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Laurier and Capacity Canada release best practice report on experiential learning in the non-profit sector

WATERLOO – Wilfrid Laurier University and Capacity Canada have released a report aimed at strengthening the quality of experiential learning in the non-profit sector for community partners and students.

The report, *Transforming Social and Non-Profit Experiential Learning*, was developed as part of a 2018-19 multi-initiative experiential learning project funded by the province's Career Ready Fund. Results were announced at a symposium for post-secondary institutions and non-profit organizations held at Laurier's Waterloo campus.

The report recommends best practices based on interviews with faculty members and senior leaders of community organizations, as well as surveys with Laurier students and non-profit partners in Waterloo and Brantford.

Recommendations include providing enhanced support for faculty, staff, students and organizations to improve existing models of experiential learning and address challenges, as well as streamlining communication between parties and promoting ease of access to opportunities using "one-stop shop" platforms.

"Laurier has a long history of supporting student learning in the non-profit sector," said Jan Basso, assistant vice-president: experiential learning and career development. "With the strong emphasis we place on curricular and co-curricular experiential learning and our commitment to the needs of our community partners, providing recommendations for a measurable approach to ensuring quality practices was important."

Experiential learning takes place when students apply knowledge and skills in workplace contexts inside and outside the classroom, for example: co-op work terms; campus and community volunteer opportunities; and community service-learning courses, where students apply classroom learning through engagement with local organizations.

Capacity Canada, which produced the report with Laurier, is a national charitable organization headquartered in Waterloo that brings together people, ideas and resources from across sectors to fuel courageous communities and social innovation.

"Many students are passionate about pursuing a career that will create positive change in their community but don't know which experiences will help them build the appropriate skills," said Cathy Brothers, chief executive officer of Capacity Canada. "Universities need to create purposeful relationships with non-profit organizations that produce beneficial outcomes for the organizations and for the students trying to make a decision about their life after graduation.

Basso said the recommendations in the report will help foster these meaningful relationships.

As part of the larger experiential learning project, Laurier also created a volunteer job portal and a certificate in volunteerism, among other initiatives.

The volunteer job portal promoted more than 300 volunteer postings to students during the past year and a live feed of volunteer listings from the Volunteer Action Centre Waterloo Region is currently being added to the portal.

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More than 40 first-year students living in residence recently completed the non-credit **Experiential Certificate in the Social and Non-Profit Sector**, which includes four workshops and a local experiential learning opportunity.

Through a hands-on community volunteerism component, the certificate provides students with a unique opportunity to understand the needs of community organizations and connect with those organizations in a meaningful way outside of the classroom.

To view the report and learn more, explore the [web resource](#) created to showcase the outcomes of *Transforming Social and Non-Profit Experiential Learning*.

- 30 -