structured programs, undergraduate experiential education programs are struggling to gain widespread support, traction, and legitimacy in the fields of the liberal arts (p. 26). In addition, Simons et al. (2012) stress that although institutions of higher education have incorporated more experiential learning courses into the liberal arts curricula over the past decade, programs such as psychology can still benefit from the inclusion of more internship and experiential

learning opportunities.

Shannon and Wang (2010) posit that there is a current disconnect between academic resources with the needs and resources of the greater community. This disconnect further highlights whether undergraduate students are being provided with knowledge and skills which are relevant, meaningful, and transferable to an effective transition into the greater community (Carter, 2013). According to Bringle and Hatcher (2009), the development of experiential learning programs do not collaborate or include the voice and needs of the greater community. Moreover, at present, students are primarily responsible for acquiring their own internship placements (Carter, 2013), which has resulted in internship programs that are delivered more like independent projects as opposed to collaborative ones involving universities, professional employers (Eyler, 2009; Virolainen, Stenstrom, & Kantola, 2011), and the input of the greater community (Bringle & Hatcher, 2009).

O'Neil (2010) suggests that there is a common resistance in the academic field when encountered with proposals to incorporate elements of vocational training or apprenticeship into the existing traditional curriculum, which therefore leads to an imbalance and inconsistency in the integration of experiential learning programs such as internships at the postsecondary level. Cord, Sykes, and Clements (2011) add that tension in postsecondary education between the academic curriculum versus preparation for standard professional workplace skills further contributes to the problem.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Although educators believe that undergraduate internships are an integral component of professional degrees (Cord & Clements, 2010; Matthew et al., 2012), there

is no consensus on generally accepted guidelines, structure, and expectations for their practice (Eyler, 2009; Gardner & Bartkus, 2014). Moreover, existing partners and faculty do not effectively collaborate to bring about mutual benefits for all stakeholders involved in the internship process (Strier, 2011). Students are predominantly responsible for organizing and seeking their own internship opportunities (Carter, 2013) but there is not enough support and emphasis on incorporating experiential learning through internships across different university programs (Daniel & Daniel, 2013). The issue, therefore, is that Ontario's undergraduate education is lacking a structured framework that provides the necessary guidelines and consistency to make sure that internship programs are meaningful for participating stakeholders and of high quality (Stirling et al., 2014).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to create an internship integration strategy that will provide guidance, structure, and opportunities to incorporate meaningful internships into the undergraduate university curriculum in Ontario. This project aims to develop an internship strategy that will provide a framework for consistency and also further strengthen the relationship between academic knowledge, professional practice, and community needs.

### **Questions to Be Answered**

This project will explore several questions. First, how can internships be integrated into existing university programs in Ontario? What components are required so that the internship strategy is structured enough to provide consistency but also flexible enough to apply across different undergraduate programs? Is there a set of basic and shared goals that can ensure that all parties mutually benefit from the internship process?

## **Theoretical Frameworks**

The basis of this research project will be rooted in the experiential learning theories of Dewey (1938) and Kolb (1984). Dewey stresses the importance of learning by engaging in a cyclic process that involves acquiring awareness of a problem, developing an idea, experimentation, experiencing the results of the experiment, and either affirming or modifying initial ideas. I will use this model as a framework to support how internships can enable undergraduate students to engage in a learning process that can connect them directly to professional practice and community needs.

Kolb (1984) presents a four-point process that involves concrete experience, reflective observations, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. By incorporating Kolb's model, an internship strategy can emphasize how experiential learning can enable undergraduate students to apply their academic knowledge to professional and community-based projects to ensure that learning is relevant and active. These frameworks will be discussed in more detail and critiqued in chapter 2.

## **Rationale**

The relationship between academic knowledge, professional practice, and societal needs will continue to be scrutinized as the needs of professional industry and society continue to progress (Brew, 2013; Grohnert, Beausaert, & Segers, 2014; Köksal & Cogmen, 2013; Miner, 2010). Maxwell (2012), Dehaas (2013), and Cord and Clements (2010), for example, believe that students are being educated for an uncertain and unknowable future, which in turn stresses the importance of incorporating the experience and demands of the workplace into education. Furthermore, O'Neil (2010) adds that "this issue is particularly timely, given the worldwide economic downturn and the need for

employees to have a broad and flexible skill set in order to evolve within a highly volatile work world” (p. 8). According to Bradshaw (2012), a related concern is that business leaders affirm that new graduates have deep technical knowledge yet they lack the skills needed to put their knowledge to full use. This is “the consequence of combining the current trend in education and training with the movement towards a knowledge-based economy” (Miner, 2010, p. 11). Lipman (2003) believes that knowledge alone is not enough as it also needs to be made practical, while Brew (2013) believes universities have a responsibility to prepare their students for entrance into the professional field. Creating a strategy to provide structure and guidance for the internship process at the undergraduate university level will enable students the opportunities to apply their knowledge and explore its uses more effectively in practice.

Shannon and Wang (2010) and Bringle and Hatcher (2009) also believe that a collaborative effort must be made between academic resources and needs with those of the community in order to mutually benefit all parties involved. The integration of more structured internship programs can offer an opportunity to incorporate academic knowledge while also providing students in Ontario with opportunities to explore changing professional environments, expectations, and industry needs.

### **Scope and Limitations**

This project will not involve collection of empirical data. Instead, it will draw on existing academic literature and the popular press focusing on student internships in Ontario. This is a limitation because there will not be evidence to support the effectiveness of the created internship strategy; this will be a topic for further research.

Although this strategy is designed for undergraduate university programs in

Ontario, another limitation is that it does not focus directly on any single undergraduate program or faculty. This project will provide a general framework and practical strategies but further consideration and adjustments will have to be made by educators and administrators to ensure that the academic expectations and requirements of their specific faculty and university are being met, and further, whether it is applicable across all contexts.

Although this project stresses the importance of the internship process being a collaborative one, the focus will primarily be on creating a resource to be used by undergraduate students and postsecondary institutions. Making sure that this strategy is as equally accessible and beneficial for employers is an integral part of the process (Cord & Clements, 2010) but one that is beyond the scope of this project.

### **Chapter Summary**

At present, this research is important because although the practice of internships in Ontario is increasing (Stirling, 2014), there remains a need for more structure and consistency in its practice (Eyler, 2009; Madden, 2014). The development of an internship strategy would enable more students the opportunity to engage in meaningful opportunities to merge academic theory and professional practice (Eyler, 2009; Virolainen et al., 2011; Wan et al., 2013), and better understand community needs (Carter, 2013; O'Neil, 2010).

### **Outline of Project**

In this chapter I have provided context for the practice of internships in postsecondary university education. This was followed by providing the purpose of this research project and the theoretical frameworks within which it will be rooted. I then

presented the rationale of this research as well as the scope of limitations accompanying this project.

In chapter 2, I will review the literature relating to experiential learning, WIL, and internships at the postsecondary university level. I will focus on the following themes: theoretical frameworks, defining experiential learning and internships, practical considerations, challenges, and the stakeholders. The chapter will conclude with a summary of the findings in the literature.

Chapter 3 encompasses the research methodology for this project. I will provide the research design and process of this project. I will also address the rationale for the selected literature in chapter 2, explain the project's format, and outline its limitations.

Chapter 4 presents the internship integration strategy I have developed. Incorporating the research examined in chapter 2, this chapter will present the internship strategy that I developed as part of a mayoral candidate's employment platform from the recent provincial mayoral elections that took place on October 27, 2014.

In chapter 5, I discuss implications for future practice and theory in the field of experiential learning and internships in postsecondary education. I also highlight opportunities for further research and provide recommendations for the practice and implementation of internship programs in Ontario universities.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this research project is to develop a framework and structured approach to the practice and implementation of undergraduate internships. The literature review begins with an introduction to the theory of experiential learning to gain a better understanding of the underlying theories that influence and shape present internship practice. This is followed by defining internships and experiential learning to provide context for this research project. The literature review then proceeds with an exploration of practical considerations, followed by highlighting challenges in order to understand the concerns that currently affect the practice of undergraduate internships in Ontario. The literature review will then take a closer look at the participating stakeholders in experiential learning programs in order to work towards a more collaborative developmental process for internship practice in Ontario.

### **Theoretical Frameworks**

The literature (e.g., Eyler, 2009; Gardner & Bartkus, 2014; Simons et al., 2012; Stirling et al., 2014) suggests that seminal theorists Dewey (1938) and Kolb (1984) have made important contributions to the development of experiential learning theory. Understanding the framework of the theory underlying experiential learning will be beneficial to adequately address the practice of internships.

### **Process/Continuum**

Dewey (1938) believes that ideas and principles are abstract by nature and only become concrete when the results of these very ideas are experienced because “there is an intimate and necessary relation between the process of actual experience and education” (p. 20). The learning process therefore consists of becoming aware of a problem,

developing an idea to solve the problem, putting this idea into experiment, experiencing the results of the experiment, and using these results to either affirm or modify the initial ideas that were developed (Dewey, 1938).

Dewey (1938) believes that learning is a continuum and that “the principle of continuity of experience means that every experience both takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those which come after” (p. 35). For example, experiential learning opportunities at the postsecondary level can help “provide students with different perspectives or alternate points of view that encourage students to question prior beliefs, understandings, or ways of doing things” (Wawrzynski & Baldwin, 2014, p. 54). Gavigan (2010) also asserts that students should have an opportunity to apply their knowledge to experience how it contributes to further research, scholarship, and practice in their fields. Furthermore, Simmons and Lee (2011) report that students participating in the University of Waterloo’s Co-op program add that their placements supported the development of research skills while also potentially strengthening the connection of placement research and their academic coursework. Brew (2013) expresses the importance of students being able to engage in a process of research and inquiry, which is part of the experiential learning continuum as presented by Dewey (1938). In this manner students are able to engage with topics that interest them and are given an opportunity to further explore their ideas and practices (Brew, 2013).

