Exploring The Role and Experience of Academic Administrators in the Delivery of Experiential

Education Programs in Undergraduate Professional Faculties

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Education

in

Adult, Community, and Higher Education

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Abstract

While experiential learning is broadly emphasized and implemented in the university setting, there is a scholarship gap regarding the organizational dynamics that impact the academic leaders who are responsible for these programs' implementation and ongoing support, as well as in how academic leaders see their role in the delivery of these programs.

The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of academic administrators responsible for the delivery of experiential education programs in undergraduate professional programs, including the perceived or expressed reasons why these academic administrators support experiential education, how these administrators see their specific role in supporting these opportunities, and the challenges these leaders see in the administration and delivery of these programs. Academic leaders, such as associate deans, occupy a unique position within higher education institutions, one in which they are required to blend administration, leadership, and scholarship while also existing in an 'interstitial space' between faculty and institutional leaders and their experiences are worthy of study.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with four administrators from professional faculties at a large research-intensive university in Alberta, Canada, the University of Alberta. Thematic analysis of the transcripts was then used as the primary form of analysis to capture patterns and meanings within data, and an additional document scan was conducted on publicly available faculty and program information to inform data analysis and conclusions. This study is a step towards better understanding the experiences of academic administrators who support experiential education programs in the face of factors such as funding limitations, operational challenges, student and employer expectations, institutional politics, or government intervention.

Preface

This thesis is an original work by Torrey Dance. The research project of which this thesis is a

part received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics

Office, Project Name "Experiential Learning in University Undergraduate Programs," Ethics ID

Pro00124675, November 7, 2022.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to all those who were patient and kind while I took the long way around.

Acknowledgements

This thesis is only possible because of the four academic administrators interviewed as part of the study; I am grateful for their insights during our conversations, their openness in discussing their experiences, and their generosity of time. These roles can, at times, be thankless and invisible, but it was immediately apparent how much each of them cared about the experience of the students in their programs and the contributions they would eventually make to their professions. Dedicated administrators, like those interviewed, are an often-overlooked reason that our academic institutions continue to function as they do, and I am glad to be able to spotlight their efforts.

I also want to express my deep gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Jorge Sousa. When we initially met to discuss what was intended to be a small research-based capstone, I entered the conversation thinking that I had 'closed the door' to the research world. Jorge encouraged me to crack the door open again. While I still suspect he had an inkling that the project might grow beyond the boundaries of a capstone, I am incredibly grateful for his steadfast support. Jorge knew exactly when to be gentle and encouraging, when to push me out of my comfort zone, and when I needed to receive a stern email to get moving again, but he never failed to be kind and compassionate. I am also profoundly grateful to the members of my examination committee who took the time to be involved: Dr. Randolph Wimmer, Dr. William Dunn, and Dr. Sara Carpenter, who chaired the committee.

It is no small feat to complete a thesis while working full-time, and I can confidently say that it would not have happened without the time and mental space afforded to me by my managers, Dr. Ania Ulrich and Andrea Anthony. Their understanding and encouragement meant that I could dedicate the necessary focus and attention to complete this thesis; without them, you

would not be reading these words. I consider it to be a great privilege to work within the Faculty of Engineering at the University of Alberta, where I am surrounded by a fantastic network of mentors, colleagues, and friends.

During my studies, I have been impacted in ways big and small by far too many people to list here, but I am grateful to each and every one of them. This includes colleagues and academic mentors who offered advice throughout my time in the program, friends who kept me accountable through online check-ins and evening work sessions, and supportive family members and close friends who were kind enough to ask, "if we were talking about our thesis right now." While it can be quite lonely to complete a project like this, and I have missed a lot due to evenings and weekends at libraries and coffee shops, I have never actually felt alone while doing so.

I began taking master's-level courses through Open Studies during the fall of 2016. Much has changed during this time; I have switched jobs *several* times, gotten married, experienced everything that comes with living through a worldwide pandemic, and grown personally and professionally. My wife Maureen has been a constant, and her unwavering love and support have meant that I have been able to keep going this entire time. My greatest thanks go to her.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Formal experiential education programs, such as internships, field placements and co-operative education (also referred to as work-integrated learning), are on the rise in higher education across Canada and the United States, especially in the curricula of undergraduate professional programs (Rodriguez et al., 2016; Kolb, 2015). As a pedagogical approach, an experience-based practicum emphasizes hands-on experience and is well-established in many professional disciplines, such as the medical sciences or teacher preparation, while others are relatively new to incorporating it into formal instructional contexts.

The increasing popularity of experiential education within post-secondary is in response to a number of questions facing scholars and educators, including the ever-increasing demand for skilled individuals capable of navigating the complexities of a global economy as well as the imperative for higher education to align closely with the needs of businesses and communities in order to survive. In addition, ongoing scholarship related to learning and cognitive development, as well as evolving workplaces that emphasize and prioritize effective interpersonal communication, have also contributed to the rise of experiential education in post-secondary (Cantor, 1995). Less optimistically, this rise can also be attributed, in part, to a trend towards public and government scrutiny of post-graduation outcomes and increased vocationalism in higher education, spurred on by "students who feel cheated because the career expectations created in college have not been met, and employers who feel that the graduates they recruit into their organizations are woefully unprepared" (Kolb, 2015, p. 6).

Academic administrators play a critical role in leading and managing the operations of these programs, all while guiding their integration with academic programming. Yet, it is unclear what is required from these leaders to support these programs effectively in order to ensure that

desired learning outcomes are being met through structured experiences. The purpose of this study is to examine the factors that motivate an academic administrator to support experiential education programs for students in undergraduate programs, e.g., an institutional shift towards vocationalism, policy, student demand, etc. This study also addresses how these administrators understand their role in supporting these opportunities and the challenges these leaders see in the administration and delivery of these programs.

Experiential education also serves to highlight the wider ongoing debate regarding the purpose of higher education and the tensions between the altruistic 'liberal education' foundations of the modern university and the increasingly influential human capital approach, which positions learners as consumers. Writing of a contemporary crisis faced by professions such as engineering, Schön (1987) argues:

> if professions are blamed for ineffectiveness and impropriety, their schools are blamed for failing to teach the rudiments of effective and ethical practice... [For example,] schools of engineering lose credibility because they are seen as producing narrowly trained technicians deficient in capacity for design and wisdom to deal with dilemmas of technological development... What aspiring practitioners need most to learn, professional schools seem least able to teach. (p. 8)

While opportunities for experiential learning offer a meaningful avenue to address concerns about the relevance and future of higher education by responding to the needs of different stakeholder groups and prepare students to enter their chosen profession, programs must also be implemented and supported in a manner that achieves the intended learning goals that come from a more liberal arts education. However, a number of factors complicate the implementation and support of these programs, including the complexity of their operations, stakeholder challenges

such as the often unrealistic expectations of students and employers, and the financial requirements of delivering such a program.

While experiential education is broadly emphasized and implemented in the university setting, there is a scholarship gap regarding the organizational dynamics that impact these programs' implementation and ongoing support. Academic administrators were chosen as a focus of this study as there is also a relative gap in the literature on the experiences of academic leaders within post-secondary, especially associate deans responsible for the delivery of these programs. Academic leaders occupy a unique position within the institution, one in which they are required to blend administration, management, and leadership, and lead programs and administrative teams through challenges, and their experiences are worthy of study. This study is a step towards understanding how and why academic administrators support the success of experiential education programs in the face of factors such as funding limitations, student expectations, employer expectations, institutional politics, or government intervention.

While there are a variety of opportunities for experiential learning in the post-secondary landscape, the focus of this study is on *sponsored* experiential education programs that occur "in the context of an institution of higher education where the learner is officially registered and the activity is an accepted part of the student's program of studies" (Keeton & Tate, 1978, p. 4). Nonsponsored experiential learning opportunities, such as participation in extracurricular activities or on-campus groups or clubs, also provide students with opportunities for meaningful learning and the development of employment-related skills, however, they are not included under the aegis of this study as they are not representative of institutional or government mandates or directives.

For the purposes of this study, *higher education* and *post-secondary education* will be used interchangeably to refer to programs at degree-granting institutions intended to be completed after elementary and secondary education, e.g., Kindergarten to Grade 12. Also referred to as tertiary education in some countries, examples of higher education institutions include colleges, universities, and some specialized institutions such as art schools or seminaries. These institutions are recognized by other degree-granting colleges and universities through mechanisms including credit transfer, student exchange, and accreditation (Brint, 2000). This study does not include noncollegiate experiential learning opportunities, i.e., occurring outside of higher education and within an organization whose primary work is *not* education, such as military services or commercial enterprises. Lastly, this study focuses on undergraduate professional programs, that is, programs that prepare students for a specific profession, such as nursing, education, or engineering, rather than graduate-level programs or general liberal arts or science degrees.

This chapter attempts to position the institution at which the study takes place within the greater post-secondary context, including the ongoing worldwide debate surrounding the ultimate purpose of higher education and whose interests it should ultimately serve. The chapter also provides relevant context for this study by providing a brief overview of the purpose of the University, a history of post-secondary education in Alberta, and an overview and recent history of the institution where the study took place, the University of Alberta.

The Purpose of the University

The years following World War II saw a dramatic increase in the influence and number of universities around the world (Eaton & Stevens, 2019). Ben-David and Zloczower (1962) attribute this rise to the university's role in military research, economic development, the training

of social and government leaders, and "the aggrandizement of national identity" (p. 3), emphasizing the institution's importance in serving government and state interests. The Robbins Report (1963), commissioned by the British government to review and advise upon the state of higher education in the country, outlined four key objectives for higher education: 1) teaching skills necessary for participation in various roles within the workforce; 2) enhancing overall cognitive abilities to foster well-rounded individuals rather than specialists in a particular field; 3) pursuing knowledge and truth; and 4) passing down a shared culture and fostering a common understanding of citizenship. The second and third objectives are key to a 'liberal education,' which is agnostic to the demands of society or government, focuses on nurturing intellectual growth and enabling students to understand their culture, and has an intrinsic value in and of itself rather than simply being a means to an end (Hirst, 1965 as cited in Lomas, 1997).

The altruistic notion of a liberal education was paramount in Western higher education throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, however, over the last several decades, it has since come into conflict with the economic realities of higher education and the need for governments to see the value in their investments (Lomas, 1997). This rising tension between the autonomy of institutions and their accountability to government has given rise to questions about the fundamental purpose of the university, including those who believe it to have a primarily economic purpose, i.e. an investment that develops human capital. The human capital approach, based on an extrinsic and instrumental model of higher education that views it as a means to an end, has played a significant part in reducing the influence of liberal education in curriculum and prompting a shift to higher education institutions being responsive to the demands of its 'consumers' (Lomas, 1997).

Writing about the root cause of the problems with modern education, Labaree (1997) argues that the source is a political conflict over the very purpose of education. Rather than being a pedagogical issue of poor teaching quality or curricula, an organizational issue of inefficient administrative structures, or a social issue arising from poverty, discrimination, or privilege, Labaree proposes that the problem arises from the conflict between three competing perspectives over the purpose of schooling: whether it is for the preparation of citizens, for the training of workers, or for competition over social positions. These three perspectives serve to influence practice and policy within education, undermining each other without entirely eliminating one another and representing a core conflict of political position, i.e., between citizens, taxpayers, and educational consumers.

Labaree (1997) designates the approach that most represents the perspective of the citizen as democratic equality, viewing education as a purely public good and emphasizing the preparation of young people for participation in an egalitarian, democratic society as the primary function of schooling. The social efficiency perspective also views education as a public good, albeit in service of the market sector, assuming that everyone benefits from a healthy economy*;* this perspective represents the interests of the taxpayer and employer, and the role of schooling is the preparation of workers for productivity and economic contribution, i.e., human capital. Lastly, the social mobility approach views education as a commodity, a private good distributed unequally and intended to provide its consumers with an advantage in competition over desirable social positions. Not only do these three perspectives differ in the extent to which they portray education as a private good or a public good, but they also differ fundamentally in their beliefs regarding the role they are preparing students for: the democratic equality perspective views education as preparing students for an explicitly political role in a democratic society and is far

more in line with the notion of a 'liberal education,' while both the social efficiency and social mobility perspectives view education as preparing students for market roles.

