

SUNY Criteria for Approved Applied Learning Activities

Definition: Applied learning refers to an educational approach whereby students learn by engaging in direct application of skills, theories and models. Students apply knowledge and skills gained from traditional classroom learning to hands-on and/or real-world settings, creative projects or independent or directed research, and in turn apply what is gained from the applied experience to academic learning. The applied learning activity can occur outside of the traditional classroom experience and/or be embedded as part of a course.

All manner of experiences including high-impact practices and traditional applied learning education can be considered approved applied learning activities if, and only if, they meet the criteria listed. When applied learning is embedded in a course, these criteria refer to the activity rather than the course as a whole. Regardless of the activity, both the experience and the learning are fundamental.

The Activity is Structured, Intentional and Authentic - All parties must be clear from the outset why this specific experience was chosen as the approach to the learning, and intentional about defining the knowledge that should result from it. The activity needs to be a structured experience with a formal process, which includes a course syllabus or learning contract between parties (students, faculty, and other supervisors as appropriate) and/or defined assessable learning outcomes. Roles and responsibilities must be clearly defined. Faculty and site supervisors (as appropriate) are expected to take the lead in ensuring both the quality of the learning experience and of the work produced. The applied learning activity should have hands-on and/or real world context and should be designed in concert with those who will be affected by or use it, or in response to a real situation.

The Activity Requires Preparation, Orientation and Training - Participants and mentors must ensure that students enter the experience with sufficient background and foundational education, as well as a plan to support a successful outcome. The training and plan should include learning expectations and be referred to (and potentially updated) on an ongoing basis by all parties.

The Activity Must Include Monitoring and Continuous Improvement - Applied learning activities are dynamic. Therefore all facilitators in the activity share responsibility for ensuring that the experience, as it is in process, continues to provide a rich learning environment and is meeting learning outcomes. Activities include a defined and flexible method for feedback related to learning outcomes and quality performance for all parties.

The Activity Requires Structured Reflection and Acknowledgment - There must be a structured opportunity for students to self-assess, analyze, and examine constructs/skills/insights from their experience and to evaluate the outcomes. Reflection should demonstrate the relevance of the experience to student learning, including the student's articulation of how the experience draws on and improves this learning and meets defined objectives. Post-experience learning should include a formal debriefing. All facilitators and students engaged in the experience should be included in the recognition of progress and accomplishment.

The Activity Must be Assessed and Evaluated - Outcomes and processes should be systematically documented with regard to initial intentions and quality outcomes. Students must receive appropriate and timely feedback from all facilitators.

Modified from Eight Principles of Good Practice for All Experiential Learning Activities, National Society of Experiential Education (<http://www.nsee.org/8-principles>).