### **Real World**

The literature also suggests that learning is more effective and meaningful when students are provided with an opportunity to engage in processes that involve direct interaction with real-world issues (Brew, 2013; Dewey, 1938; Kolb, 1984; Madden,

2014; Maxwell, 2012; O’Neil, 2010; Rosario, Flemister, Gampert, & Grindley, 2013; Wan et al., 2013), which include current issues affecting society and the greater community (Bringle & Hatcher, 2009; Carter, 2013; Shannon & Wang, 2010).

Furthermore, Dewey (1938) believes that as students are members of society, knowledge can be difficult to access and recall when the learning process does not connect to real life experiences; this, therefore, results in a process of having to relearn technical knowledge that was previously acquired. In response, the literature suggests that meaningful learning occurs when students are able to apply and connect their knowledge to real-world situations and contexts (Dewey, 1938; Kuh, 2008). Along with making connections to the real world, Kuh (2008) further adds that an education involving collaborative experiences and activities will enable students to engage in meaningful tasks which include the opportunity to “develop [a] meaningful relationship with another person on campus—a faculty or staff member, student, coworker, or supervisor” (pp. 27-28). Wawrzynski and Baldwin (2014) also add the importance of faculty to collaborate to develop learning opportunities that allow postsecondary students to link their formal knowledge to other experiences in the real world. Experiential learning programs also offer postsecondary students an opportunity to become knowledgeable and contributing citizens in their communities (Wawrzynski & Baldwin, 2014).

### **Connecting Present Learning to the Future**

Another theoretical element of experiential learning, as presented by Dewey (1938), suggests that simply doing or experiencing is inadequate as an experience should have a dual impact: it should have an immediate and present effect on the learning process, and it should be an influencing factor for future experiences. In other words, the

“central problem of an education based on experience is to select the kind of present experience that lives fruitfully and creatively in subsequent experiences” (Dewey, 1938, pp. 27-28). A concern with current experiential learning practice is that simply acquiring field placements has taken precedence over ensuring that internships are relevant and provide essential opportunities to acquire relevant and meaningful experiences that connect to future practice and experiences (Declou et al., 2013; Katula & Threnhauser, 1999; Madden, 2014). The CCL (2008) and Wan et al. (2013) further add that participation in experiential learning programs improves the quality of learning and helps students develop skills that complement their present learning but are also relevant for their future integration into the professional workplace. Cord and Clements (2010) also add that internships give students an opportunity to apply their knowledge while also acquiring new skills in a professional workplace context.

### **Quality of Experiences**

Ensuring that internship programs provide quality experiences is another concern. Madden (2014) and Declou et al. (2013) suggest that although students attending Ontario universities want more experiential learning opportunities, inconsistency, limited access, and variation in positive and negative experiences is a point of concern and discontent worth noting. In terms of quality, Dewey (1938) suggests that all experiences are not equally beneficial, and this is rooted in “the belief that all genuine education comes about through experience does not mean that all experiences are genuinely or equally educative” (p. 25). For example, students participating in the University of Waterloo’s Co-op program provide varied responses as to the effectiveness of their placements and the program’s ability to improve their research skills (Simmons & Lee, 2011).

Experiential learning can offer students an opportunity to acquire professional skills directly through their participation in professional placements (CCL, 2008; Wan et al., 2013). Cord et al. (2011) add that developing a quality and structured internship program “may lead to successful integration within the professional world—bridging both curriculum and workplace requirements—and contributing to program success” (p. 20).

### **Kolb's Four-Point Process**

An integral component in the development of internships at the postsecondary level involves the four-point point process of experiential education as presented by Kolb (1984), which includes: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. These modes contrast one another and involve the interplay between the immediate concrete ideas as well as the theoretical perspective (Kolb, 1984). This process involves gaining experiences that will enable learners to adapt to the world around them and suggests that the adaptation process occurs more broadly and is not restricted or confined to the classroom (Kolb, 1984). In other words, when learning is conceived as an “adaptive process, it provides conceptual bridges across life situations, school and work, portraying learning as a continuous, lifelong process” (Kolb, 1984, p. 33). The integration of academic knowledge and professional field experience is important to student development (Gavigan, 2010) as there is “an intuitive value to being able to apply abstract concepts to real situations” (Katula & Threnhauser, 1999, p. 251).

Grohnert et al. (2014) believe that the four-point process as presented by Kolb (1984) includes a cycle of learning and reflection that is both important and beneficial for organizations and employees participating in experiential learning and training programs.

Some pitfalls and concerns for the learning and reflection process as presented by this study show that there is a lack of opportunities to participate in formal learning activities as well as to engage in the process of reflection (Grohnert et al., 2014). Furthermore, in connecting education to the professional field, “without learning experiences, individuals do not have the opportunity to work on their learning goals and to develop” (Grohnert et al., 2014, p. 85). Stirling et al. (2014) believe that the development of an internship program should involve strategies for each stage of Kolb’s four-point process.

Still, it is also worth considering certain shortcomings in Kolb’s approach. In some instances, Kolb’s process may be an oversimplification of the experiential learning process which can lead to the inability to fully understand the significance of each experience (Kayes, 2002). This can be seen in Declou et al.’s (2013) study that indicates many students participating in WIL at the University of Waterloo report that their placements did not always provide them with opportunities to develop their academic and professional skills, as they were often assigned to tasks that were disengaging, simple, and irrelevant to more meaningful learning. In addition, Kuh (2008) also adds that there is a difference between effective experiences and those that are just simple experiences.

### **Reflection**

Engaging in reflective observation is an integral component of the experiential learning process (Dewey, 1938; Eyler, 2009; Kolb, 1984; O’Neil, 2010; Wawrzynski & Baldwin, 2014) although it is one of the components most often neglected and overlooked (Katula & Threnhauser, 1999). Kolb (1984) believes that reflective observation is a key component of the four-point process as it enables students to find a deeper understanding of how their experience and experiments connect to the other

processes. In other words, how do students' findings affect their future experiments?

Eyler (2009) expresses the importance of the reflection process in experiential education in connection to Kolb's reflective process. Gavigan (2010), Madden (2014), and O'Neil (2010) also believe that ensuring that a process of reflection occurs after engaging in an experiential learning process is important to its success and understanding in connection to the real world. Consideration can be given to building a reflective component into coursework as well as offering a showcase to share students' experiences (Gavigan, 2010).

O'Neil (2010) believes that experiential learning enables students to understand their own roles and how their academic knowledge can contribute when it is applied within a real-world context. Furthermore, Brew (2013) believes that ensuring that educational processes are in place to enable students to be critically reflective on their research is related to the process presented by Kolb (1984). Wawrzynski and Baldwin (2014) believe that experiential learning "encourages students to look at complex issues from multiple perspectives, connect formal and informal learning experiences, question assumptions that restrict understanding, and make new meaning that more accurately reflects a holistic view of reality" (p. 56). From reading the literature, I want to assert that experiential learning through internships can give undergraduate students an opportunity to develop their practical and professional skills through the application and synthesis of the knowledge they have acquired from the academic classroom and course work.

### **Defining Experiential Learning and Internships**

The literature suggests that the scope of experiential education and work-integrated learning covers a large area of different types of experiences. Katula and

Threnhauser (1999) explain that

experiential education comes in many forms including internships, study abroad, cooperative education, service-learning, and field experiences such as intercollegiate debating or archaeological sitework. Experiential education is usually a voluntary part of the curriculum, although for some programs and some colleges (as we will see) it can be a mandatory, credit-bearing course of study. Experiential education is a phenomenon common to traditional and non-traditional students and to colleges and universities in equal proportion (p. 240)

Along with experiential learning, Cord and Clements (2010) add that the term WIL has become prevalent in postsecondary education to define programs that prepare undergraduate students for the future by giving them opportunities to engage in meaningful experiences in professional environments.

With these definitions in mind, this project focuses on the internship process as a form of experiential learning. Stirling et al. (2014) posit that there is a lack of consistency in the definition and understanding of internships within undergraduate education in Ontario. Although a search for a concrete definition of internships reveals many different responses, O'Neil (2010) concludes that commonalities include a reflection component, supervision and guidance in the field, as well as exposure to and increasing interest in a professional career.

Furthermore, recurring key words related to internships include experiential, real world, and active (O'Neil, 2010). A working definition for this project can be found in Madden's (2014) definition of experiential education at the postsecondary level as a process in

which students “learn by doing” tasks related to their academic work in an environment that allows for structured learning and critical reflections. These experiences allow for students to apply theoretical skills and insights to real-world, contemporary applications. Similarly, this allows professors and even students to bring such practical examples into the classroom in an impactful way (p. 8)

Theoretically, this definition also encompasses a reflective process as an integral component of the practice of internships (Dewey, 1938; Kolb, 1984; O’Neil, 2010; Virolainen et al., 2011). Providing a working definition for internships and experiential learning will provide a stronger understanding of and direction for the development of an internship implementation strategy.

### **Practical Considerations**

The literature suggests that the creation and implementation of effective and meaningful experiential learning programs is a challenging process (O’Neil, 2010) wherein goals and ideals will remain “empty castles in the air unless they are translated into the means by which they may be realized” (Dewey, 1938, p. 70). In addition, Katula and Threnhauser (1999) believe that “experiential learning is a wonderful ideal dreamed of by a wonderful philosopher. Its translation into the curriculum of higher education remains a work in progress” (p. 254). But, over the past decade, participation in experiential learning programs such as internships has increased heavily in the field of undergraduate education (Eyler, 2009; Madden, 2014, Stirling et al., 2014). The following literature suggests practical approaches to the development of internship programs.