    While Labaree's focus was on the overall education system, including primary and secondary schooling as well as higher education, Stevens et al. (2008) offer a complementary typology intended to describe the various sociological perspectives on the primary functions of higher education. Using 'provocative metaphors,' Stevens et al. describe higher education as an *incubator* for socialization and the development of relationships between "competent social actors" (p. 128) (i.e., social reproduction), as a *sieve* that regulates access to social position and privilege (i.e. social stratification), as a *temple* for the legitimation of academic information and knowledge, and as a *hub* that connects various social processes including the labour market, the economy, and the professions. Similar to Labaree, these perspectives also differ in the extent to which they portray higher education as a private good or a public good, with the social reproduction and social stratification functions primarily benefiting the individual through access to social position, social mobility, status, and cultural and social capital, and the legitimation of knowledge benefiting society more broadly by producing and certifying "the best and brightest citizens and the most complex and rarefied knowledge" (Stevens et al., 2008, p. 134).

    Disagreement regarding the most pressing issues with higher education and the subsequent attempts to address them, as well as the conflict over purpose and whose interests should be prioritized, inform the tensions surrounding the modern university. As demonstrated in later sections, these tensions also inform the implementation of experiential education opportunities, which is often seen as directly addressing any number of problems with higher education. Rationales for its implementation can also be illustrative of the influence of these political perspectives and whose interests are ultimately being prioritized. If implemented as an

attempt to better integrate theory and practice or address gaps in the curriculum, the integration of experiential learning opportunities may be grounded in the belief that any problems are pedagogical, whereas a desire to give students an 'edge' in the competition against other students in the workforce may reflect an underlying belief in the social mobility or social stratification functions of education. If the implementation of experiential learning opportunities is driven by a desire to better prepare students for the workforce or respond to the expressed needs of employers, it may reflect human capital approaches or the social efficiency view, and it may demonstrate the influence or importance of the taxpayer or employer as a primary stakeholder.

With the steadily increasing costs of post-secondary education, as well as the majority of Canadian post-secondary institutions being largely publicly funded, perspectives that emphasize the importance of the taxpayer and employer, as well as the student as a consumer, dominate the current debate over post-secondary in the country. Vocationalism, a movement to shift curriculum away from traditional academic subjects (such as those typically found in a liberal education) and towards content that explicitly prepares students for the workforce, has been particularly influential in this debate (Labaree, 1997; Billett, 2009). Billett (2009) observes that this shift towards the development of job-specific skills and knowledge has also been accompanied by an expectation from employers and government that graduates will be able to seamlessly transition into the workplace upon graduation, noting that this purpose has long been exercised "by the North American co-op movement, through its provision of extensive periods of workplace placements (e.g. internships), and also through practicums in such courses as medicine, nursing and physiotherapy" (p. 827). In this way, sponsored collegiate experiential education serves as a potential 'ground zero' to examine the influence of vocationalism and

human capital approaches in higher education and the growth of experiential education, with academic administrators caught between 'the academy' and 'administration.'

Post-Secondary Education in Alberta

Under the Canadian constitution, each province has regulatory and legislative authority for education, resulting in significant variations in policy and structure for higher education across the country (Jones, 2007). When Alberta first became a province in 1905, one of the first acts passed by the Alberta legislature was the creation of the University of Alberta, with the act to establish the single provincial university passing in 1906 and the institution officially opening its doors in the city of Edmonton in 1908. Since Edmonton was the provincial capital and had been chosen as the seat of the Albertan government, influential residents of the city of Calgary, which rivalled Edmonton in size, argued that it should instead be the seat of the provincial university (Harris, 1976). With the failure of this argument, the provincial legislature authorized the incorporation of a non-degree-granting Calgary College in 1912, however, the institution closed its doors in 1915 after several failed attempts to be given degree-granting powers by the province.

By the 1960s, the University of Alberta would have affiliated junior colleges in the cities of Camrose, Lethbridge, and Calgary (Mount Royal College), as well as branch campuses in Calgary and Lethbridge; these two branch campuses would eventually break off to become the University of Calgary in 1966 and the University of Lethbridge in 1967 (Harris, 1976; University of Lethbridge, n.d.). The 1960s and 70s would also see increasing enrolment in higher education in the province and the expansion of colleges and technical institutes, including Red Deer College, Mount Royal College, the Northern and Southern Alberta Institutes of Technology

(NAIT and SAIT, respectively), and Athabasca University, the province's fourth University and first distance education institution.

Prior to the 1960s, funding for post-secondary education in Alberta came predominantly from the federal government. This changed in 1966 when the province began to provide operating grants based on a formula that considered the number of full-time enrollments (FTEs) and weighting by program, and it changed again in 1973 when the government established a base grant system based on projected operating costs over three years, allowing for greater provincial control over post-secondary funds (Hauserman & Stick, 2005). The provincial granting model would be adjusted numerous times over the decades, including, notably, in the 1990s when the province introduced funding caps, sharply reduced overall support for post-secondary programs, introduced performance-driven funding, and created a policy that allowed institutions to raise tuition levels to a maximum of 30% of operating costs, placing significantly more of a financial burden on students for financing their education (Hauserman & Stick, 2005).

Today, public post-secondary institutions in Alberta still receive funding from the provincial government through capital and operating grants, determined every year as part of their budget process (Government of Alberta, n.d.-a). Operating funds, delivered through the Campus Alberta Grant, are used to offset the costs for the institution in delivering their programs and can support costs such as equipment or administration, and faculty and instructor salaries. In comparison, capital project grants can be used to help institutions maintain, build or renovate instructional, research, or administration buildings, as well as support projects for increasing student access or research capacity (Government of Alberta, n.d.-a). As these institutions are publicly funded, they are accountable to Albertan taxpayers, and their boards of governors are responsible for ensuring public funds are used appropriately; in turn, the provincial government

is responsible for providing funding to both institutions and learners (via student aid), quality assurance and monitoring, and for setting the strategic direction for the entire post-secondary education system in Alberta (Government of Alberta, n.d.-b). According to the Government of Alberta (n.d.-c), the province's vision is for every Albertan to "fulfill their full potential and contribute to their communities by obtaining a high-quality post-secondary education regardless of financial circumstances" (para. 1).

Perhaps contrary to the aforementioned liberal and utopic vision, the Government of Alberta's recent 10-year strategy for post-secondary education in the province, 'Alberta 2030: Building Skills for Jobs", is far more centred on market and economic interests, envisioning that:

> Alberta's world-class post-secondary system will equip Albertans with the skills, knowledge and competencies they need to succeed in their lifelong pursuits. The system will be highly responsive to labour market needs and, through innovative programming and excellence in research, contribute to the betterment of an innovative and prosperous Alberta. (Government of Alberta, 2021, p. 6)

The strategy outlines five key trends in post-secondary as the impetus for change: (1) the changing profile of post-secondary learners and the increasing financial burden on students and their families, (2) the impact of COVID-19 on opening online and remote delivery options, (3) the changing nature of work and demands for greater technological, emotional, social and critical thinking, (4) public research spending being outpaced by GDP growth in a number of jurisdictions, and (5) declining public funding of post-secondary education. The Alberta 2030 strategy outlines six goals to "ensure that more of Alberta's youth and workforce set bold aspirations and are well-positioned to succeed in rewarding careers today and tomorrow" (p. 5),

including improving access and student experience, developing skills for jobs, improving sustainability and affordability, and strengthening system governance.

Goal two of the strategy, developing skills for jobs, is intended to ensure that institutions "teach learners the future-proof skills and competencies they need for successful careers" (Government of Alberta, 2021, p. 22) and provide opportunities for hands-on and work-integrated learning; critical objectives for this goal rest heavily on experiential education as a means of addressing the skills needs of industry and employers, and include "become the first province in Canada to offer every undergraduate student access to a work-integrated learning opportunity" (p. 23), "reduce the skills gap by fostering the strongest employer, industry and post-secondary partnership environment in Canada" (p. 23), and "develop strategies and approaches to measure employment-related skills in students" (p. 2). Flagship initiatives for this goal include providing "high-quality labour market data to support students, employers and institutions in making informed decisions regarding programs and pathways" (p. 23) and, most relevant to the discussion that follows, "become the first province in Canada to offer access to work-integrated learning to 100 percent of students" (p. 23).

The Institution of Study: The University of Alberta

This study was conducted at the University of Alberta, a large, publicly funded academic and research university in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. The institution, established in 1908, offers 200+ undergraduate programs and 500+ graduate programs across 18 faculties to more than 40,000 students and is recognized as one of Canada's top four universities and one of the top 100 in the world (University of Alberta [UAlberta], n.d.-a). The University of Alberta currently has five campuses, one of which is located approximately 100 km away from the main campus in the city of Camrose. Previous to 2004, this campus existed as a separate institution,

Augustana University College (formerly the Camrose Lutheran College), however, the institution became a University of Alberta campus, delivering primarily a liberal arts and sciences curriculum (UAlberta, n.d.-b). The institution was also home to a Faculty of Extension, now Continuing Education, established in 1912 to provide continuing education opportunities to diverse communities across Alberta (UAlberta, n.d.-c).

The University of Alberta has a bi-cameral governance structure comprising a Board of Governors and a General Faculties Council. The Board of Governors is composed of representatives from within the institution as well as the general public (appointed by the provincial cabinet) and has senior oversight of the institution, including the management and operations of the University (UAlberta, n.d.-d, n.d.-e). In comparison, the General Faculties Council is responsible for the academic governance of the institution, including academic programs and policies, and is composed of senior academic and administrative leaders from the institution, as well as appointed and elected academic staff, administrative staff, and students (UAlberta, n.d.-f). Each faculty also has its own Faculty Council for faculty-level governance, including determining programs of study and granting degrees, consisting of faculty leadership, all academic staff, student representatives, and representatives from other faculties across campus; in the case of professional faculties, their Faculty Council membership also includes representatives from the relevant professional body and may include representatives other organizations related to their profession (UAlberta, 2023-a). This structure, including the governance responsibilities of the above bodies, is laid out in the Alberta Post-Secondary Learning Act, which governs the Alberta post-secondary system (Post-Secondary Learning Act, 2023).

A variety of experiential education opportunities are offered across the 18 faculties at the University of Alberta, primarily in undergraduate programs but not exclusively. These opportunities include but are not limited to, field placements in Education (UAlberta, n.d.-g), clinical placements in Nursing (UAlberta Faculty of Nursing, n.d.), co-operative education programs in Business and Engineering, and internships in Arts, Science, and Agricultural, Life and Environmental Sciences (UAlberta, n.d.-h). While the majority of programs are administered within the associated faculty and available only to students in those faculties, a number of programs are administered centrally or are widely available to all students, including undergraduate research and community service learning (UAlberta, n.d.-h).

University of Alberta: Recent History and Institutional Restructuring

In June 2020, amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the University of Alberta launched a massive institutional restructuring called the University of Alberta for Tomorrow initiative (UAT). This initiative was in response to an anticipated 33% cut to provincial government grants over three years (UAlberta, n.d.-i) and included both an academic restructuring as well as an administratively focused Service Excellence Transformation (SET), necessitated by a loss of more than 1000 full-time administrative positions across the institution. The academic and administrative changes were sweeping under the new operating model and included the establishment of three colleges under which like-faculties were organized: the College of Health Sciences, the College of Natural and Applied Sciences, and the College of Social Sciences and Humanities. According to the institution, the colleges are intended to:

> leverage excellence within all departments and faculties to improve both academic and
> administrative performance... They remove barriers to collaboration and reduce
> duplication across teaching and research, leveraging and aligning individual faculty and

department strengths to students' and society's benefit. They lead and coordinate

multidisciplinary programs of research and education focused on global challenges, and

foster innovation and entrepreneurship. (UAlberta, 2022, p. 5)

While the administratively focused SET had numerous objectives, the most relevant include the

institution-wide redesign of structure, roles, and responsibilities of administrative staff, the

simplification and streamlining of service delivery processes, and the improvement of quality of

service. Under SET, recruitment and other student services have been centralized into service

centers and various 'Centers of Expertise' (UAlberta, 2022). An 18-month review of the college

model, reporting on interviews with leaders at all levels of the institution, was released in

February 2023 and highlighted some of the early successes of the model, including a more even

distribution of power amongst academic leaders, some process efficiencies, and the coordination

of strategic priorities, as well as identified issues including a continued lack of perceived value of

the college structure and confusion surrounding newly created roles (Marshall, 2023).

