Why Should I Get Involved With Experiential Learning?

Experiential learning (EL) gives you the opportunity to have practical learning experiences outside of the classroom, by doing internships, research, teaching or service-learning. These activities emphasize the central role of experience in the learning process. In addition to gaining practical job experiences, these activities can also be invaluable for making contacts with people in various professions.

Most EL programs are open to sophomores and up. But that doesn't mean you should ignore EL during your freshman year. You can prepare to choose the right EL activity by:

- Exploring the Office of Experiential Learning for Web site (for Arts & Sciences undergraduates) to see what’s available. Keep in mind your interests, your likely major, your career goals, and your qualifications. Some EL programs have prerequisites, such as a minimum number of credits completed, major, minimum GPA and other requirements. (For example, to apply for an internship for credit, you must have already earned at least 36 credits.)

- Understanding the EL requirements for the majors. Some departments have specific activity requirements, such as completing an internship, for graduation. Check the major requirement page for information.

- Stopping by the Office of Experiential Learning (B-4 Thaw Hall) and the department office of your major to learn more about the types of EL programs that would be best suited for you, your interests, talents and career goals.

- Signing up for a PantherTRACS account. PantherTRACS is a Career Services database of internship and job opportunities. You need to register for an account with Career Services to explore internship opportunities in PantherTRACS. Go to WPU 224 to sign up for PantherTRACS.

Approach getting accepted in an EL program as you would approach getting a job: Research the possibilities, develop a résumé and think about the interview. The Academic Internship Web site has pages of information on writing résumés and cover letters and interviewing. The Internship site links to hundreds of internships in many fields. Internships are a useful way to “test out” a career you’re interested in.

Many universities offer research programs for undergraduates, both during the school year and during the summer. If you would like to try to get into a summer research program after your freshman year, you need to submit applications during the winter. Visit the Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program Web site for more information about these programs. A professor in your chosen field and your academic advisor will be able to help you find the right research experience for you.

If you are interested in service-learning, visit the Academic Service-learning and the Amizade Global Service-learning Web sites.

If you are interested in a teaching assistantship, visit the Undergraduate Teaching Experiences (UTE) Web site for information. In addition, some departments (e.g. Philosophy) do not have formal programs but faculty members may consider taking motivated undergraduates as teaching assistants. So if your department is not listed at the UTE site, discuss your interest with a professor in the department.

So why investigate experiential learning? EL can help you select a major and/or a career by letting you work in a professional setting while you’re in college.

Web Site URLs

Office of Experiential Learning: http://www.pitt.edu/~oel
Internships: http://www.pitt.edu/~intern
Research: http://www.pitt.edu/~urop
Service-learning: http://www.pitt.edu/~oel/servelearn
Teaching: http://www.pitt.edu/~oel/ute
Amizade Global Service-learning: http://www.globalservicelearning.org
Major Requirements: http://www.advising.pitt.edu/majors/msword/start.htm
PantherTRACS: http://pitt.erecruiting.com/er/security/login.jsp