Another consideration is that the practice of experiential learning through WIL programs such as internships vary across universities in Ontario (Declou et al., 2013; Stirling et al., 2014) but there are significant opportunities to increase the participation in experiential learning programs (CCL, 2008; Madden, 2014). Cord and Clements (2010) suggest that it is imperative that students are provided with an opportunity to develop transferable skills to prepare them for the transition into the professional field. The following examples will offer insight into some existing experiential learning programs and also provide guidance and recommendations to consider for improving present experiential learning and internship practice at the post-secondary level in Ontario.

### **Recommendations**

To begin, Stirling et al. (2014) propose three recommendations for the improvement of internship practice in Ontario: establish meaningful goals that target each process in the experiential learning theory (Kolb, 1984), set clear roles and responsibilities for all stakeholders who are involved in the internship process, and ensure that internship placements adhere to the Ontario Employment Standards Act and the Ontario Workers Act. The establishment of meaningful goals in connection to Kolb's (1984) learning theory is integral to creating a structure and framework to model internship practice (Gardner & Bartkus, 2014). Setting clear goals for participants that include stakeholders is another essential component of a successful internship program (Rosario et al., 2013). As well, making sure that internship placements meet provincial employment standards can help structure a program that provides a beneficial experience for undergraduate students (Declou et al., 2013; Stirling et al., 2014).

## **Collaboration**

The development of internship programs and establishment of goals should be a collaborative process (Dewey, 1938; Eyler, 2009; Kolb, 1984; Shannon & Wang, 2010; Wan et al., 2013) that includes the participation of all stakeholders (Cord & Clements, 2010; Stirling et al., 2014; Strier, 2011; Virolainen et al., 2011). Accordingly, O’Neil (2010) suggests that “internships can be designed by faculty/advisers, students, and site supervisors with specific learning goals in mind” (p. 7). Wan et al. (2013) also suggest that the development of and guidance for an internship placement should be a joint effort by both the employer and faculty. To ensure the effectiveness and quality of programs, Bringle and Hatcher (2009) insist that further research must be completed to assess the quality of “experiences for students, faculty, institutions, and communities” (p. 45). The establishment of goals can also benefit from making sure that the development process involves distinguishing between learning and career-development goals (O’Neil, 2010).

An example of the collaborative development process is the Co-op and Internship program at Hostos Community College. Rosario et al. (2013) assert that the effectiveness of the program relies heavily on the “confluence of three separate factors: preparation of students, outreach to local businesses, and faculty buy-in” (p. 26). O’Neil (2010) suggests that another practical consideration is developing

an internship course where a department wanted to strike a balance between career development and learning goals. The course could be team-taught by faculty and career-services professionals or could feature standards for internship programs to include both student affairs and academic departments. (p. 44)

The participation of students in the development of and implementation of internships is

another key factor to its success (Rosario et al., 2013). Allowing students to be involved in the development process will help them find ways in which their academic learning can translate over to their professional experiences (Wawryzinski & Baldwin, 2014) while the opportunity to collaborate with their peers within and outside of the academic boundaries will challenge their approaches to different real life scenarios (Kuh, 2008).

### **Support Systems**

Properly defining the roles of stakeholders in the internship process is another important consideration as it builds a support system and network that ensures the quality of internship experiences (Stirling et al., 2014). Providing support, guidance, and mentoring should be the responsibility of both faculty and employers (Wan et al., 2013). For example, Cord et al. (2011) propose the Beyond the Duty of Care approach—an internship program in which academic and workplace supervisors are engaged and actively guide each student during their placements with the intention of gradually allowing them more autonomy as time progresses. Supervision is adjusted during the process so that students maintain ownership of their learning and placements but also understand the academic and professional requirements and expectations along the way (Cord et al., 2011). The Beyond the Duty of Care approach offers potential for success “by prioritizing the transition of supervision towards student autonomy and adoption of the seven key principles, the approach provides significant opportunities for students’ professional development and simultaneously narrows the ‘gap’ between employers and higher education's expectations of graduates” (Cord et al., 2011, p. 22).

Internship programs should also make sure there is a support system in place so that “all students are provided support from the program in the form of regular contact,

including workplace visits. Students are also allocated a mentor within the workplace to nurture their development” (Cord & Clements, 2010, p. 291). This is a common strategy and consideration for internship programs although it does not always happen because there is a lack of structure and consistency in its practice (Daniel & Daniel, 2013; Eyler, 2009). As a result, internship placements and programs vary in the support systems provided which can therefore leave some interns without the necessary resources to excel (Madden, 2014) and engage in meaningful learning experiences during their placements (Stirling et al., 2014).

### **Meaningful Integration**

Wawrzynski and Baldwin (2014) note that an experiential learning strategy “should identify places where learning alliances can be promoted to ensure that students' learning is adequately connected and mutually reinforcing” (p. 54). In other words, it is important to find placements and learning opportunities that will enable students to further develop their academic knowledge and apply it to professional experiences which require problem solving (Declou et al., 2013; Eyler, 2009; Wawrzynski & Baldwin, 2014). In addition, meaningful integration opportunities “can also prepare students to use their education creatively when they leave [postsecondary] to enter the job market or contribute to their community as citizens” (Wawrzynski & Baldwin, 2014, p. 54). As opposed to merely enabling students to obtain experience (Dewey, 1938), experiential programs need to develop and offer opportunities which will allow for meaningful connections between academic knowledge and practical situations.

### **Reflection**

Engaging in a process of reflection is an integral component of the experiential

learning process (Dewey, 1938; Eyler, 2009; Kolb, 1984; Stirling et al., 2014; Wan et al., 2013). Cord and Clements (2010) add that “reflection is critical to professional development and learning from experiences” (p. 290) and although its implementation is common in programs such as education (CCL, 2008; Madden, 2014), its practice as part of the experiential learning process is often neglected (Grohnert et al., 2014; Katula & Threnhauser, 1999). O’Neil (2010) suggests the use of available technologies such as e-portfolios or other technological mediums as practical steps that enable students a platform to share their reflections on their experiences. This process is essential because it is “critical to have students enter a process where faculty, staff, and peers ask them to reflect, challenge their assumptions, test theories, and make connections across different sites of learning” (O’Neil, 2010, p. 7).

Wheaton College provides one such example of how reflective practice can be implemented. Gavigan (2010) explains that the reflection process for Wheaton College’s internship program involves writing a reflective essay as well as participation in an organized showcase that offers students a platform to share their critical reflections about how their placements have affected their learning with their classmates, faculty, and the university.

Furthermore, the reflective process can also be integrated and students should be offered an opportunity to “process the internship experience in course papers or by assembling a portfolio” (Wawrzynski & Baldwin, 2014, p. 58). The internship process should also involve “thoughtful guidance and questioning from course instructors and advisers can help make internships a valuable element of the [postsecondary] learning experience rather than an isolated work opportunity detached from the curriculum in the

student's field of study” (Wawrzynski & Baldwin, 2014, p. 58).

### **Summer Placements**

Another practical consideration involves finding a way to integrate internships into an existing postsecondary curriculum. Gavigan (2010) suggests integrating placements into each summer term over the span of 4 years to provide students with ample opportunities to try “potential careers, to see what fits and what doesn't” (p. 16). Using a scaffolding approach, Wheaton College annually administers questionnaires intended to allow their students to reflect, focus, and question how their internships placements are related to their future goals (Gavigan, 2010). In this manner, the process of acquiring an internship is not simply reduced to securing one; rather it becomes a process that involves writing proposals, mapping out goals and expectations, and experiencing the interview process—and these experiences themselves can lead to a more valuable and effective internship (Gavigan, 2010). Furthermore, from the beginning of the process, Wheaton’s summer internship programs are a collaborative effort of student, staff, faculty, and alumnae, and cross-campus conversations are ongoing. It is common practice for faculty members to examine students’ fellowship applications, noting exceptional promise in particular fields and shepherding students to reach their highest potential (Gavigan, 2010). Although there may be gaps among the goals of all parties involved, Gardner and Bartkus (2014) believe that the logic for implementing experiential learning into higher education is a shared one that is focused on enhancing “the value of the learning experience through an integration of work and education” (p. 37).

In order to effectively implement internship programs into undergraduate education, it is necessary to understand and explore practical considerations that currently

make up the internship process. The development and practical implementation of internship programs should involve a more collaborative effort among participating stakeholders (Cord & Clements, 2010; Eyler, 2009; O'Neil, 2010; Strier, 2011) while also ensuring that there are support systems in place for students (Stirling et al., 2014), faculty, employers (Cord et al., 2011; Wan et al., 2013), and the greater community (Carter, 2013; O'Neil, 2010). Another important practical consideration for internship programming is to ensure that the reflective process is integrated into the curriculum and course design to give students an opportunity to further understand their placements, experiences, and classroom knowledge (Eyler, 2009; Gavigan, 2010; Rosario et al., 2013).

### **Challenges**

The integration of an effective internship program can be a difficult process with challenges that include different goals and views among stakeholders (Eyler, 2009; Strier, 2011), an inability for departments to collaborate across campus (O'Neil, 2010), and challenges maintaining program quality (Declou et al., 2013; Stirling et al., 2014). This section will outline the challenges related to the practice and implementation of internship programs in postsecondary university education.

### **Divergent Goals**

The literature suggests that the differing goals of those involved in the experiential learning process can create barriers for undergraduate students, universities, professional institutions, and the greater community. For example, Shannon and Wang (2010) stress that “too frequently universities and communities have such divergent goals of perspectives on community issues that they have difficulty finding common ground”

(p. 109). In addition, programs are often developed based on older and existing models and without “real participation with the community” (Strier, 2011, p. 87). For example, some students participating in the University of Waterloo’s Co-op program felt that the work being completed during their placements did not always align with opportunities to improve and address their research and academic goals (Simmons & Lee, 2011).