In February 2022, the Government of Alberta announced a Targeted Enrollment

Expansion program for Albertan post-secondary institutions to create new seats in high-demand

programs such as healthcare, business, and technology (Government of Alberta, 2023). Funds

were granted in two rounds, one in 2022 and another in 2023, and the University of Alberta

received almost $60 million to support the creation of roughly 3000 new seats in programs

including business, science, engineering, and nursing (Government of Alberta, n.d.-d).

Responding to projected demographic growth in Alberta and student demand, enrolment growth

has been a consistent theme for the institution in recent years, with the University of Alberta's

President initially citing a goal of 50,000 students by 2025 even before he started in his role in

2020 (French, 2020, May 26). While COVID-19 and cuts to the provincial budget hampered

these plans, and the timeline would be pushed back multiple times (UAlberta, n.d.-j; Brown, 2022, May 17), in late 2023, as part of its 10-year strategic plan, the University of Alberta officially announced that it would be working to grow its enrollment by more than 35% in the next decade to 60,000 students by 2030 (UAlberta, 2023-b).

Chapter Summary and Thesis Overview

There are a number of internal and external factors influencing the delivery of experiential education opportunities in the post-secondary landscape and in the province of Alberta. The purpose of this study is to examine the perceived or expressed reasons why academic administrators support experiential education programs for students in undergraduate professional programs, how these administrators see their role in supporting these opportunities, how they support these opportunities and overcome challenges within their leadership role, and the challenges these leaders see in the administration and delivery of these programs.

Following this introduction is Chapter 2, a literature review that defines and describes a number of key concepts, including the process of experiential learning, experiential education, and work-integrated learning. The chapter also traces the emergence of experiential learning approaches in higher education, as well as their relevance and applicability for the preparation of future professionals. This chapter also describes the practical implementation of work-integrated learning in post-secondary, including program stakeholders, documented delivery challenges, as well as the role of the associate dean in academic administration. The second chapter concludes with a conceptual framework for the research that is to follow.

Chapter 3 is the Research Design, which begins by positioning me as a professional administrator at the institution of study, and contains an overview of the research design, including the participants, methods, data analysis, and ethics and risk considerations.

Chapter 4, Results and Findings, outlines the key themes identified following an analysis of the semi-structured interviews conducted with academic administrators; the chapter begins with a brief description of the programs for which the administrators are responsible and proceeds to address the key research questions: the perceived or expressed reasons why academic administrators support experiential education programs for students in undergraduate professional programs, how these administrators see their role in supporting these opportunities, and the challenges these leaders see in the administration and delivery of these programs. This chapter concludes with an overview of additional findings not related to the initial research questions.

Chapter 5, Discussion, returns to the conceptual framework of the study outlined in Chapter 2, updating and addressing potential changes that further illustrate the experiences of the academic administrators. The chapter also explores the implications of the study, specifically as they relate to how institutions prepare academic administrators for these roles, as well as the limitations of the study and further areas of exploration.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this study is to examine the perceived or expressed reasons why academic administrators support experiential education programs for students in undergraduate professional programs, how these administrators see their role in supporting these opportunities, and the challenges these leaders see in the administration and delivery of these programs. Therefore, this chapter is intended to position this study within the broader literature related to experiential learning theory, experiential education, the education of future professionals, and the relatively recent history of experiential and work-integrated learning in higher education. In this literature review, I will also include a brief overview of the academic administration and commonly identified issues and challenges in the delivery of different types of experiential education programs. This chapter concludes with an explanation of the conceptual framework that underlies this study.

Experiential Learning and Experiential Education

The work of prominent 20th-century educational philosophers and psychologists Kurt Lewin, Jean Piaget, and John Dewey centred experience within human learning and development processes, laying the foundation for the formal models and theoretical frameworks that would follow (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). Dewey's work would prove to be particularly influential for the study of experiential learning that would follow, with him distinguishing 'traditional' education from 'progressive' education and arguing that a sound 'theory of experience' was required to guide its development.

In contrast to traditional education that emphasizes information assimilation and "imposition from above" (Dewey, 1938, p. 12), John Dewey (1938) advocated for education that built upon lived experiences, integrating them intentionally into education. Dewey also viewed

learning as a lifelong process in which past experiences are applied and adapted to suit new situations (Merriam & Bierema, 2013); the skills and knowledge that an individual gains from one situation becomes a way to understand and behave within future situations. Dewey (1938) refers to this as the principle of continuity in which learning in the present is connected both to past and future experience; "every experience takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those which come after" (p. 35).

In an attempt to adapt to experiences within the external environment, individuals develop routine ways of doing things without conscious reflection, also known as 'habits.' When established habits do not function, a crisis emerges and reflective thought and investigation are required to understand the conditions of the situation. After defining the problem and developing a working hypothesis about the solution, the learner evaluates their hypothesis through a series of thought experiments and acts upon it in order to draw conclusions about its validity. These hypotheses are not always confirmed through this testing process, but new or unexpected outcomes can then be compared to the beliefs implied in the initial hypothesis, making learning possible, resolving the initial problem and producing meaning for the learner (Miettinen, 2000).

Formal models of experiential learning began to emerge beginning in the 1960s and 70s, such as David Kolb's influential Experiential Learning Theory (ELT), which built on the work of these early theorists and "explained psychological processes [and] prescribed a formula for practice" (Seaman et al., 2017, p. NP7) that could be applied to a variety of contexts, including education and organizational behaviour. Since the emergence of these formal models, there have been countless academic attempts to define 'experiential learning' and build usable conceptual frameworks of 'learning by doing' (Kolb, 2015), however, the lack of a universally agreed-upon

definition muddies the academic water as it can be unclear whether the term 'experiential learning' is referring to a learning process, an educational philosophy, or an activity or program.

When incorporated into instruction, experiential learning is often defined in a similar fashion to Dewey, as an opposition to 'traditional' classroom learning, focusing instead on direct life experience and active engagement (Beard & Wilson, 2013). The experiential learning process reverses the 'information assimilation' process found in the traditional post-secondary classroom, wherein the learner begins by receiving information through a symbolic medium (a lecture or book) and proceeds to the assimilation and organization of the information so the general principle can be understood and potentially applied through action. Rather, through experiential learning, the learner carries out an action, sees and understands the effects of the action as well as the general principles in play, and then applies this knowledge through continued or further action (Coleman, 1976). Keeton and Tate (1978) offer an early definition of experiential learning:

> Learning in which the learner is directly in touch with the realities being studied. It is contrasted with the learner who only reads about, hears about, talks about, or writes about these realities but never comes into contact with them as part of the learning process... It involves direct encounter with the phenomenon being studied rather than merely thinking about the encounter. (p. 2)

Missing from this definition is the role of individual cognition, analysis, and reflection, which later work in the field emphasized; experiential learning is not 'simply learning by doing,' and it is more than a simple educational technique to be applied in the classroom. Attempting to synthesize definitions from a variety of theorists and address their individual shortcomings, Beard (2010) offers the following:

a sense-making process involving significant experiences that, to varying degrees, act as the source of learning. These experiences actively immerse and reflectively engage the inner world of the learner, as a whole person (including physical-bodily, intellectually, emotionally and spiritually) with their intricate 'outer world' of the learning environment (including belonging and doing – in places, spaces, within social, cultural, political context etc) to create memorable, rich and effective experiences for and of learning. (p. 17)

Stated simply, experiential learning is "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (Kolb, 2015, p. 49). This definition, put forward by Kolb, emphasizes that experiential learning is understood as a process rather than simply an outcome. That is, knowledge is a process of transformation rather than acquisition alone and the learner plays an active role in processing and acquiring relevant knowledge. While this ultimately does not solve the problem of definition, and there is still inconsistency in the popular usage of the term, it does serve as a relatively straightforward explanation of the learning process that occurs and distinguishes it from pedagogical approaches and education programming.

Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) has been widely acknowledged as "a useful framework for learning-centred educational innovation, including instructional design, curriculum development, and life-long learning" (p. xxv), and serves as the foundation for much of the contemporary academic research on experiential learning. Kolb's definition of experiential learning will be used for this study when referring to the individual *process* of learning through experience. A brief overview of ELT follows as it will serve as the theoretical foundation for the experiential learning that occurs through involvement in experiential education programs, which is the focus of this thesis.

Experiential Learning Theory (ELT)

Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) offers a view of the learning process that differs from rationalist views that primarily emphasize the acquisition, manipulation and recall of abstract symbols and behavioural approaches that deny the role of subjective experience and consciousness in the learning process (Kolb, 2015). Instead, ELT emphasizes the primary role of experience in learning and provides a holistic perspective that combines behaviour, perception, cognition, and experience. According to ELT, ideas are not *fixed* but are continuously modified -- formed and re-formed -- by experience, and learning is not an outcome but a continuous process of knowledge creation (Kolb, 2015).

Figure 1

Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle
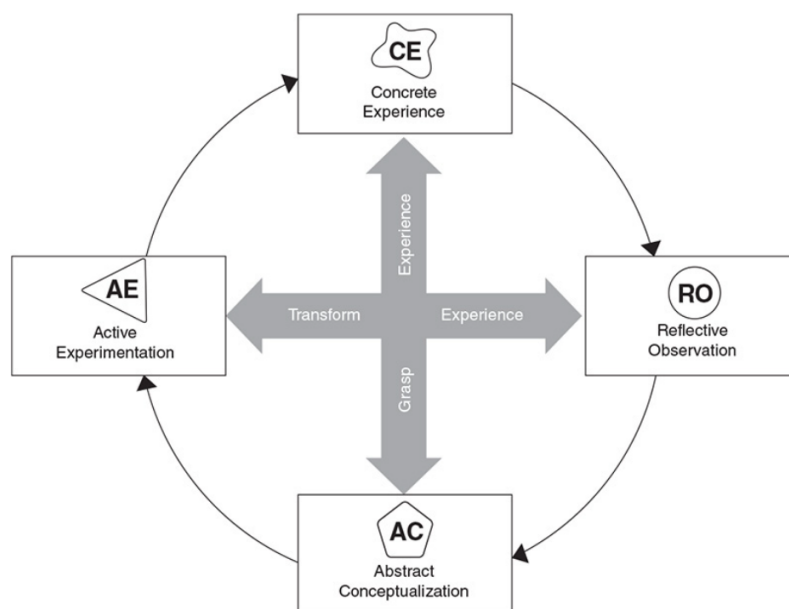
Note: The image is a visual representation of David Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle. From Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development (2nd ed.) by D.A. Kolb (p. 51), 2015, Pearson Education Inc. Copyright 2015 by Pearson Education Inc.

ELT outlines an idealized cycle of learning in which knowledge results from taking in and subsequently transforming experience into interpretation and action; this cycle includes two related modes of 'grasping' experience -- concrete experience (i.e. experiencing) and reflective observation (i.e. reflecting) -- and two modes of 'transformation'-- abstract conceptualization (i.e. thinking) and active experimentation (i.e. acting). Within the learning cycle,

> immediate or concrete experiences are the basis for observations and reflections. These reflections are assimilated and distilled into abstract concepts from which new implications for action can be drawn. These implications can be actively tested and serve as guides in creating new experiences. (Kolb, 2015, p. 51)

In order to be effective, the learner must shift from being involved in the experience (concrete experience) to reflection upon the experience (reflective observation), to forming ideas related to the experience (abstract conceptualization), and finally, to making decisions based on these ideas (active experimentation) (Magro, 2001).

Limitations of Kolb's Experiential Learning Model. Despite Kolb's significant influence on the field of experiential learning, common critiques of Kolb's learning cycle include the fact that it "describes an individual model of learning that ignores the historical, cultural, and social context of learning" (Kolb, 2015, p. 52) and separates the learner from the environment, that it presents "an oversimplified view of learning describing a mechanical step-by-step process that distorts both learning and experience" (p. 55) and that it underemphasizes the importance of reflection in the learning process. Kolb responds to the critiques, claiming that he aimed to create a pragmatic and usable "model for explaining how individuals learn and to empower learners to trust their own experience and gain mastery over their own learning... not a discourse on social and political factors that influence what people learn" (p. 53). He also argues that "reflection in

experiential learning theory is not the sole determinant of learning and development, but is one facet of a holistic process of learning from experience that includes experiencing, reflecting, thinking, and acting" (p. 57). Despite its potential limitations, Kolb's ELT remains the most influential theory of experiential learning in the field and a valuable model for understanding how we learn from experience.

Experiential Education

Experiential *learning* and experiential *education* have often been used interchangeably (Itin, 1999), leading to conceptual confusion regarding what is actually being discussed. The Association for Experiential Education broadly defines experiential *education* as "challenge and experience, followed by reflection, leading to learning and growth" (n.d., para. 1), however, this basic definition could also easily be applied to experiential *learning*.

Compared to experiential *learning,* which is an individual experience that does not necessarily require a teacher and can occur in a variety of settings, experiential *education* is a pedagogical approach that involves a "transactive process between an educator and student" (Itin, 1999, pp. 91-92). Rather than an individual experience, a method, or a process, experiential education describes a *philosophy* of education as well as a pedagogical approach, whereby deliberate experiences, complemented by reflection, critical analysis, and synthesis, are orchestrated to provide learners with the opportunity to proactively engage with the experience, make choices, and take responsibility for outcomes. This approach encourages learners to ask questions, explore, experiment, tackle problems, be creative, integrate existing knowledge and potentially engage with the experience intellectually, emotionally, socially, politically, and physically; they will be immersed in an unpredictable setting where they may encounter success, setbacks, and opportunities to take risks. The Association for Experiential Education (n.d.) also

affirms experiential *education* as an approach "that informs many methodologies in which educators purposefully engage with learners in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develop skills, clarify values, and develop people's capacity to contribute to their communities" (para. 2).

Experiential education approaches are used in various disciplines and settings, including project-based learning, place-based education, service learning, and work-integrated learning (WIL), including co-operative education and professional practica (Association for Experiential Education, n.d.). This conception of experiential *education*, as a philosophy of instruction and pedagogical approach, will be used for this study to describe educational programs and experiences that facilitate the experiential learning process by deliberately pairing structured experiences with reflection, critical analysis, and synthesis. The term 'experiential education program' will be used to describe formal programs as well as educationally integrated programming grounded in the philosophy of experiential education. While administrators of these experiences may consider them to be a component of a larger academic program rather than a standalone entity (e.g., a field experience or practicum), this usage of the term reflects Newcomer et al.'s (2010) definition of a program as "a set of resources and activities directed toward one or more common goals, typically under the direction of a single manager or management team" (p. 5). In this case, it reflects the fact that dedicated resources are needed to deliver these experiential education opportunities, that specialized activity (distinct from standard lecture-based instruction) is required to offer them, that the common goal is the facilitation of the experiential learning process for students, and that these activities are under the direction of an academic administrator and/or administrative team.

In contrast, the term 'experiential learning opportunities' will be used to broadly describe structured and unstructured experiences in which the experiential learning process *may* occur within the individual (and may even be the intended outcome of an experience), but is not necessarily facilitated by an educator, within a program, or in an educational setting. As such, experiential education programs could be considered 'experiential learning opportunities,' but not all experiential learning opportunities could be considered experiential education.

Experiential Education in Practice

An implication of ELT is that, in order to be effective, educational programs should teach 'around' the learning cycle and reinforce each of the stages of the process (Kolb, 2015); programs must therefore provide students with an opportunity to shift "from getting involved (concrete experience), to listening (reflective observation), to creating an idea (abstract conceptualization), to making decisions (active experimentation)" in order to be effective and promote deep learning (Magro, 2001, p. 92; Kolb, 2015). Joplin (1981) presents a five-stage model for experiential education developed in order to aid educators in offering these programs and teaching 'around' the experiential learning cycle:

1. Focus: "presenting the task and isolating the attention of the learner for concentration. It defines the subject of study and prepares the student for encountering the challenging action that is to follow" (p. 18).

2. Action: "This stage places the learner in a stressful or jeopardy-like situation where he is unable to avoid the problem presented, often in an unfamiliar environment requiring new skills or the use of new knowledge" (p. 18).

3. Support: "Support provides security and caring in a manner that stimulates the learner to challenge himself and to experiment. Support demonstrates that the learner is not working alone but has human responsiveness that accepts personal risk taking" (p. 19).

4. Feedback: "Feedback provides information to the student about what he has been doing. It can include comments about how the student works, his manner of interactions, or the substance of his work. Feedback works best with an equalization of power between learner and facilitator" (p. 19).

5. Debrief: "Learning is recognized, articulated and evaluated... Debrief helps the student learn from experience. Debrief is a sorting and ordering of information, often involving personal perceptions and beliefs" (p. 19).

Reflection may occur within the individual; however, in experiential education, debriefing should be public, i.e., done through group discussions, projects, writing summary papers or personal journals, presentations, or blogging (Fiddler & Marienau, 2008). It is this reflection process that "turns experience into experiential education" (Joplin, 1981, p. 17).

Experiential Education in Post-Secondary Education

According to Cantor (1995), experiential education is a necessary component of formal instruction in post-secondary institutions for several reasons: Firstly, in order to improve students' prospects of smoothly transitioning into their chosen professions or achieving their desired goals after graduating, especially amidst increasingly competitive job markets. Secondly, as more non-traditional learners pursue college education, there is a growing demand for diverse instructional methods accompanied by institutions increasingly concerned about student recruitment, retention, and completion rates. Lastly, there is wide recognition of the significant advantages experiential education offers in guiding students' career decisions and fostering their

personal development. Based on its importance, one might assume that experiential learning has been an essential component of post-secondary education for hundreds of years, however, the emergence of experiential learning approaches has been a relatively recent development in the history of post-secondary education.

The Emergence of Experiential Learning Approaches in Post-Secondary Education

Referring to the limited application of experiential education in pre-Medieval and Medieval Western universities, Houle (1976) writes that:

> the learning that the university offered was essentially the mastery by the student of content provided by books and lectures… Even medicine was treated deductively in terms of the rules of learned doctors. Occasionally a student had a chance to dissect a cadaver, but he might be severely punished if he was found doing so… Throughout the university, experiential learning had no part in formal training. (pp. 21 - 22).

While education incorporating experiential learning existed in other forms (i.e. apprenticeships and other formal and informal training), this approach would remain relatively consistent in traditional university education for hundreds of years. By the late 1800s, however, the need to integrate experiential learning into systematic instruction became apparent, as a need for specialized training was generated by rapid industrial growth and new disciplines such as engineering and management were established to offer practical and applied educational programs (Sovilla & Varty, 2023). Medical education also changed, and in 1876, William Osler, the first Professor of Medicine at the Johns Hopkins University medical school, required his students to perform autopsies and observe his treatment of patients; this model would be applied across medical schools and eventually, in profession after profession, "the practicum or guided

simulation became essential, though it might be called *practice teaching, moot court, field work,* or some other similar term" (p. 30).

In 1903, Sunderland Technical College in England developed a 'sandwich' education plan, in which the academic curriculum included a year-long, full-time work placement (Udell et al., 2023), and the first co-operative Education program was developed in 1906 for the engineering program at the University of Cincinnati by Herman Schneider, concerned that his students were unprepared to transition into the field (Zegwaard & Pretti, 2023; Fannon, 2023). Co-operative education programs expanded modestly to include other disciplines at other schools, many in engineering and technology, and by 1956, approximately 60 American institutions offered co-op programs. While the term would not be used until decades later, these early work-integrated learning (WIL) programs incorporated academic studies with structured work experiences, and WIL programs began to be widely recognized by the 1950s and 1960s, including at Antioch University, Goddard College, and Berea College in the United States, and the University of Waterloo in Canada (Chickering, 1977).

Following the emergence and widespread recognition of WIL programs, professional societies and organizations such as the Co-operative Education Association[1] (CEA), the Society for Field Experience Education[2] (SFEE), the Council for the Advancement of Experiential Learning[3] (CAE), and the Canadian Association for Co-operative Education[4] (CAFCE) sprung up throughout the 60s and 70s to foster the development and further understanding of experiential learning and experiential education programs in both Canada and the United States.

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[1] Now the co-operative Education and Internship Association (CAIA).
[2] Now the National Society for Experiential Education (NSEE).
[3] Now the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL).
[4] Now Co-operative Education and Work-Integrated Learning Canada (CEWIL Canada).

The development of experiential education and work-integrated learning programs was not isolated to North America, and in 1990, the World Association for Co-operative Education[5] (WACE) was formed. WACE now has 4000 members, and its Global Strategy Council consists of 40 members from a wide variety of countries (Sovilla & Varty, 2023). Since the global rise in popularity of experiential education programs in higher education, the "greatest use of direct experience to date has been in practica, internships, on-the-job training components of professional or vocational education programs, and… in co-operative work-study programs" (Chickering, 1977, p. 19), hence the focus of this study on professional programs.

The Benefits of Experiential Education

Participation in experiential learning opportunities has been shown to lead to positive outcomes for students during their schooling and post-graduation. These opportunities may provide financial benefits, career-related knowledge and experience, and valuable skills needed to find a job (Cantor, 1995). Specific student learning outcomes from participation in experiential opportunities include the development of transferable and occupation-specific skills as well as professional identity, increased self-efficacy and motivation to learn, and greater career clarity (Fannon, 2023).

Many experiential activities, including capstone courses and projects, international experiences, internships, undergraduate research, service learning and community-based learning, have been identified by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) as High-Impact Practices (HIPs)[6]. Participation in these activities has been found to be positively associated with higher student engagement and retention, deeper learning, greater

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[5] Now the World Association for Co-operative and Work-Integrated Education (WACE).

[6] Not all High-Impact Practices (HIPs) are inherently experiential; other HIPs include collaborative assignments and projects, common intellectual experiences, first-year seminars and experiences, learning communities, and writing intensive courses (Kuh, 2008).

personal development, and higher grades, particularly for students of colour, first-generation

students, and students from disadvantaged backgrounds. These practices are impactful for

students as they require substantial time and effort, create shared experiences between peers and

faculty members, and provide the opportunity to step outside students' comfort zones, engage

diverse worldviews, and synthesize and apply their learning to new settings (AAC&U, n.d.; Kuh,

2008; McDaniel & Van Jura, 2022; Tukibayeva & Gonyea, 2014).

For faculty members and the institution, experiential learning opportunities can serve as a

critical marketing tool to attract students (Rodriguez et al., 2016), and programs that are offered

collaboratively with business or industry may lead to valuable partnerships that support the

mission of the institution, including expanding research partnerships, fundraising, the direct

financial support of students, and even shared facilities (Cantor, 1995). Workplace-based

opportunities for students may also provide prospective employers an opportunity to establish

direct partnerships with the postsecondary sector, access cutting-edge knowledge and technology

(Walters & Zarifa, 2008), and offer a steady supply of new hires with relevant work experience

that can be evaluated before long-term employment commitments (Cantor, 1995; Rodriguez et

al., 2016).

While a common expectation of post-secondary education is to prepare students for post-

graduation contributions to society, the economy, and their chosen profession, there is an

increasing expectation for institutions to align their curricula more directly to employment

outcomes, which has resulted in experiential education approaches gaining worldwide attention

(Zegwaard & Pretti, 2023). Work-integrated learning, in particular, is uniquely positioned "by

explicitly linking the learning activity to employability outcomes by requiring external

stakeholder involvement and authentic practice, thereby allowing students to be part of a relevant

professional practice" (p. 3). While experiential education programs can be found across a wide variety of academic disciplines and programs, work-integrated learning experiences such as practicums, internships, field placements, or co-operative education programs are also an opportunity for socialization into specific professions, "an intense experience that instills not only knowledge and skills but also a fundamental reorientation of one's identity" (Kolb, 2015, p. 261). This socialization includes professional standards, ethical codes, and appropriate ways to think and behave as a doctor, teacher, engineer, nurse, lawyer, etc.