Incorporating more structured internship programs into undergraduate education can create mutual benefits to all stakeholders involved and can be a way to strengthen university–community partnerships (Simons et al., 2012; Stirling et al., 2014) because “students in experiential education learn as workers or community participants with a need to know in order to get a job done, not just as students who need to take a test” (Eyler, 2009, p. 29). In addition, more structured experiential learning programs will enable students in Ontario more opportunities to apply their academic knowledge, theory, and research to professional practice (Stirling et al., 2014) and the inability to make these crucial connections can lead students to question their education and role as contributing members of society (Bringle & Hatcher, 2009; Carter, 2013).

Wawrzynski and Baldwin (2014) explain that “linking undergraduate learning is a shared, often collaborative, responsibility. Instructors, student affairs professionals, academic leaders, and students all have important parts to play in integrating elements of the [undergraduate] learning environment” (p. 59). As effective internships rely on collaboration and shared goals, the inability to work together coupled with the divergent goals of university education, professional industry, and community needs can potentially lead to ineffective experiential learning outcomes (Shannon & Wang, 2010) and render internship placements less effective and meaningful (Wawrzynski & Baldwin, 2014).

Although this project does not focus on the issue of paid and unpaid internships, concerns about the dangers underlying unpaid internships in Ontario have come to the forefront of its practice (Declou et al., 2013; Madden, 2014; Stirling et al., 2014). This issue includes the concern that unpaid internships, particularly those facilitated by postsecondary institutions, provide limited protections for participants under Ontario's Employment Standards Act, which can lead to internal exploitation that includes student work hours that exceed the maximum limit (Stirling et al., 2014). In addition,

even outside of the discussion of official protections, students are becoming concerned about the expectation that students and recent graduates will undertake unpaid work as a form of a prolonged "job interview" or in order to gain training that should be provided by employers. (Madden, 2014, p. 9)

Another note to consider is that although Ontario postsecondary students participating in experiential programs believe they need to be compensated more for their placements (Declou et al., 2014), students also expressed their willingness to participate in an unpaid placement as it was perceived to offer high-quality employment or educational value (Madden, 2014). Conversation around methods to improve the issue of unpaid internships in Ontario should be integral to ensuring all students have access to experiential learning opportunities (Stirling et al., 2014).

### **Collaboration Across Campus**

Seifert and Burrow (2013) suggest that Ontario universities are in need of a more collaborative effort between the academic and student service departments. Similarly, O'Neil (2010) adds the need to "improve collaboration and communication between career service professionals and faculty" (p. 8). As well, a common resistance from

academic departments towards incorporating vocational elements into the curriculum usually results in career-related issues being relegated to career services when it should be a collaborative process (O'Neil, 2010). In other words, effective programs need a collaborative effort across all departments to make sure that the success of undergraduate students is a collective responsibility of an entire university (Rosario et al., 2013; Seifert & Burrow, 2013) as opposed to a process where students are left to determine their own academic and professional success (O'Neil, 2010).

### **Program Quality**

Another concern is the quality of experiential learning placements. For example, according to Declou et al. (2013), students participating in the University of Waterloo's Co-op program are more likely to report that their professional work assignments were boring and disengaging and also felt that they were not compensated enough for their work. This addresses concerns of ensuring that student placements are carefully sought out and researched so that they provide meaningful experiences that can provide opportunities to connect their academic learning to professional practice and experiences (Eyler, 2009; Stirling et al., 2014).

### **The Stakeholders**

Internships have the opportunity to benefit all stakeholders involved in the process (CCL, 2008; Stirling et al., 2014). As well, the professional community continues to express a desire for students who are well-rounded and able to “engage with the organization, the community and the real world. Higher education must understand these challenges and provide a supportive transition into the workforce by fostering the necessary learning to compete in the marketplace” (Cord & Clements, 2010, p. 288).

O'Neil (2010) suggests that internships have a significant impact and are beneficial when they are intentionally organized as an activity that leads to particular learning outcomes; when students apply what they have learned in courses to work experiences, reflect on these experiences, and receive feedback that helps them to improve; when students build mentoring relationships with supervisors, faculty, and peers; when students are exposed to differences across people and in ways of thinking; and when students are asked to use their experiences to clarify their values, interests, and personal goals—including, in this case, their values, interests, and goals related to careers (p. 5). As an effective internship process is one that involves the collaborative participation of its stakeholders (Shannon & Wang, 2010; Stirling et al., 2014), the following section will identify how internships can benefit students, faculty, academic institutions, employers, and the greater community.

### **Students**

The literature suggests that participation in WIL programs such as internships are rapidly increasing in Ontario (Stirling et al., 2014). Furthermore, a province-wide questionnaire completed by the Ontario Undergraduate Student Association (OUSA) reveals that postsecondary students in Ontario also want more opportunities to learn through WIL and high-impact experiences such as internships which suggests the need for provincial expansion strategies (Madden, 2014) as well as more structure to ensure placements are high quality and meaningful (Dewey, 1938; Eyler, 2009; Stirling et al., 2014).

Students want more opportunities to engage in experiential learning at the postsecondary level (Madden, 2014; Simons et al., 2012). According to a questionnaire administered to 200 undergraduates at a university in the United Kingdom, Healey,

Jordan, Pell, and Short (2010) reveal that students overwhelmingly support experiential learning programs, believing that opportunities to participate in academic activities amplifies the learning process while acquired professional experiences can offer potential opportunities for future employment. Furthermore, Simons et al. (2012) note that experiential learning also “enhances student personal, civic, and professional development” (p. 325). As well, Maxwell (2012) adds that internship experiences can help students understand “the complexity of their profession and potential ways to improve it—[thereby] contributing to outcomes of the profession” (p. 694).

Experiential learning programs such as internships not only enable students to acquire experiences that can help them in their future professional careers (CCL, 2008; Gavigan, 2010) but also assist with their integration into the greater community (Carter, 2013; Dewey, 1938; Shannon & Wang, 2010; Simons et al., 2013). Kuh (2008) asserts that internships are important as they provide students with an opportunity to see how their knowledge can be applied in relation to a larger world and greater community setting while also enabling them to “develop the ability to take the measure of events and actions and put them in perspective” (p. 28).

Wawrzynski & Baldwin (2014) note also that the internship process is beneficial as it allows students an opportunity to apply what they have learned in the classroom to concrete opportunities in the professional field. Kuh (2008) adds that these “experiences often challenge students to develop new ways of thinking about and responding immediately to novel circumstances as they work side by side with peers on intellectual and practical tasks, inside and outside the classroom, on and off campus” (p. 28).

In relation to the experience of students with their employers and placements,

students highlight that having support and guidance from their field supervisor was a major contributor to ensuring that their placements were effective and a positive learning experience (Virolainen et al., 2011; Wan et al., 2013). Another consideration is that students participating in WIL face different challenges based on the different types of WIL programs they participate in (Declou et al., 2013). For example, although the University of Waterloo's Co-op program boasts high student participation rates, the university was not able to provide as many opportunities for students wanting to participate in other WIL programs in comparison to other Ontario universities (Declou et al., 2013). Furthermore, different faculties and departments across a university also provide various challenges which include limited access, opportunities, and faculty and university support (Daniel & Daniel, 2013; Eyler, 2009).

### **Faculty**

Faculty are integral stakeholders in the internship process. Declou et al. (2013) suggest that in Ontario “the most common challenges faced by faculty were ensuring the quantity and quality of placements for students” (p. 5). In comparison to other Ontario universities, faculty at the University of Waterloo were less likely to support the increase of WIL opportunities in postsecondary education (Declou et al., 2013), which may be because of the strong co-op program already in place, though it must be acknowledged that co-op placements do not provide internship access for all students. Faculty in Ontario universities also reported difficulty managing large class sizes participating in WIL opportunities (Declou et al., 2013). As well, ensuring that there are enough placements to meet undergraduate student need can be further challenging as internship participation in Ontario is increasing at a rapid pace (Madden, 2014; Stirling et al., 2014). Although

undergraduate students in Ontario want more experiential learning opportunities, they also want to ensure that faculty receive access to current resources and training enabling students to receive meaningful knowledge and opportunities to help them excel in their future practices (Madden, 2014). Furthermore, Eyler (2009) expresses that it is equally important that professors and faculty receive proper training and support so that they are knowledgeable and effective in their roles. Katula and Threnhauser (1999) posit that experiential education can be a legitimate and valuable part of academic study only when the institution has in place a program for training faculty members to participate in it, and only when it is contextualized within the classroom by trained faculty members who facilitate student comprehension of the intellectual basis and meaning of such experiences. In terms of benefits for students, faculty at the University of Waterloo believe that WIL benefits students by enabling them to build their professional network and become more employable as they gain a stronger understanding about professional expectations through their experiences (Declou et al., 2013).

Furthermore, the implementation of internships will be a complex process as faculty from different programs across the university will each experience unique challenges based on the current curriculum and practice in their field (Daniel & Daniel, 2013; Eyler, 2009; Stirling et al., 2014). For example, in comparison to other Ontario universities, faculty in the University of Waterloo's Co-op program have expressed fewer challenges with WIL opportunities as their programs are well-structured, a large portion of their faculty are experienced, the university has strong existing partnerships with employers and the community, and the university collaboratively develops and specializes in WIL in the form of student co-ops (Declou et al., 2013).

In contrast, incorporating and assessing internships can be a more challenging process for faculty from the liberal arts as it requires a clear sense and understanding of the benefits that experiential learning can contribute to the existing process for academic learning; it also involves a willingness from department administrators and faculty to participate in WIL (Elyer, 2009). In response, Wawrzynski and Baldwin (2014) suggest that faculty should take steps to expand beyond their subject courses to find meaningful linkages to the larger educational goals of their institutions as well as those of their students. “Ideally, student affairs professionals and faculty members will collaborate on ways to complement each other's efforts to promote student learning and development” (Wawrzynski & Baldwin, 2014, p. 59).

### **Universities**

The literature suggests that collaboration across different university departments, faculties, and programs is essential to the development and effective implementation of experiential learning programs (Gavigan, 2010; O’Neil, 2010; Rosario et al., 2013). Bradshaw (2012) argues that cross-campus collaboration is challenging because Canadian universities function and operate in separate silos.

As well, internship programs also present opportunities for universities to create and build partnerships with employers and industry (Cord & Clements, 2010). Irish, Kurth, Falsetto, and James (2013) believe it is necessary to link education and professional practice because a university’s

theoretical research contribution enriches corporate research by adding a stimulating intellectual environment for new discoveries by contributing fundamental new knowledge to the field’s intellectual core, and by indicating

fresh, practical applications. If theory does not stimulate practice, it can become stale and fail to contribute to societal needs (p. 13)

Furthermore, internship opportunities can benefit universities by increasing their partnerships with industry, helping to reduce student debt and provide financial assistance (Declou et al., 2013), and also decreasing the demand for student loans (CCL, 2008).

### **The Greater Community**

The literature also suggests that another stakeholder that universities should collaborate with is the greater community. Enabling dialogue and input in the development of experiential learning opportunities in the community can help to ensure that all stakeholders mutually benefit from the internship process (Bradshaw, 2012; Carter, 2013; Cord & Clements, 2010; O'Neil, 2010; Shannon & Wang, 2010).

Dewey (1938) suggests that students need to become “acquainted with the conditions of the local community, physical, historical, economic, occupational, etc., in order to utilize them as educational resources” (p. 40). Irish and O'Callaghan (2013) express that the separation between the greater community and education is problematic as it is seen as a responsibility of the latter as opposed to a collaborative one.

Furthermore, Bradshaw and Hatcher (2009) suggest that experiential learning programs need to make sure that there is a direct and relevant connection between education and the voice of the community. In addition, Shannon and Wang (2010) suggest that the development of experiential learning programs should be a collaborative effort so that the goals and aims of universities are also aligned with the needs of the greater community.

## **Employers**

Cord and Clements (2010) suggest that the development of experiential learning programs has often neglected developmental input from employers which prevents the optimum effectiveness of the internship process. Ontario employers recommend a better placement schedule which can in turn fit their professional needs better so that more employers can participate in WIL programs (Declou et al., 2013). Furthermore, Declou et al. (2013) report that of the employers in Ontario who participated in the conducted survey, many did not find that their participation in WIL programs presented any challenges (p. 5). On the other hand, Ontario employers did find WIL beneficial as it provided them with opportunities to “prescreen potential hires, developing industry/profession workforce skills, and bringing in specific skills and talent” (Declou et al., 2013, p. 5). Likewise, the CCL (2008) also believes that the experiential learning process is desirable for Canadian employers because they can potentially offer “(1) the ability to hire motivated and enthusiastic new employees; (2) the opportunity to screen students for permanent employment; and (3) the chance to engage in positive interactions with post-secondary institutions” (p. 5). Although internship placements offer employers opportunities to improve their own practice and can potentially lead to innovative growth, it is a process which requires participation with universities (Irish et al., 2013).

Sattler and Peters (2012) report that although employers view that WIL is effective in offering students opportunities to gain professional skills, the lack of active participation and collaboration with Ontario academic institutions in the developmental process so that programs also benefit the employers is a factor limiting WIL programs from being more successful. Virolainen et al. (2011) suggest that the lack of collaboration

with employers in the internship process has had an adverse effect on developing strong partnerships as well as ensuring placements are of high quality and effective.

The internship process is one which involves the participation of multiple stakeholders (Carter, 2013; Rosario et al., 2013; Stirling et al., 2014). The participation of stakeholders is a complex and difficult process which requires more collaboration and developmental input from students, faculty, community members (O'Neil, 2010), and employers (Wan et al., 2013). Understanding the perspectives of each stakeholder involved in the process will enable a stronger understanding on what considerations to make when developing an internship implementation strategy.

### **Chapter Summary**

In Ontario, there is a push for higher education to make sure that both colleges and universities “are meeting labour market needs, accomplishing research and developing excellence” (Rae, 2005, p. 14). In response, past research suggests that experiential learning forms such as WIL programs that include internships are increasing in demand and participation at the undergraduate level in Ontario (Madden, 2014; Stirling et al., 2014). The research also suggests that the practice of internships at the undergraduate level varies across programs and faculties (Daniel & Daniel, 2013; Declou et al., 2013; Eyler, 2009) and that a more consistent structure, understanding, guidance (Eyler, 2009; Stirling et al., 2014) and collaboration (Bradshaw, 2012; O'Neil, 2010) is needed to ensure that placements are meaningful and contribute to the mutual benefit of all stakeholders participating in the internship process (Cord & Clements, 2010).

## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODS**

The purpose of this project is to create an internship implementation strategy to encourage collaboration, provide guidance, and structure for the practice of undergraduate internships in Ontario. Consistency and structure are current challenges facing the practice of internships (Eyler, 2009; Stirling et al., 2014) and I want to provide a framework that is manageable and also offers enough flexibility and structure that Ontario university faculty and administrators can implement these strategies into the undergraduate curriculum. This chapter provides an outline of the design, processes, rationale for readings, and limitations of this research project.

### **Process of Development**

The process of development for this project involved a literature search using Google Scholar with filters set for articles published from 2013 until present. I narrowed my field down to five peer-reviewed articles and acquired additional resources by locating literature that was cited across different resources, which included drawing from their relevant references dating from 2008 and onwards that I came across during the research process.

The process of locating the additional resources involved conducting a search using a combination of Google Scholar, Google, and Brock University's online Supersearch engine with filters set for articles that are peer-reviewed. As there was limited current research in the field, I also expanded the publication date parameters using the aforementioned resources and made exceptions for literature that included useful definitions of experiential learning and internships in undergraduate education.

In addition, to acquire more Ontario-based research, I also conducted searches on

the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario website's database using the keywords *internships* and *experiential learning*. As well, I searched the online database of the Ontario Undergraduate Student Association (OUSA) using these same key words.

I also wanted to include some popular press articles for my research and therefore used Google as a search engine entering the key words Ontario, Canada, undergraduate, research, experiential learning, Kolb, Dewey, CBC, and The Star in various combinations which also included entering all of the same key words all at once while interchanging the addition of either the CBC or The Star.

### **Research Design**

The design of this project also involves the undertaking of an internship placement. The experience I decided to undertake was as a member of a campaign team for Ontario's provincial mayoral elections on October 27, 2014. After meeting with the mayoral candidate, I was given the opportunity to select the area in which I wanted to complete my internship placement. Deciding to complete my placement in the area of undergraduate student internships, I was given the opportunity to explore and develop an internship integration plan to be integrated into the campaign's platform. The internship strategy was then included as part of the campaign's job platform under the internship section. I chose this placement because it provides an opportunity to develop a strategy that links higher education to the professional field through a medium that will create opportunities to share this research project with stakeholders within and outside of the academic community.

### **Format**

I have chosen to present the internship integration strategy handbook in chapter 4 as an electronic and print copy. Using an electronic copy will enable its accessibility to

stakeholders participating in the process. As well, providing the handbook in an electronic format will enable stakeholders to make adjustments to ensure that the strategy adheres to their institutional, academic, and professional guidelines. The internship implementation strategy handbook presented in the next chapter includes the following sections: current state of internships in Ontario, strategy for implementation, setting goals, and additional guidelines. The electronic and print copies will be a template and outline for the practice of undergraduate internships that can be used by university administration and faculty.

### **Limitations**

There are limitations to this process that need to be considered. Although information and research concerning Ontario postsecondary internships is readily accessible online, there is limited peer-reviewed literature on unpaid internship placements in Ontario (Madden, 2014; Stirling et al., 2014). The majority of the literature used for this research is therefore focused on paid and monitored internship placements and programs.

Some of the considerations and recommendations for this project are also drawn from various universities, undergraduate programs, and countries so it is important to understand that these ideas and approaches may not transfer as effectively to all undergraduate universities in Ontario. In addition, another limitation is that this internship implementation strategy has not yet been reviewed, implemented, or tested. Therefore, it is not possible to confirm the validity and effectiveness of this framework.

Although it is important to keep these limitations in mind, the content and recommendations of this project still have the potential to affect the practice,

development, and perception of internships in postsecondary university education. Developing a strategy as part of a mayoral campaign will enable opportunities for participating stakeholders and community members to engage with the practice of internships to gauge its potential benefits in building a bridge between the academics, professionals, and the greater community.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter has provided an understanding of the process of development and rationale for the chosen literature in the development of the internship implementation strategy handbook. In this chapter I have also described the format that the project will be presented in as well as the limitations that accompany it.

The next chapter presents the internship implementation strategy handbook for postsecondary universities in Ontario. Using a collection of research findings and recommendations, the handbook offers practical strategies towards improving the development and practice of internships in Ontario postsecondary education.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES HANDBOOK**

The following chapter presents a handbook comprising an undergraduate internship implementation strategy. The handbook begins with a brief summary of issues relating to current internship practice in Ontario, followed by an outline adapted from the experiential learning model presented by Kolb (1984). This adaptation of Kolb's model provides structure and guidance for the development of an internship program as well as implementing internship placements. This strategy also includes templates to ensure internship quality and collaboration among stakeholders, and outlines stakeholder responsibilities.

**Making Connections: An Internship Implementation Strategy for Ontario**

**Undergraduate Education**

## **Foreword**

Based on a review of the literature on the practice of undergraduate internships in Ontario, there is a need for an internship implementation strategy that provides structure and guidance to ensure that placements are meaningful opportunities for students and the stakeholders involved.