Reflecting on their analytic study of graduate-level professional field education, Argyris and Schön (1974) describe the purpose of the experience as "to learn to become more reflective under real-time conditions so that effective ad hoc theories of action can be created and tested" (p. 188). These theories of action include not only formal theory about a subject or field but also the assumptions, informal ideas and expectations generated by the previous experience(s) that can then be applied to new experience. Argyris and Schön also differentiate between *espoused theory,* the behaviours, values, and constructs an individual might describe as governing their practice, and the *theory-in-use,* the forces, assumptions, and principles that *actually* dictate an individual's decisions and actions. Experiential learning opportunities allow students to check their espoused theory against their theory-in-use (likely with the help of an observer) and further modify and test their theory of action so their espoused theory and theory-in-use become more closely aligned. This process aligns with Kolb's Learning Cycle, with *reflective observation* revealing the student's *theory-in-use;* through intentional reflection, effort, and modification, their *espoused theory* (or *abstract conceptualization)* develops and can then be tested (*active experimentation),* and the cycle continues anew with another *concrete experience* (Doherty et al., 1978). In this way, "field experience simultaneously enhances the learner's theoretical

knowledge of her field, her process skills in the field, and her ability to monitor and change her own behaviour" (p. 26), supporting the development of the reflective practitioner.

Professional Programs and Developing the Reflective Practitioner

In describing professional programs in higher education -- that is, programs that explicitly prepare students to enter directly into a profession such as education, engineering, nursing, business programs such as accounting, medicine, or law -- Kolb (2015) describes the vital role that these programs play in preparing future professionals for their responsibility to society, writing that:

> schools of professional education have the primary responsibility for the development and certification of professional competence... This responsibility causes professional schools to make every possible effort to incorporate the appropriate knowledge, skills, and attitudes deemed necessary for professional competence. As a result, the process of socialization into a profession becomes an intense experience that instills not only knowledge and skills but also a fundamental reorientation of one's identity. (p. 261)

When a student enters a work-integrated learning experience, one of their most important tasks is recognition of that professional mentality or the professional practice (Schön, 1987). These facilitated work experiences serve as a form of technical training, wherein standard facts, rules, and procedures are taught, as well as how to *'think like a _____'* when faced with new problems. Students can be taught to act as practitioners who "solve well-formed instrumental problems by applying theory and technique derived from systematic, preferably scientific knowledge" (p. 4), however, Schön argues that rigorous professional practice is insufficient for tackling the problems of the real world where problems present themselves not as well-formed

structures but instead as messy, indeterminate situations or "indeterminate zones of practice" (p. 4). Civil engineers, for example:

> know how to build roads suited to the conditions of particular sites and specifications. They draw on their knowledge of soil conditions, materials, and construction technologies to define grades, surfaces, and dimensions. When they must decide *what* road to build, however, or whether to build it at all, their problem is not solvable by the application of technical knowledge, nor even by the sophisticated techniques of decision theory. (Schön, 1987, p. 4)

Schön suggests that the ability to handle 'indeterminate zones of practice' competently, such as the engineer's decision of what road to build, is central to professional practice and can be addressed by focusing a practicum or work experience on reflection-in-action, a process through which professionals make sense of uncertain or unique situations. Reflection-in-action extends beyond learned theory or stated rules by constructing and testing new knowledge, including novel ways to frame problems and creative solutions that can be applied both to the situation at hand and similar situations in the future.

The practitioner "responds to the unexpected or anomalous by restructuring some of her strategies of action, theories of phenomena, or ways of framing the problem; and she invents on-the-spot experiments to put her new understandings to the test" (Schön, 1987, p. 35). While reflection-*on*-action requires thinking back to the action that occurred in response to a surprising situation (likely an unexpected result of a routine response), reflection-*in*-action occurs (at least in some measure consciously) during action without interrupting it. Schön (1987) offers an example of how a reflective practicum might be structured in an engineering program:

In a school of engineering, a reflective practicum might focus, in a broad sense, on

engineering design. Students would undertake simulated design projects (as they do in

some existing design courses). But the use of such projects might be extended in several

ways. For one thing, students might be asked to reflect on and describe their ways of

approaching a design task. They might be helped in this respect by exposure to other

forms of designing… to which engineers usually have little or no access. (p. 325)

Schön argues that a 'reflective practicum' can coexist with a practicum focused on professional

competence and can help students learn to become proficient at reflection-in-action. It relies

heavily on the reflective dialogue between coach and student and requires coaches to reflect on

their own theories, practices, and processes.

Work-Integrated Learning

Co-operative Education and Work-Integrated Learning Canada (CEWIL Canada), the

lead organization for Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) in the country, defines WIL as a "form of

curricular experiential education that formally integrates a student's academic studies with

quality experiences within a workplace or practice setting" (n.d.-a, para. 1). CEWIL Canada

distinguishes nine types of WIL: 1) Community and Industry Research & Projects, 2)

Apprenticeships, 3) Co-operative Education, 4) Entrepreneurship, 5) Field Placement, 6)

Internships, 7) Mandatory Professional Practicum/Clinical Placement, 8) Service Learning, and

9) Work-Experience. Co-operative Education and Professional Practicum are described in

greater detail below as these experiences are offered by the faculties of which the interviewees

serve as academic leaders.

WIL experiences are considered an engaged partnership between the post-secondary

institution, the student, and the employer or organization, and "includes the development of

student learning objectives and outcomes related to: employability, agency, knowledge and skill mobility and life-long learning" (CEWIL, n.d.-a, para. 1). Despite various formal programs existing as early as the late 1800s and early 1900s, the term 'WIL' only dates back to the late 1990s. Numerous attempts have been made to create formal definitions, typologies, and frameworks to bring uniformity to the field; however, challenges similar to finding a shared definition of 'experiential learning' and 'experiential education' persist (Zegwaard et al., 2023). For this study, we will use the definition and typology of WIL put forward by CEWIL Canada.

Participation in work-integrated learning is widespread across postsecondary institutions in Canada, with 50% of respondents to the 2018 National Graduates Survey indicating that they had participated in *some* form of WIL, such as a clinical placement, practicum, internship, or co-op placement, during their post-secondary studies. Participation in WIL was observed to be exceptionally high for professional programs, with 64.6% of engineering, 92% of education, and 84.3% of health-related graduates reporting participation in WIL, with business, management, and administration graduates coming in at 29.7% (Galarneau et al., 2020).

Research comparing Canadian students who participate in work-integrated learning opportunities such as co-operative education, placements, and internships with those who do not has shown an association between participation in these activities and a greater likelihood of full-time employment two years after graduation, higher starting salaries (Walters & Zarifa, 2008), a greater likelihood of having employment related to their field of study, less of a likelihood of being overqualified for their job three years after graduation, higher employment earnings (Darch, 1995; Galarneau et al., 2020), and various other positive labour market outcomes. The most common explanation for why graduates who have participated in work-integrated learning experiences enjoy such benefits has been "human capital (i.e. skills needed in the labour market),

signaling (i.e. send message to employers) or focus (i.e. actively seek counseling or aid in job placement while still in school)" (Walters & Zarifa, 2008, p. 379) as well as increasing social connections, building personal networks, and fostering the connection between the classroom and the workplace.

Co-operative Education. While the first formal co-operative education program in a higher education context appeared in 1906 at the University of Cincinnati in the engineering program, the first co-operative education program in Canada began at the University of Waterloo in 1957 (also in engineering) with 75 students (Darch, 1995; Fannon, 2023). By 1979, 11 universities across Canada were also offering a co-operative education program, with total enrollment exceeding 10,000 students; by the mid-1990s, total enrollment approached 31 000 students at 39 institutions across almost all disciplines, with 4.4% of all respondents to Statistics Canada's 1992 Survey of 1990 Graduates reporting that they had participated in co-op programs during their university studies (Darch, 1995). By 2015, this number grew substantially, with roughly 17% of respondents to Statistics Canada's National Graduates Survey[7] indicating that they had participated in a co-op program during their university studies across all disciplines (Galarneau et al., 2020). Participation in co-op was observed to be high for engineering programs, likely due to the long history of co-op in engineering, with 37% of Canadian graduates reporting participation in a co-op program during their bachelor's degree, the highest participation rate of all major fields of study (Rodriguez et al., 2016).

CEWIL Canada (n.d.-b) recognizes two types of co-op experiences: *alternating experiences*, which consist of alternating academic and work terms, and *internships*, which consist of several back-to-back work terms. The total number of co-op terms varies by program,

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[7] Conducted in 2018, 3 years after graduation.

but in order to be accredited by CEWIL, "the time spent in work terms must be at least 30% of the time spent in academic study for programs over 2 years in length and 25% of time for programs 2 years and shorter in length" (para. 1). CEWIL Canada (n.d.-c) also outlines several criteria for co-operative education that accredited institutions must meet, including:

> Each work term is developed in partnership with the employer and approved by the co-operative education program as a suitable learning environment; The student is engaged in productive work for which the student receives remuneration; The co-op curriculum supports student learning goals, personal evaluation and reflection; The student's performance in the workplace is supervised and evaluated by the student's employer; [and] The student's progress during their work term is monitored by the co-operative education program. (para. 3)

Co-op programs are frequently supported by co-operative education offices within a faculty or institution, and dedicated staff, such as co-op coordinators or faculty co-op advisors, structure the experiences for students in collaboration with employers (Fannon, 2023; Sovilla & Varty, 2023). None of the elements of the co-op structure are unique however; education, social work and health care programs often include multiple practicums, paid work experiences can occur within various other WIL experiences, and generalized WIL offices are increasingly common. What makes co-op programs unique is the specific combination of structural elements and how they are operationalized within institutions (Fannon, 2023).

Professional Practica. CEWIL Canada (n.d.-d) defines professional practicum as involving "work experience under the supervision of an experienced registered or licensed professional (e.g. preceptor) in any discipline that requires practice-based work experience for professional licensure or certification" (para. 1). Also referred to as work, clinical, or block placements, these

experiences are common in teaching/education, nursing and other health sciences, social work, and criminal justice, and are "fully immersive in a workplace for a block of time, usually over a term, or semester" (Hay et al., 2023, p. 163). Each block is typically between 200 and 600 hours, but the specifics are often influenced by professional regulatory bodies, who may also contribute to shaping curricula and setting standards for assessing professional competence. The exact role of the regulator varies by profession and geography, with some providing accreditation to the program or practicum while others may set an exam to be completed following graduation, allowing them to set standards for practice but not be involved in determining program curriculum or structure (Hay et al., 2023).

Similar to other WIL experiences, teaching and learning occur in ways that are both planned (ideally, a prescribed set of learning goals for the experience) and unplanned (such as unpredictable events and learning from mistakes). Factors shaping the quality of practicum experiences include the "student having an available and supportive supervisory relationship in a setting where there is a balance between structure and autonomy; opportunities to develop reflective and conceptual capacities; and provision for observation of student practice, reflective discussion, and constructive feedback" (Hay et al., 2023, p. 165), and learning occurs best when workplace tasks are perceived to be authentic and relevant to their chosen profession. The need for integrating discipline-specific knowledge and theory with professional practice is well recognized in most professional programs; however, the task of doing so can be complex and challenging, relying heavily on the supervisor's ability to introduce and lead discussion, prompt reflection, and provide feedback.

Stakeholders in Experiential and Work-Integrated Learning Programs

Educational institutions exist at the centre of a complex web of relationships, with the frequency of interaction and scale of impact or influence varying according to the nature of the relationship (Waring, 1999). Universities and colleges function as open systems that are subject to changes in their external environment; for their effective functioning and long-term survival, institutions must, at least to some extent, adapt and be responsive to the demands of various stakeholder groups. Otherwise, they may put their continued existence at risk (Bush, 1999; Hoy & Miskel, 2008). In addition to their most obvious stakeholders and primary 'clients,' i.e., students, educational institutions must also respond to a wide array of expectations and demands from various groups, including government, industry, and community organizations whose interests often intersect and may occasionally conflict with each other (Waring, 1999). Administrators within these institutions must then decide how to respond to these varying and conflicting demands while also considering how they may align or conflict with the institution's own long-term interests (Bush, 1999).