## **Internships in Ontario**

Participation in work-integrated learning (WIL) programs such as internships is rapidly increasing in Ontario (Madden, 2014) and undergraduate students want more opportunities to participate and apply their knowledge practically (Dehaas, 2013). Stakeholders in the internship process include students, faculty, universities, employers (Declou, Peters, & Sattler, 2013; Eyler, 2009; Stirling et al., 2014) and the greater community (Carter, 2013; O'Neil, 2010; Shannon & Wang, 2010; Strier, 2011). A major goal of implementing internships into undergraduate education is to allow opportunities for students to reach their academic potential while also enhancing their employability and competitiveness in the professional field after graduation (Wan, Yang, Cheng, & Su, 2013). The current practice and implementation of internships, however, lacks structure and consistency across different programmes (Daniel & Daniel, 2013) as well as universities in Ontario (Declou et al., 2013; Madden, 2014).

## **Strategies for Implementation**

To provide more structure and consistency to the practice of internships, it is worthwhile to consider the integration of Kolb's (1984) four-point process (Eyler, 2009; Stirling et al., 2014). The experiential learning model presented by Kolb provides a cycle and framework that can help guide the practice and implementation of experiential learning forms such as internships from the early stages throughout their completion while also incorporating opportunities to consolidate the experiences and engage in reflective practice (O'Neil, 2010; Wan et al., 2013).

Table 1

*Experiential Learning Process*

<b>Stages</b>	<b>Objective</b>	<b>Actions</b>
Stage 1	Concrete Experience (CE)	1. Participation in internship experience
Stage 2	Reflective Observation (RO)	1. Reflect on experience 2. Use journals, media, presentations to share experience
Stage 3	Abstract Conceptualization (AC)	1. Understanding how academic ideas and theories relate and connect to professional practice 2. Conduct research, in-class learning
Stage 4	Active Experimentation (AE)	1. Apply academic knowledge and theory to resolve practical and professional situations which arise during internship placements

Table 1 is adapted from the experiential learning process presented by Kolb (1984). As Kolb's process is integral to understanding experiential learning (Grohnert, Beausaert, & Segers, 2014), Table 1 is also adapted from the recommendation of Stirling et al. (2014) to incorporate the process into the development and practice of undergraduate internships in Ontario. While offering recommendations adapted from research in the field of experiential learning and internship practice, Table 1 also offers practical steps towards shaping and developing internships prior to their commencement, during and throughout the duration of the placement, and following its completion. Table 1 offers a practical guideline that can be applied to the practice, implementation, and development of internships in post-secondary education.

The development and implementation of internships will benefit from a process

that provides structure and guidelines before, during, and after placements (Cord & Clements, 2010; Gavigan, 2010). Outlining expectations among students, academic supervisors, and field advisers is a key component to ensuring that placements are beneficial to all participating stakeholders (Stirling et al., 2014).

Table 2

*Internship Development Structure*


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<b>Before</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Collaboration with supervisors (academic &amp; field) to select fitting placement</li> <li>2. Agreement on mutual goals of placement by stakeholders</li> <li>3. Outline expectations (academic &amp; professional)</li> <li>4. Outline supervisor mentorship roles</li> <li>5. Ensure placements adhere to Ontario Employment Standards Act (ESA)</li> </ol>
<b>During</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Continued collaboration/dialogue among participating stakeholders</li> <li>2. Tracking of student placement from supervisors (academic &amp; field)</li> <li>3. Continued guidance and mentorship throughout process as needed</li> <li>4. Collate resources, build professional network, keep updated journal</li> <li>5. Ensure placements adhere to Ontario Employment Standards Act (ESA)</li> </ol>
<b>After</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Reflection process</li> <li>2. Connect back to academic knowledge-based</li> <li>3. Implications for future practice/experiences</li> </ol>

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Table 2 outlines recommendations for the practice of internships. Ensuring that the roles of participating stakeholders are clearly defined and that placements adhere to the Ontario Employment Standards Act (ESA) is an adaptation from Stirling et al. (2014). The recommendation of a collaborative approach to the development of internships programs, and placements is also adapted from the literature (Irish & O'Callaghan, 2013; Rosario, Flemister, Gampert, & Grindley, 2013). The implementation of a

reflection process is an adaptation from recommendations in the literature (Eyler, 2009; Gavigan, 2010; Madden, 2014; O'Neil, 2010).

In this next section I provide recommendations for the components of an internship placement form. The intention of a placement form is to ensure that all student placements are tracked so as to work towards an internship strategy that adheres to Ontario's ESA as recommended by Stirling et al. (2014) and Madden (2014).

Placement forms should include the following information:

- Student Name
- Academic Supervisor
- Placement Supervisor
- Internship Placement
- Hours
- Credit
- Shared Goal(s) of Placement

The suggested requirements in the list above are adaptations from Stirling et al.'s (2014) and Madden's (2014) recommendation to track all internship placements including both paid and unpaid ones. In addition, it also addresses the importance of shared goals of each internship placement in order to encourage collaboration among participating stakeholders (Seifert & Burrow, 2013; O'Neil, 2010; Rosario et al., 2013).

### **Improving Structure**

This section addresses the need to improve the structure (Eyler, 2009) and consistency (Daniel & Daniel, 2013) in the development and implementation of

internship strategies in Ontario postsecondary education (Stirling et al., 2014).

Recommendations to consider are:

1. Ensure placements adhere to the Ontario ESA
2. Track all internship placements (paid/unpaid)
3. Make sure connections are made between course content/knowledge and internship placement
4. Adherence to academic expectations and faculty requirements
5. Clear identification of professional expectations
6. Opportunity to engage in reflective process
7. Ongoing support for supervisors (academic, professional, field, student services)

These recommendations are adapted from Stirling et al. (2014) to ensure that placements adhere to the Ontario ESA. Ensuring that connections are made between course content and internship placements are adaptations from literature suggesting that internships enable students an opportunity to apply their academic knowledge to professional experiences (Declou et al., 2013; Eyler, 2009; Wawrzynski & Baldwin, 2014). Opportunities to engage in reflective practice are adapted from Kolb's (1984) experiential learning model as well as current literature that also promotes the integration of a reflective process into the practice of internships (Gavigan, 2010; O'Neil, 2010; Wan et al., 2014).

### **Stakeholder Collaboration**

To encourage and help facilitate collaboration among participating stakeholders in the internship process (O'Neil, 2010; Shannon & Wang, 2010; Wan et al., 2013), the

following recommendations offer three guiding principles to ensure that the process is beneficial for all participants:

1. Develop mutually beneficial partnerships
2. Allow stakeholders to be part of programme development process
3. Foster ongoing communication between stakeholders during placements

These recommendations are adapted from the literature that suggests collaboration is integral to the development and practice of internship programs (Cord & Clements, 2010; Dewey, 1938; Eyler, 2009; Kolb, 1984; Rosario et al., 2013) and this process should enable opportunities for participating employers, businesses (Irish, Kurth, Falsetto, & James, 2013; Wan et al., 2013), and the greater community (O'Neil, 2010; Shannon & Wang, 2010) to provide their perspectives and input.

### **Ensuring Quality**

The development and implementation of an effective internship program for Ontario postsecondary institutions should also provide guidelines and strategies to ensure internship program quality as this can help maximize its benefits for students, institutions, and participating stakeholders (Bringle & Hatcher, 2009; Declou et al., 2013). The process of ensuring internship programme quality should:

1. Clearly outline roles of stakeholders
2. Provide clear academic and professional expectations before commencement of internship placement
3. Provide ongoing support and resources for students
4. Develop and maintain relationships with stakeholders

5. Track placements
6. Adherence to academic requirements and expectations
7. Monitor to ensure adherence to Ontario's ESA.

These recommendations are adapted from literature that suggests internship programs need to make sure that the roles of stakeholders are clearly defined (Declou et al., 2013; Madden, 2014; Stirling et al., 2014). Furthermore, recommendations for a collaborative approach are adapted from literature that suggests internship programs and placements need to move towards ensuring that the process is one in which participating stakeholders have an opportunity to provide input on their development and practice (Eyler, 2009; O'Neil, 2010; Wan et al., 2013). The greater community also benefits from this process as it enables them to be participants in developing programs that are relevant, meaningful, and specific to issues that directly affect them (O'Neil, 2010; Shannon & Wang, 2010). This will also help students to become more active and engaged members in the greater community if they are given opportunities to collaborate and work directly alongside members of their community on projects that have meaning to the participating stakeholders (Kuh, 2008).

### **Setting Goals**

Working towards improving the consistency in the practice and implementation of internships in Ontario's postsecondary institutions must be a collaborative effort (Madden, 2014; Stirling et al., 2014). This section provides an outline of goals for participating stakeholders which can be amended and adjusted based on their unique situations, requirements, and needs.

## **Faculty**

Faculty play an integral role in the internship process and need to make sure that they provide the proper support to help students gain valuable experience from their placements (Declou et al., 2013; Gavigan, 2010). In relation to supervising and/or developing internships, faculty should consider the following recommendations:

- Collaborate/guide student participants and at least one other stakeholder (e.g., field supervisor) so that mutual goals for placement are developed
- Connect four stages of the experiential learning process (Kolb, 1984) to the curriculum
- Track all placements in adherence to Ontario's ESA.

These goals are adapted from literature suggesting the importance of collaboration in the development and practice of internships (Madden, 2014; Wawrzynski & Baldwin, 2014) as well as suggestions to ensure that placements also work towards achieving participating stakeholders' mutual goals (Stirling et al, 2014). Ensuring a connection to the experiential learning process (Kolb, 1984) will provide a platform and guidelines for the practice of internships (Eyler, 2009).

## **Employers**

As participating stakeholders, employers are an integral component of internship placements and should also have opportunities to collaborate and contribute to the development and implementation of internships (Cord & Clements, 2010). At present, the practice of internships often lacks input from employers (Cord & Clements, 2010) and will therefore require more collaboration and participation with universities to

increase opportunities for innovation and growth for students and employers (Irish et al., 2013). As participating stakeholders in the internship process, employers should:

- Collaborate/guide student participants and at least one other stakeholder (e.g., faculty supervisor) so that mutual goals for placement are developed
- Make sure students have opportunities and experiences that will contribute to their professional future and give them opportunities to apply their academic knowledge
- Provide opportunities to acquire experiences that fall into the four stages of the experiential learning process (Kolb, 1984)
- Track *all* placements in adherence to Ontario's ESA.

The recommendations for collaboration are derived from the literature suggesting its importance in ensuring that placements address participating stakeholders' mutual goals (Madden, 2014; Stirling et al., 2014). Recommendations to follow the experiential learning process as outlined by Kolb (1984) are adapted from the literature suggesting their effectiveness in ensuring internship experiences are meaningful and beneficial (Eyler, 2009; Stirling et al, 2014). The recommendation to track all placements is an adaptation from literature highlighting the importance of tracking all placements regardless of whether they are paid or not (Stirling et al., 2014).

### **Universities**

Universities in Ontario are a key piece to implementing more structured internship programs across the province. At present, there is no consistency across Ontario universities in relation to their development, practice, and implementation of

internship programs (Declou et al., 2013). Ensuring that universities create meaningful partnerships and collaborate with participating stakeholders such as employers (Cord & Clements, 2010) and the greater community will improve the practice of postsecondary internships (Strier, 2011). The following are recommendations universities should consider when developing and implementing internship programs and placements:

- Collaborate with faculty and at least one stakeholder so that mutual goals for placement are developed
- Organize on-campus conferences to enable students and stakeholders to network and present
- Provide faculty with support, training, resources, and professional development opportunities so that they succeed
- Explore partnerships with employers, community groups, and volunteer organizations that can enrich and develop meaningful experiences for all stakeholders
- Track *all* placements in adherence to Ontario's ESA.

These recommendations for engaging in a collaborative process to reach mutual goals for internships are adapted from Stirling et al. (2014) and Madden (2014).

Recommendations to organize on-campus conferences are adapted from Gavigan (2010) and providing support and professional development to staff is adapted from Declou et al. (2013).

### **The Greater Community**

The greater community play an important role in the internship process and

should have more opportunities to offer input (O'Neil, 2010; Strier, 2011). By collaborating with participating stakeholders in the development process, community members can work towards ensuring that the needs of the community are also addressed as an integral component of the experiential learning process (Carter, 2013). The following are recommendations for the greater community to consider in relation to their participation in the internship process:

- Explore partnerships with stakeholders in the undergraduate internship process
- Community leaders need to collaborate with community members to ascertain their academic and professional needs to make links to higher education internship practice
- Create public interest groups to participate in discussions about higher education and the importance of practical experience in education.

These recommendations are adapted from Shannon and Wang (2010) stressing the importance of a collaborative approach to make sure that the academic goals of universities also take into consideration the needs of the greater community. The recommendations for creating public interest groups is adapted from the literature suggesting the need for opportunities to develop connections between greater community and experiential learning (Bringle & Hatcher, 2009; Carter, 2013; O'Neil, 2010; Shannon & Wang, 2010).

### **Students**

Stirling et al. (2014) suggest that participation in experiential learning programs are increasing in Ontario's postsecondary institutions. Internships also provide students

with opportunities to merge academic theory and professional practice (Eyler, 2009; Gavigan, 2010; Kolb, 1984; Madden, 2014). When considering participation in an internship program or placement, students should consider the following recommendations:

- Request more collaboration and input in the internship process
- Ensure placements adhere to Ontario’s ESA
- Seek assistance and support from university services, faculty, and placement supervisors
- Be active and do research so that placements can provide opportunities that are aligned with potential academic and/or professional goals.

These recommendations are adapted from the literature suggesting that students should be part of the collaborative process of developing and implementing internship programs and placements (Cord & Clements, 2010; Eyler, 2009; Gavigan, 2010; Stirling et al., 2014). Recommendations to ensure that placements adhere to Ontario’s ESA are adapted from Stirling et al. (2014).

The responsibilities listed above are adapted from literature which suggests that internship programs need to make sure that the roles of stakeholders are clearly defined (Declou et al., 2013; Madden, 2014; Stirling et al., 2014). Furthermore, recommendations for a collaborative approach are adapted from literature which suggests that internship programs and placements need to move towards ensuring that the process is one in which participating stakeholders have an opportunity to provide input on its development and practice (Eyler, 2009; O’Neil, 2010; Wan et al., 2013). The

greater community also benefits from this process as it enables them to be participants in developing programs that are relevant, meaningful, and specific to issues that directly affect them (O'Neil, 2010; Shannon & Wang, 2010). This will also enable students to become more active and engaged members in the greater community if they are given opportunities to collaborate and work directly alongside members of their community on projects that have meaning to the participating stakeholders (Kuh, 2008).

### **Summary**

This strategy aims to provide recommendations to refine and optimize the practice of internships in Ontario universities through ensuring program quality, collaboration among stakeholders, and defining responsibilities for those participating in the process. Kolb's (1984) model of experiential learning provides a framework to guide the practice of experiential learning (Grohnert et al., 2014) and WIL forms such as internships (Stirling et al, 2014; Madden, 2014).

To ensure the quality of internships it is imperative that participating stakeholders are cognizant of the importance of adherence to Ontario's ESA and that all placements regardless of whether they are paid or unpaid should be tracked (Sagan, 2013; Stirling et al., 2014). This strategy also suggests the exploration and development of meaningful partnerships and collaboration between participating stakeholders such as employers (Sattler & Peters, 2012) and the greater community (Carter, 2013; O'Neil, 2010; Shannon & Wang, 2010) to make sure that placements are addressing the needs of those involved in the process (Stirling et al., 2014).

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## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

This research project aimed to bring more structure and guidance to the practice of undergraduate student internships in Ontario. The development of an internship implementation strategy presents an opportunity to provide a template and guidelines towards improving the effectiveness of undergraduate internships. These guidelines also propose and encourage the development of partnerships and collaboration among participating stakeholders to ensure that internship placements consist of shared goals that can potentially lead to mutual benefits for those involved in the process. Moreover, these guidelines are also meant to help Ontario's undergraduate internship placements to provide their students with meaningful experiences that can bridge the gap between academic knowledge and professional practice. In this chapter I will provide a summary of the research project, highlight implications for future practice and theory, identify opportunities for further research, and provide recommendations for the development and practice of undergraduate internships.

### Summary

Participation in experiential learning through WIL programs such as internships are rapidly increasing in Ontario's undergraduate education (Madden, 2014). Nonetheless, the increase of placements also requires increased support from the academic and professional field (Declou et al., 2013). The current practice of internships lacks consistency in practice, development, and understanding (Eyler, 2009; Daniel & Daniel, 2013). While internship placements are more common in more vocational programs (Wan et al., 2013), experiential learning is still struggling to gain support and acceptance in such fields as the liberal arts (Eyler, 2009) and psychology (Simons et al., 2013). Even within Ontario, the

implementation of experiential learning and internship programs vary across university campuses in the province (Declou et al., 2013; Stirling et al., 2014).

The current practice of internships is lacking a more cohesive and collaborative approach amongst students, faculty, universities (Madden, 2014; Stirling et al., 2014), employers (Cord & Clements, 2011; Declou et al., 2013; Virolainen, 2011), and the greater community (Carter, 2013; O'Neil, 2010; Shannon & Wang, 2010). The challenge moving forward is finding ways to ensure that there are mutual goals that can encourage collaborations within the university (Rosario et al., 2013) and that extend beyond to include all stakeholders (Stirling et al., 2014). While challenges do exist, experiential learning programs have started to gain traction in undergraduate education as both academics and professionals agree that it provides valuable learning opportunities to undergraduate students and helps them merge their academic practice with professional practice (Eyler, 2009; Kolb, 1984; Stirling et al., 2014; Wan et al., 2011).

In chapter 4, I presented a strategy for implementing more structured internship programs and practice into the Ontario undergraduate curriculum. Using the experiential learning model presented by Kolb (1984) as a framework, I presented a structured approach that can be used by university administrators and faculty to guide their implementation of internship placements. This strategy also provided guidelines and suggestions to encourage collaboration among stakeholders and outlined stakeholder responsibilities.

### **Implications for Future Practice**

As Dewey (1916) notes, “if we teach today's students as we taught yesterday's, we rob them of tomorrow” (p. 167). At present, the practice of internships in Ontario universities would benefit from a framework that offers more structure and guidance

(Madden, 2014; Stirling et al., 2014). Providing a strategy to address this concern is only one step towards improving the internship experience for students and participating stakeholders. This step also leads to opportunities to highlight current concerns so as to collaboratively work towards a better understanding of experiential education and the practice of internships at the undergraduate level.

Although it is difficult to gauge the implications of this research for the field of experiential education as a whole, these internship strategies can provide guidance for future internship practice if their approaches are further explored by participating stakeholders who are willing to explore alternate approaches or to make minor or major adjustments to their current approach towards internship programming. Moreover, if this project garners consideration and attention from any faculty member(s), employers, students, and/or community members, then it will be successful in bringing focus to the current practice of undergraduate internships. The exchange of ideas and development of dialogue between stakeholders would be of benefit for the field as well as its participating stakeholders.

The process of acquiring and organizing an internship is at present still one that relies heavily on a student's initiative (Eyler, 2009). I recommend that stakeholders take an opportunity to conduct more research on experiential learning and to be active in working towards opportunities to explore and collaborate on internship projects to develop potential partnerships within and outside of the academic community. This research project provides a framework to guide collaboration in developing internship programs but it requires a willingness from different departments, faculties, and stakeholders to engage in dialogue and work towards shared ideals and mutually beneficial goals.