For the purposes of this study, stakeholders are defined as "all those who have a legitimate interest in the continuing effectiveness and success of an institution" (Waring, 1999, p. 180). Not only does this definition include direct and indirect 'clients' and partners, but also those who have a direct effect on the institution through control of finance, policy, or institutional directives (Hoy & Miskel, 2008). In order to capture the various types of 'stakeholders' that exist for an institution, we can break the term down further to include *primary* and *secondary* stakeholders, as well as *internal* and *external* stakeholders.

For an educational institution, *primary* stakeholders are those groups whom its continuing existence relies on, e.g., students, staff and faculty, funders, government, etc. Without the

involvement of primary stakeholders, an institution would be significantly impacted and would not be able to function (Clarkson, 1995). In contrast, *secondary* stakeholders may influence or affect, or be influenced or affected by, an institution, however, they are not absolutely essential for its continued survival, e.g., alumni, local community and business, media, etc. Despite their lack of dependence on secondary stakeholders for survival, institutions may still be significantly impacted by them, including damage to reputation (Clarkson, 1995). *Internal* stakeholders for educational institutions, according to the authors, are the most influential when it comes to the perceptions, character, reputation and performance of an institution and include senior leadership or management, teaching and support staff, students, and governing bodies within the institution (Anderson et al., 1999). In contrast, *external* stakeholders often rely on past experiences with an institution or information communicated by internal stakeholders and include prospective students and their families, alumni from the institution, the larger community, industry, other educational institutions, and regulatory bodies (Anderson et al., 1999).

When it comes to post-graduation employability as an outcome of experiential education and work-integrated learning programs, primary stakeholders include students, government, potential employers, and internal stakeholders within the institution, including leaders, faculty members, and administrators (Cheng et al., 2021; Sin & Neave, 2016). These stakeholder groups all have a legitimate interest in the effectiveness and success of these opportunities and possess the ability to directly affect the delivery of these programs for good or ill. They may also have conflicting demands, reasons for participating in or supporting these programs, and desired outcomes. It is therefore up to the academic administrators for these programs to decide how to navigate these intersecting interests while also considering how they may align or conflict with their own beliefs and values.

Issues and Challenges with Experiential Education and Work-Integrated Learning Programs

While the benefits of experiential education are plentiful, there are also a number of issues and challenges with integrating it into post-secondary programs. Comparing the differences between traditional classroom learning and experiential learning approaches, Coleman (1976) writes that:

> Learning through information assimilation with a symbolic medium can enormously reduce the time and effort necessary to learn something new. It is the embodiment, in a symbolic medium, of the experience of others… [and] without it, each generation would have to traverse the whole path of civilization. (p. 54)

In contrast, experiential learning is time-consuming and costly to facilitate as it "involves actions sufficiently repeated and in enough circumstances to allow the development of a generalization from experience" (p. 56). Once an experiential learning opportunity has occurred, it can be challenging to assess what has been learned, ensure that the *correct* things have been learned, and assign credit for it. The administrative burden can also be high due to the complexity of managing stakeholder groups, "the authenticity of the tasks and subsequent outcomes, the learning experiences that may occur off-campus, and the tendency for one-to-one staff–student interactions due to the students' highly individualized… experiences" (Zegwaard & Pretti, 2023, p. 6).

Fannon (2023) identifies one of the long-standing challenges of offering co-operative education specifically is faculty resistance, as the approach asserts "that learning can occur outside of a classroom; it often requires extra time commitments; and for some, it challenges a philosophical belief that education is about higher learning and not workforce preparation" (pp. 152 - 153). Faculty support is also *required* for both the success and recognition of programs, so

in order to help overcome resistance, formal learning outcomes from participation in co-op programs should be clearly articulated and assessed, and the positive outcomes from participation must be demonstrated as aligning with institutional priorities, e.g., student retention and graduation rates. Other challenges for co-operative education programs include sourcing sufficient and appropriate *paid* co-op opportunities for students, as well as integration into curricula, with Zegwaard and Coll (2011) noting that "even though co-op often claims to have integration of knowledge between the workplace and educational institutions, the claims are often not well supported, how integration may occur seems to be poorly understood, and here still lays a challenge for the co-op community" (p. 8).

Similar to other work-integrated learning programs, one of the critical challenges in the delivery of professional practica and other block placements is sustainability due to the significant time and resources required to manage and deliver the programs, both on the part of the institution as well as on the part of the supervisor or preceptor (Hay et al., 2023). In addition, compared to co-operative education and other paid WIL experiences, students completing professional practica often do not receive remuneration for their work, making participation difficult for students who work part-time, require childcare, or incur expenses related to travel (Jackson et al., 2017).

As the success of placements relies so heavily on the relationships between the student, the institution, and the host organization, inadequate communication, a lack of clarity regarding the roles and responsibilities of each stakeholder, incompatibility between stakeholders, or a lack of commitment on the part of any of the stakeholders can create significant challenges to the student's learning experience or sustainability of placements. It is also vital that host organizations understand the knowledge, skills, and experience that students are entering their

organization with and that their expectations are realistic and aligned with the overall objectives of the placement (Hay et al., 2023). Lastly, curriculum development and assessment pose a significant challenge for professional placements as assessment often involves multiple stakeholders with varying expectations of 'work-readiness' and a variety of processes that may or may not align with each other (i.e., university-generated assessment requirements that may not align with professional practice). Assessment is also centred around competence, a challenging and complex task, and supervisors may be reluctant to fail students on their placements (Hughes et al., 2021).

Academic Administration in Post-Secondary Education

While academic administration shares many features with general administration, that is, "duties related to the proper functioning of organizations" (Lavigne et al., 2022, p. 123), it is also differentiated by a number of factors, including the research, service, and teaching missions of academic institutions, as well as the tenure system and academic freedom for faculty (Musselin, 2007). There is significant variation in the specific organization of academic structures based on the size, type and history of different institutions (Shen, 2009), but defined broadly, 'academic administration' involves management (e.g., tasks such as planning, supervising, and coordinating), leadership (e.g., tasks associated with influence and authority), and scholarship (e.g., tasks involving or requiring a scholarly background, research, and accomplishment) (Lavigne et al., 2021). There are also numerous debates and discussions surrounding leadership and management in the academy, including whether management and leadership are opposite approaches to administration, whether leadership is a component of management, whether managerial and collegial practices are in opposition to each other, and how the shift towards managerialism is changing, and potentially eroding, collegial practices (Lavigne et al., 2021).

Administrative positions that are responsible for academic affairs in post-secondary institutions include presidents, provosts, deans, chairs and, most relevant to this study, associate deans, who act as delegates of the dean and oversee specific faculty operations such as teaching, administration, and research. Academic administrators are generally appointed or elected from within the faculty ranks, although they may also come from another post-secondary institution and usually have a track record of competence and performance in their academic field as well as in their home department. Potential administrators will also likely be recognized as possessing skills and traits important for leadership, including collaboration, collegiality, and drive, and will have likely navigated the tenure process successfully, displaying a record of scholarship and research, however, they likely have minimal or no formal training for their leadership role (Martin, 2022). Research also shows that the transition from faculty member to administrator can be difficult and stressful for many due to factors including the loss of social relationships and peer groups, the difficulty of forming new relationships, the necessity of on-the-job learning due to a lack of formal training, imposter syndrome, and the loss of autonomy (Martin, 2022; Preston & Floyd, 2016; White, 2014).

Despite the importance of these positions for the operations and long-term success of institutions, Gmelch and Miskin (2004) note that academic leaders, such as associate deans responsible for the oversight of experiential education programs, "may be the least studied and most misunderstood management position anywhere in the world" (p. 6), necessitating a need for more research and a greater understanding of these roles.

Administration of Experiential Education Programs in PSE

LaCroix (2022) observes that while experiential education is broadly emphasized in university settings, the process of implementation and institutionalization "has been relatively

taken for granted, with a notable scholarship gap considering the organizational dynamics of universities" (p. 158). While previous studies may provide "empirical examples of how experiential education has been implemented in a course or program, [they] do little to theorize beyond a purely disciplinary or pedagogical context" (p. 158). Addressing the need for institutional support for experiential education programs in post-secondary education, Chickering (1977) identifies three factors necessary for their success: 1) a senior academic administrator dedicated to supporting the program full-time, such as an associate dean, 2) support from senior institutional or faculty leaders, and 3) support from the academic system, i.e., "approval and encouragement from the academic policy committee, curriculum committee, or other appropriate faculty governance bodies" (p. 53). Assuming these three elements are in place, administrative, managerial and logistical support is required for these programs' sustained growth and operations.

Associate Deans in Post-Secondary Education

While there is research across the higher education literature on the experiences of presidents, deans, and chairs, there is very little information on the experiences and contributions of associate deans, those individuals responsible for serving as delegates or extensions of academic deans (Jackson & Gmelch, 2003). Commenting upon the importance of the associate dean role, Zodikoff and Pardasani (2020) write that

> Associate deans ultimately have the potential to influence the experiences of a wide range of constituencies with whom they work and collaborate, from… students enrolled in their educational programs to the full-time and adjunct faculty as well as administrative staff who contribute to creating the broader institutional culture of their schools. Ultimately, many deans are recruited from the ranks of associate deans and directors of academic

programs, suggesting this role's scope of significance as a training ground for future

leaders. (p. 301)

Jackson and Gmelch (2003) identify three potential reasons for the creation of the associate dean

position within higher education: 1) to address increasing workloads related to the increased size

and complexity of institutions, 2) to delegate responsibility and ensure adherence to the primary

functions of higher education: teaching, research, and service, and 3) due to the transformation of

the dean's role "from academic leader to chief executive officer" (p. 90). In Canada, there is

variation between associate dean positions in terms of their focus (i.e., administrative, academic,

or a combination of both) and whether they are elected or appointed into their position, however,

Stovin (2023) notes that associate deans generally work in an 'interstitial space' in which they

may be caught between faculty and executive-level administrators, as well as between their

academic colleagues and the dean's office. Role ambiguity is common among associate deans,

with the responsibilities of their role often being unclear or unagreed upon (Jackson & Gmelch,

2003), but as 'academic middle managers,' their activities may include administrative activities,

relational activities, intervening activities, and results-oriented activities (Kallenberg, 2015).

According to Kallenberg, administrative activities, such as managing, monitoring, and

controlling people, structures and processes, help to keep the organization running. Relational

activities, such as trust-building and meetings with colleagues, maintain cohesion within the

institution. Intervening activities, such as proposing new ideas for educational or administrative

processes, help the administrator realize their vision, purpose and strategy. Lastly, results-

oriented activities focus on achieving specific goals or metrics, such as student performance or

administrative efficiency.

Within the literature, associate deans are characterized as mid-level administrators (Jackson & Gmelch, 2003; Kallenberg, 2015) and transactional leaders responsible for day-to-day operations, including management and leadership activities related to teaching, research, and/or service (Jackson & Gmelch, 2003). A survey of associate deans from American colleges and schools of education conducted in the late 1980s revealed a wide range of responsibilities, including

> special projects (76%), program development (73%), curriculum (72%), budget (64%), student affairs (63%), state certification (61%), public relations (59%), faculty/personnel (58%), school/field relations (57%), dean's office management (53%), and research and development (51%). (Applegate & Book, 1989, p. 7)

In another study of 131 associate deans across 51 American colleges and schools of education, Jackson & Gmelch (2003) found the most common functions of associate deans to be "administration, research, student affairs, teacher education, external affairs, graduate programs, undergraduate programs, budget and finance, and academic programs" (p. 98), and a study conducted by Sayler et al. (2019) found the most common areas to be academic, administration or administrative services, and curriculum, both consistent with previous findings.

When asked in Applegate and Book's (1989) survey about their motivations for entering academic administration, 76% of associate dean respondents indicated that the specific responsibilities of the position attracted them to it, and 66% indicated that they were ready for a career change; salary and status were only moderately important for their decision. Other factors that have been found to influence faculty members to accept the position of associate dean include being asked to take the role, a sense of duty or responsibility toward their school or faculty, a desire to make a difference or effect positive change within the institution

(e.g., to the teaching environment or institutional policy/procedure), the desire to engage in leadership activities or personal growth, a desire to develop an alternative career path to research, a desire to take on a new challenge, or an interest in bringing their academic perspective to administrative processes, culture, or planning (Floyd & Preston, 2019; Sayler et al., 2019; Stovin, 2023; Zardakoff & Pardasani, 2020) A recent survey of more than 500 associate deans from research-intensive colleges of arts, science, business and education in the United States also found that the least likely to be ranked high as a reason for accepting the position were financial benefits or career advancement (Sayler et al., 2019).

Applegate and Book's (1989) study also found that most associate deans received their training on the job, with only a few indicating they had formal training or preparation in educational administration prior to taking the position. 72% also reported that they had not received any training since accepting their position, and many attributed their career development and advancement to mentors and the mentorship process. The prevalence of a lack of formal training or preparation for associate dean roles is also a common theme in more recent literature (Foster, 2006; Palm, 2006; Preston & Floyd, 2016; Sayler et al., 2019; Strathe & Wilson, 2006), as is the reliance on informal learning and mentorship for developing an awareness of administrative functioning (Jackson & Gmelch, 2003; Preston & Floyd, 2016; Sayler et al., 2019). In a study of more than 1000 academic leaders, including deans, chairs, directors, and associate deans, survey respondents overall felt least well prepared for responding to appeals and grievances, creating metrics to assess progress, and developing revenue (Morris & Laiple, 2015).

In addition to the lack of formal training or preparation, other areas of challenge identified by associate deans include budget cuts and the need to increase revenue, staff

development concerns such as turnover, a lack of resources, stakeholder relationships, and achieving personal career goals such as work-life balance or maintaining their research (Sayler et al., 2019)

With the potential to impact post-secondary institutions so significantly, and with such a lack of information and research on the role, further study of the experiences of associate deans, especially within specialized areas such as the delivery of experiential education programs, is needed. Educational theorist Thomas Greenfield (1993) advocates for understanding the subjective experiences of individuals within educational organizations as a valuable lens through which to examine organizational challenges. This view, grounded in the phenomenological perspective, sees organizations as cultural artifacts that are influenced by the meanings and intentions of the people within them. As Greenfield (1993) writes, if

> our ideas for understanding the world determine our actions within it, then our ideas about the world—what really exists in it, how we should behave in it—are of the utmost importance. And if our ideas about the world are shaped by our experience, then the interpretation of experience is also of paramount importance. It is this process, the placing of meaning upon experience, which shapes what we call our organizations and it is this process which should be the focus of the organization theorist's work. (p 21)

In addition to the basic facts of an organization, an understanding of how people within it perceive it and act within it yields valuable insight into the organization and how to improve it. Within the limited body of literature related to the experiences of associate deans, the majority of the research is broad and survey-based, attempting to understand the *what* rather than the *why*. While there are a handful of qualitative studies attempting to understand the subjective experiences of associate deans (Floyd & Preston, 2019; Preston & Floyd, 2016; Stovin, 2023;

White, 2014), further insight is a step toward better understanding and addressing educational and organizational challenges. Therefore, a qualitative examination of the subjective experiences of associate deans responsible for the oversight of experiential education programs can lead to a better understanding of the organizations they operate within and the potential challenges in their delivery.

Conceptual Framework: Why, How, and Challenges Faced

The purpose of this study is to examine three questions: (1) What are the perceived or expressed reasons *why* academic administrators support experiential education programs for students in undergraduate professional programs? (2) *How* do these administrators see their role in supporting these opportunities? (3) What are the *challenges* these leaders see in the administration and delivery of these programs? Based on the review of relevant literature, several ways of understanding or perspectives emerge for each, informing this study's conceptual framework (outlined in Figure 2).

Within Figure 2, each large circle serves as a representation of one of the research questions of this study, but also a key question towards understanding the motivations and lived experiences of the administrators. The small circles that surround each question serve as possible answers and are informed by the literature review, including general challenges in the delivery of experiential education programs. Based on the relative absence of literature examining the specific experiences of administrators responsible for experiential education programs, these possibilities have been determined based on the generalized experiences of academic administrators. This study is intended to verify the applicability of these possibilities to the subjective experiences of the administrators interviewed, and the framework serves to focus the data collection process by suggesting possible areas of focus for the interview protocol, as well

as the thematic analysis process, by suggesting areas for particular attention during the coding process as well as possible codes. There is the possibility of a relationship between the reasons administrators support these programs and the *ways* in which they support them, which will also

Figure 2

Conceptual Framework: Understanding the Role of the Academic Administrator
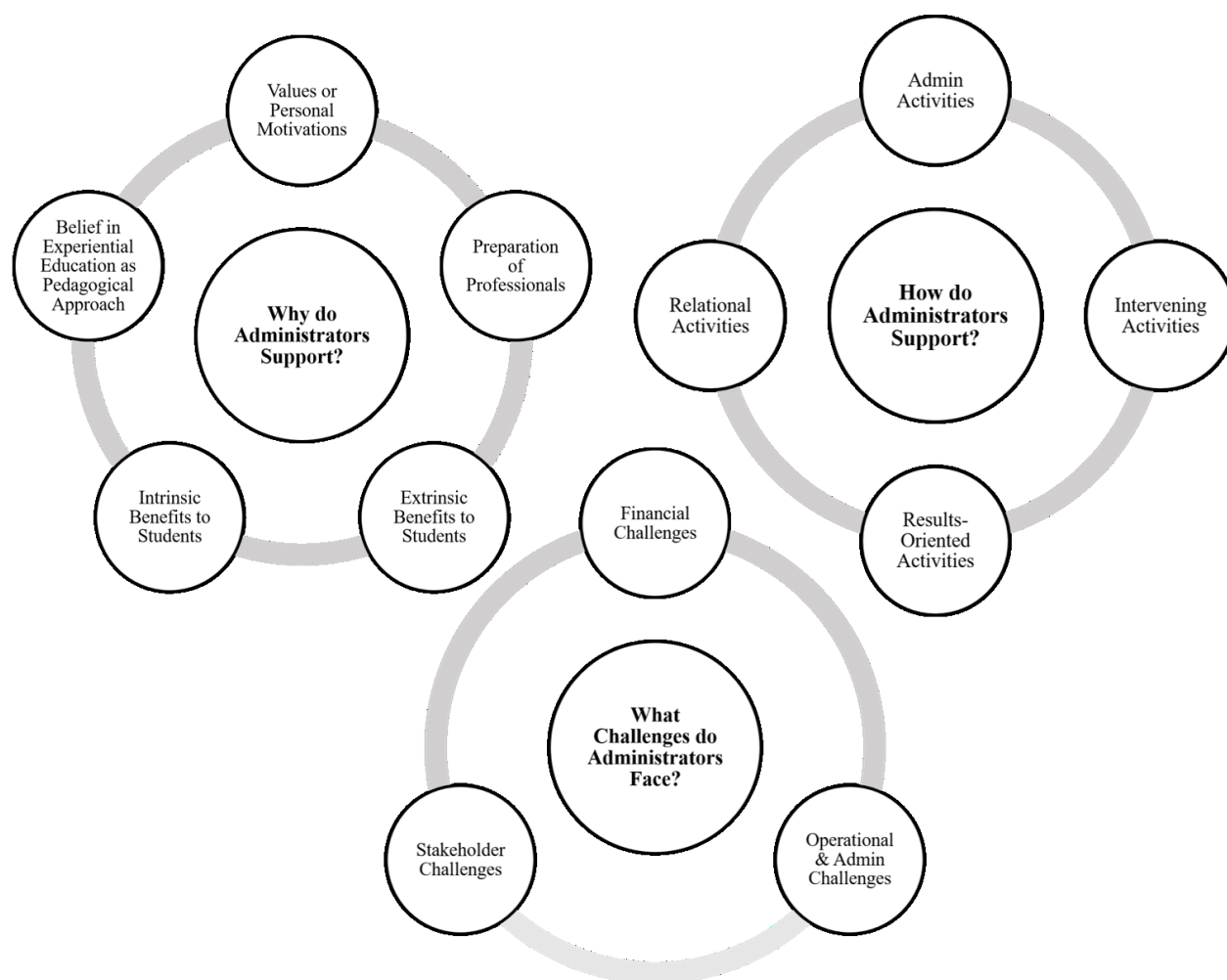
be examined through the thematic analysis process, but is not yet reflected in the framework.

Based on previous research, academic administrators may be personally motivated to support experiential education programs due to the specific responsibilities of their position, their career interests, a sense of duty or responsibility toward their faculty, or a desire to make a

difference or effect positive change within the institution (e.g., to the teaching environment or institutional policy/procedure), or the desire to engage in leadership activities or personal growth. Other motivating factors may also include an interest in bringing their academic perspective to administrative processes, culture, or planning, their acceptance of experiential education as an effective pedagogical approach, their belief in the intrinsic and extrinsic benefits that students gain through participation, or their belief in the suitability of experiential learning for the preparation of future professionals. Within the context of their roles, the academic administrator will more likely support these programs through management, leadership, and scholarship responsibilities. These responsibilities likely include the activities identified by Kallenberg (2015): administrative activities (e.g., the management of teams), relational activities (e.g. leveraging their personal connections in the field), intervening activities (e.g., working towards a long-term purpose, vision, or strategy), and results-oriented activities (e.g., working to improve processes or procedures).

Lastly, anticipated challenges in the delivery of experiential education programs include financial, operational, and logistical challenges, as well as challenges associated with primary and secondary stakeholder groups' expectations, policies, procedures, directives, standards, and more. The employer or placement partner will likely dictate the position, tasks, and/or responsibilities of the placement (likely in collaboration with staff or instructors from the faculty) and will provide coaching, mentorship or support, but they will likely bring their own expectations and assumptions about students' knowledge, skills, and abilities that may conflict with the expectations of students or the faculty. The faculty will provide teaching, mentorship, coaching and support both before and after the placement or practica, it will dictate the program structure and requirements (likely with input from the larger institution, program accreditors,

and/or relevant professional body), and it will set direction and policy for the placements. The larger institution's administration and leadership, whose directives, budget, policy or procedure will influence the faculty, as will the provincial government, whose directives and funding will also have an influence. Depending on the profession, e.g. health or education, the provincial government may also have a direct influence on the experience of the placement and may even be the placement partner or employer. Lastly, the relevant professional organization and/or program accreditor will influence the faculty through licensure, professional, or accreditation requirements and standards.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this study is to examine the perceived or expressed reasons why academic administrators support experiential education programs for students in undergraduate professional programs, how these administrators see their role in supporting these opportunities, and the challenges these leaders see in the administration and delivery of these programs. As we can see in the chapter above, the integration of experience in education, especially for the preparation of future professionals such as engineers, teachers, and healthcare professionals, is a vital yet relatively recent part of higher education. We can also see that there is significant complexity when it comes to the delivery of these programs within the post-secondary environment, a challenge that our academic administrators must be able to navigate deftly. The chapter that follows is an overview of the research design, including an outline of the methods intended to address the research questions.

Chapter 3: Research Design

This qualitative study examines the perceived or expressed reasons why academic administrators support experiential education programs for students in undergraduate professional programs, how these administrators see their role in supporting these opportunities, and the challenges these leaders see in the administration and delivery of these programs. Investigators engaging in qualitative research are generally interested in understanding the constructed meaning that a specific phenomenon or experience has for individuals, based on the assumption that "individuals construct reality in interaction with their social worlds" (Merriam, 2014, p. 22). Qualitative research consists of data collection through interviews, observations, or document analysis, and addresses "(1) how people interpret their experiences, (2) how they construct their worlds, and (3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (p. 23). Therefore, this study is an attempt, through interviews, to understand how the subjects interpret their own experiences as academic administrators, how they construct and interpret their role in delivering these programs and the meaning they attribute to their own experiences in academic administration.