As part of my internship placement as a team member for a mayoral candidate in

the Ontario municipal elections on October 27, 2014, I was responsible for the development of an internship implementation strategy. I also wanted to make sure that I was engaged in a process that had direct relevance to the current needs of the community (Bringle & Hatcher, 2009; Carter, 2013; Shannon & Wang, 2010) and that also extended beyond the academic field bridging the gap with the real world (Brew, 2013; Dewey, 1938; Kolb, 1984; Madden, 2014; Maxwell, 2012; O'Neil, 2010; Rosario et al., 2013; Wan et al., 2013). The research that I have conducted and the internship strategies I have suggested were condensed and stood as one of three goals of the mayoral candidate's youth and education employment platform. As a platform goal, the research was used to generate interest and discourse among members of the community which include participating stakeholders. It was also used as an opportunity to present a plan that would highlight how more structured experiential learning and WIL placements could benefit the municipal job market, higher education, local businesses, and the greater community.

As mentioned earlier, this project also aimed to ensure that the development and practice of internship placements provides meaningful integration opportunities for participating stakeholders. This strategy is not simply about increasing the practice of internships in Ontario postsecondary education but more so about providing guidance and structure so that students get the most out of their internship experience. Moreover, providing guidance and structure will help ensure that placements are carefully sought out and prepared so that the knowledge gained within the classroom can be extended into the professional field (Declou et al., 2013; Eyler, 2009; Wawrzynski & Baldwin, 2014) and the greater community (Carter, 2013; O'Neil, 2010; Shannon & Wang, 2010).

In addition, it is important to make sure that support systems are in place so that

students and participating stakeholders benefit from internship placements. Providing support for students during their placements should be a responsibility for both academic and field supervisors (Wan et al., 2013) and should be adjusted according to the students' needs so that they are gradually provided with more autonomy to shape and develop their skills and knowledge during their placements (Cord & Clements, 2010). It is imperative to define the roles and responsibilities of participating stakeholders prior to the commencement of placements to ensure that students receive the support they need and that placements provide meaningful learning opportunities (Eyler, 2009; Stirling et al., 2014).

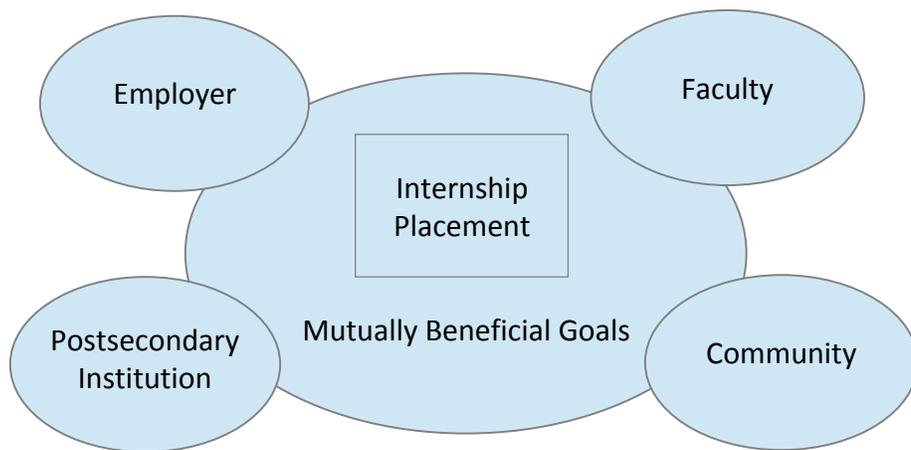
### **Implications for Theory**

As this project is rooted in theories of experiential learning as proposed by Dewey (1938) and Kolb (1984), it provides a structured framework and conceptual model that implements components of the experiential learning that can be translated into internship practice and implementation. While experiential learning theory as proposed by Dewey (1938) had a larger emphasis on training students to become more active and engaged democratic citizens, Kolb wanted to address issues in higher education including the “gap between necessary job skills and educational institutions” (as cited in Katula & Threnhauser, 1999, p. 242). Moving forward, the consideration of Kolb's four-point process can be beneficial for providing guidance and structure for organizations and employees in their development of experiential learning, work-integrated learning, and internship programs (Grohnert et al., 2014; Striling et al., 2014). Participating stakeholders such as administrators, faculty, and employers can refer to the proposed strategies in chapter 4 as a conceptual template to refine their approach to merging classroom knowledge with relevant knowledge for student internship placements (Stirling

et al., 2014). It also provides further support for shaping the practice of internships around the theory of experiential learning as presented by Kolb. As theorists Dewey (1938) and Kolb identify the importance of integrating reflective practice into experiential learning, perhaps this project will lead to further exploration of how reflective practice can be integrated into the internship learning process (Eyler, 2009; O'Neil, 2010; Wawrzynski & Baldwin, 2014).

The development of internship programs as well as the implementation of placements must involve a collaborative effort to be more effective (Dewey, 1938; Eyler, 2009; Kolb, 1984; Shannon & Wang, 2010; Wan et al., 2013). In addition, I have suggested in chapter 4 that the starting point of internships should involve a process of collaboration among participating stakeholders in order to develop mutual goals that are unique to each placement. This provides an opportunity for involvement and collaboration among participating stakeholders while also engaging in an active approach to ensure that placements embody the shared goals of those participating in its process (Eyler, 2009; O'Neil, 2010; Stirling et al., 2014; Wan et al., 2013).

The model presented in Figure 1 shows that there can be many potential stakeholders in the undergraduate internship process. Allowing stakeholders the opportunity to contribute to the developmental process further encourages collaborative practice, helps develop meaningful partnerships (O'Neil, 2010; Virolainen et al., 2011), and represents progress towards ensuring all participants benefit (Stirling et al., 2014). Therefore, ensuring the quality and effectiveness of undergraduate internships requires an implementation strategy that is structured and enables opportunities for stakeholder collaboration (Stirling et al., 2014).



*Figure 1.* Collaboration model.

### **Opportunities for Further Research**

Although this project briefly highlights the concerns surrounding unpaid internships in Ontario and across Canada (Goodman, 2014; Sagan, 2013; Stirling et al., 2014) while also proposing a strategy that emphasizes the need to track both paid and unpaid internship placements, a stronger understanding of internship practice will require further research and academic inquiry into Ontario's unpaid internship placements. As students in Ontario have expressed concern over unpaid placements or compensation they feel is too low (Declou et al., 2013; Stirling et al., 2014), further research can explore whether there are current funding programs in Ontario that can be further developed or improved upon to address the growing concern of unpaid internships in Ontario and Canada (Sagan, 2013). Some questions to consider involve whether a paid internship strategy can be implemented at the provincial level. How would this model look across the different postsecondary institutions in Ontario? Would it be more sustainable to have a model in which the province and institutions collectively share in the costs of paid internship programming? And would the process enable opportunities for more collaboration among participating stakeholders?

As this project draws to an end it presents opportunities for further research in the area of experiential learning. The limitations of this project are identified in chapters 1 and 3 but also provide meaningful context and opportunities for future research. As mentioned in chapter 1, a limitation of this research project is that it does not involve the collection of empirical data. Weingarten (2014) believes that there is a need to measure whether postsecondary students in Ontario are acquiring the skills that academic programs claim to offer. I recommend the development of a research project that focuses

on evaluating and measuring whether students are acquiring meaningful skills from internship experiences and programs in Ontario as integral to bringing a better understanding the impact of experiential learning in post-secondary institutions.

In addition, another limitation of this project is that it does not focus on one postsecondary program but instead addresses Ontario undergraduate education more broadly. I would recommend that future research narrow the scope to one program or faculty in order to measure the success of experiential learning and internship programs in relation to the focused program. This can allow for the required adjustments to be made to adhere to the requirements and needs of specific programs.

It is also important to highlight that the research used in this project predominantly focuses on experiences derived from tracked and paid internships in Ontario. As mentioned in the previous section, it is imperative for future research and practice to explore alternatives and methods to ensure that both paid and unpaid internships are tracked in order to assess and measure their effectiveness.

Another limitation of this project is that although it addresses the need for collaboration in the process of developing an effective internship strategy in Ontario, this research would benefit from further and more extensive research from the perspectives of stakeholders such as businesses taking on interns and how it can be possible to mutually address their needs as well during the internship process.

### **Final Word**

Moving forward, the development of an internship implementation plan is intended to provide meaningful experiences and opportunities for participating students, faculty, universities, employers, and the greater community. So how do we extend the

conversation beyond the academic field? How does one engage in a process of education that meets the expectations of the academic field but also addresses the needs of the community and industry? I think this begins with taking small steps towards building a bridge between the academic world, professional field, and the greater community. By participating in an internship for the provincial municipal elections, I was given an opportunity to build a bridge between my academic research, the professional field, and needs of the community. The opportunity to integrate my research into a mayoral candidate's campaign as part of an employment platform is a small step towards garnering more interest and discussion for the practice of internships in Ontario's universities. In addition, greater attention, research, and focus are needed to explore opportunities for how the greater community can contribute, participate, and benefit from the development of internship programs in Ontario's postsecondary institutions.

This research has provided a starting point and some structure for an area of education practice that requires consistency across postsecondary institutions. The study's recommendations hopefully will provide some structure and direction for future research and lead to improvements and ongoing research in the field of experiential learning. As the participation in experiential learning continues to increase in Ontario (Madden, 2014), what lies ahead are growing opportunities to engage in dialogue with participating stakeholders to work towards a more structured and uniform approach (Eyler, 2009; Stirling et al., 2014; Wan et al., 2013) involving a more collaborative process in the development of internship programs. Through active engagement and increased dialogue, the practice of internships can continue to create meaningful opportunities for students.

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