For this study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with four academic administrators in professional faculties at a large, publicly funded, research-intensive university in Canada, the University of Alberta. Thematic analysis of the resulting transcripts served as the primary data to address the research questions, and interviews were selected as the ideal format for this study due to the richness of information and data (i.e., thick description) generated by the approach, as well as the psychological safety that can be created for potentially sensitive discussions compared to other qualitative approaches, such as surveying.

The following chapter begins with a section positioning myself as a professional administrator at the institution of study as well as a student and researcher. Following that is a brief overview of the institution of study, including recent events that inform the study as well as relevant institutional policy related to experiential education programs. Finally, this chapter concludes with an explanation of the research design, including the participants, methods, data analysis, and ethics and risk considerations.

Positionality

Having completed an undergraduate degree, pursued graduate studies, and worked for more than ten years as an administrator at the University of Alberta, I have a deep connection to the institution, and my interest in the chosen topic stems from a variety of personal and professional experiences within post-secondary education. While I have occupied various roles, primarily in professional faculties, including the Faculty of Education and the Faculty of Engineering, my current position directly involves the administration and management of experiential education, shaping the lens through which I approach this research. I have also worked closely with a number of academic administrators in my professional life, including a number of associate deans, and I currently work alongside an associate dean responsible for the oversight of a work-integrated learning program[8].

I am a heterosexual, cisgender man, I reside in Western Canada, and I am of European descent; my beliefs about the role of higher education in society, as well as my own political beliefs, prompt a critical examination of the impact of vocationalism and government policy, particularly concerning outcome-based funding models, on higher education. Being both a student and an administrator provides a unique vantage point, allowing me to straddle the

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[8] This individual was not a participant in this study.

institutional 'aisle.' However, I am also cognizant that my dual role may introduce bias into my research. Acknowledging this potential bias, I am committed to reflexivity and consistently scrutinizing the influence of my position and experience at the institution on the research process. I am interested in understanding how individuals construct and assign meaning to the work that they do, especially in the context of leadership in higher education, and the constructivist approach guided my research decisions. Within this context, I embark on this research journey, aiming for a nuanced understanding of the role that academic administrators serve in leading the delivery of experiential education programs in higher education.

Participants

Academic administrators were selected from the University of Alberta from faculties that offer experiential education opportunities to undergraduate students. Participants occupied comparable Associate Dean positions within their faculty, however, the scope and scale of student-related responsibilities within their positions varied as there is no consistent position structure for academic administrators at this institution. The amount of experience also varied between participants, with several having similar administrative roles at other institutions or different positions at the same institution and one returning to their currently held position after an extended break. Lastly, the type of experiential education programs also varied, however, all were work-integrated learning (WIL) opportunities and included co-operative education and practica.

Aligning with the intended focus of this study, participants were only selected from professional faculties, that is, programs intended to prepare students for a specific profession. To limit the scope of the study and maintain consistency in comparison, only faculties offering professional programs at the undergraduate level were selected, limiting the available pool of

participants but reflecting the typical focus of experiential education at the post-secondary level and still providing a variety of responses across different faculties, professions and programs.

The decision to interview exclusively academic administrators rather than other administrative staff involved in the delivery of experiential education programs (e.g., managers, coordinators or other administrative staff) was made not only to narrow the focus of the study but because there is a relative gap in the literature on how academic leadership influences the delivery of these positions. Academic leaders occupy a unique position within the institution, one in which they are required to blend administration, management, and leadership, and lead programs and teams through challenges, and their experiences are worthy of study. The only inclusion criteria for participants was the role held within the participants' faculty (an academic leadership role responsible for overseeing undergraduate experiential education programs in a university faculty); no other criteria were considered for selection.

Participant selection was based on purposive sampling, and participants were identified based on information publicly available on institutional websites and directories. In contrast to probability sampling, which allows a researcher to generalize the results of a study from a small representative sample to the population it was drawn from (Merriam, 2014), purposive sampling "is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore [they] must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (p. 77). As the research question seeks to understand the experiences of academic administrators responsible for overseeing undergraduate experiential education programs in professional undergraduate programs at Canadian universities, subjects that met this criterion were selected. Sampling by convenience, a subcategory of purposive sampling, was used, with participants being identified at my home institution for ease of contact and communication.

While there was a limited pool of candidates who met the criteria at the institution

dictated a small sample size (n=4), it allowed for a greater degree of depth and exploration into

the subject and experiences being explored (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006). In comparison to

quantitative research, which aims for large numbers of participants separated from their context,

a common characteristic of qualitative research is a small sample size of people "nested in their

context and studied in-depth" (Miles et al., 2014, p. 31). This depth and detail afforded by

qualitative research, also referred to as "thick description" (Geertz, 1973), is a distinct advantage

of the approach as it helps to convey the lived experiences of the participants (Jhangiani et al.,

2019). Therefore, this study is intended as an initial attempt at exploring and understanding the

experiences of academic administrators rather than an attempt to seek statistical significance,

identify causal relationships, or create a generalizable model. As Crouch and McKenzie (2006)

write, a small number of respondents "is the way in which analytic, inductive, exploratory

studies are *best* done" (p. 496). Table 1 provides basic demographic information on the

interviewees, all of whom have been assigned a pseudonym to maintain anonymity.

Table 1

Participant Background Information

Pseudonym	Faculty Description	Type of Program Offered	Years in Position[9]
Anderson	Natural and Applied Sciences	Co-operative Education	5 years
Jones	Health Sciences	Professional Practicum	1.5 years
Smith	Social Sciences and Humanities	Co-operative Education	3 years
Willow	Social Sciences and Humanities	Professional Practicum	5 years

[9] At the time of interview.

Initial interview requests were sent via email, and all follow-up communication (including obtaining written informed consent) was conducted via email and online calendar tools. Verbal informed consent was also obtained prior to the start of the interview.

This study was conducted in early 2023, following the global COVID-19 pandemic. While the University of Alberta had largely returned to in-person delivery of coursework almost an entire year prior in February 2022, all of the administrators were in their positions for the duration of the pandemic and would have needed to navigate various logistical, geographical and human challenges as their faculties administered experiential education programs via online and remote delivery methods. For students in professional programs related to essential services, e.g., education, healthcare, etc, experiential education programs would have returned to in-person delivery prior to February 2022, presenting their own unique challenges as well as increased stressors for administrators and students. While the impact of COVID-19 on the delivery of experiential education programs is not the focus of this study, the pandemic no doubt impacted these administrators as well as the various stakeholders involved in the delivery of these programs.

Methods

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with four academic administrators, focusing on how they understand the role of experiential learning within their program, why they support experiential education programs for students, and how they work to overcome institutional challenges in the context of their academic leadership role. Prior to the interview, participants were informed that they would be recorded and that a transcript of the recording would be created and sent to them for review; a brief written summary was also offered as an alternative if preferred by the participant. Participants were informed that if recording were to take place

without prior informed consent, the audio would not be used and would be destroyed, and I would not attempt to get consent after the fact. If the participants did not agree to be recorded, I would instead take field notes during the interview, with permission, however, no subjects requested this.

Interviews lasted 60 - 90 minutes, and the majority were conducted via the web-based meeting platform Zoom, with the system's auto-transcription function capturing a rough conversation transcript. Zoom was chosen as an interview platform due to the practical benefits of meeting online, specifically flexibility and ease of participation for busy academic administrators, as well as the audio recording and transcription tools offered by the platform. While the interviews were conducted in early 2023, after students, staff, and faculty had returned to campus following the COVID-19 pandemic, participants' comfort and familiarity with online meeting platforms increased the viability of using Zoom to conduct the interviews[10]. One interview was conducted in-person based on the preference of the subject, however, a computer running Zoom was used during the interview, and the auto-transcription function captured the interview. One interview (Smith) was also cut short due to time constraints, and the entire protocol could not be completed.

A pre-prepared interview protocol was followed for each semi-structured interview, with four primary areas of focus:

1. Program background (program structure and stated goals), e.g. "What are the desired outcomes of the experiential learning?"

2. Participant information (including personal motivation), e.g., "Why did you specifically accept a leadership role related to experiential learning?"

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[10] While interviews often veered into topics related to the COVID-19 pandemic and the delivery of experiential education programs, significant effects of the pandemic on the research design or data collection were not observed.

3. Stakeholders in the experiential education program, e.g., "Why do these stakeholder groups support or participate in these opportunities?"

4. Challenges in delivering the experiential education program, e.g. "What, if any, institutional factors serve as challenges in delivering experiential education programs?"

In keeping with the semi-structured format, I followed a standard protocol but reflected answers back to the interviewee to confirm understanding, asked follow-up and clarifying questions, and pursued additional lines of inquiry relevant to the research topics (Jhangiani et al., 2019). As Timmermans and Tavory (2022) write, "playing to the strength of the [qualitative] method means taking advantage of the close contact and probing while you go along, examining alternative explanations, and working closely with your observations as they unfold over time" (p. 17). See Appendix A for the complete interview protocol.

Audio recordings, also captured through Zoom, were then used to verify and correct the rough, automatically generated transcripts. Participants were given the option to either review and verify the transcript in its entirety or to review and verify a written summary provided by the interviewer within several weeks of the interview. Field notes, transcripts, and audio recordings were kept for data analysis and stored securely.

Ethics and Risk

As with most research dealing with human subjects, involvement in this study entails potential risks to participants; in order to mitigate these risks, protect and respect participants, and ensure high-quality research, ethical principles and guidelines laid out by my home institution and the Tri-Council Policy for governing Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans "guided the design, ethical conduct and ethics review process of research involving humans" (CIHR, NSERC & SSHRC, 2022, p. 13). A thorough overview of the study was

provided to the University of Alberta Research Services Office, including an outline of how data would be handled after the fact, the research protocol (Appendix A), and the informed consent form (Appendix B). Ethics approval for the study was granted following this successful application (Appendix C).

Participants provided written and verbal consent to participate in the study and could withdraw their consent for the research at any point during the interview (terminating their participation) and up to 14 days after the transcript or summary was provided for member checking. If no response was received within this 14-day window, the transcript was assumed to be accurate and complete, and this information was communicated to participants at the point the transcript or summary was provided. Name and email were required to communicate with potential participants; however, the information was only used to communicate with participants and conduct the interviews. Following this, field notes and transcripts only contained identifying information relevant to the purpose of the study, i.e. Faculty, and no identifiable information was retained following data collection.

As one of the interview areas involved a discussion of institutional challenges that impact the delivery of experiential education programs (i.e., other institutional leaders or pressure from stakeholder groups), there is a possible risk of damage to professional reputation if anonymity is not adequately maintained. While there were multiple participants in the study, there is a risk that the anonymity of participants cannot be completely guaranteed. However, to manage and minimize risks, discomfort and harm, appropriate handling of field notes, transcripts and audio recordings was ensured, and audio recordings will be erased/deleted after the requisite five years. Anonymity will be maintained within this and any subsequent publications.

In addition to being a Master's student, I am also a staff member of the institution. I have a professional working relationship with one of the research subjects, and it is highly likely that I will encounter research subjects in a professional context. To avoid undue pressure on the participants to agree to the study, I followed the appropriate research protocols outlined above. I am also positioned at a lower level than all interviewees within the institution, ensuring no risk of an abuse of power.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis of the transcripts was identified as the primary form of data analysis due to its suitability for capturing patterns and meanings within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This method allows for the identification of recurring themes related to the research questions, including the administrators' understanding of experiential learning, how and why they choose to support these opportunities for students, and the challenges faced. An additional document scan was conducted on faculty and program information that was publicly available online to inform data analysis and conclusions.

In order to conduct the thematic analysis, I reviewed the transcripts and assigned descriptive codes, labelling "data to summarize in a word or short phrase—most often a noun… eventually [providing] an inventory of topics for indexing and categorizing, which is especially helpful for ethnographies and studies with a wide variety of data forms (field notes, interview transcripts, documents, etc.)" (Miles et al., 2014, p. 65). Rather than taking an inductive or 'bottom-up' approach to thematic analysis, in which the data itself dictates coding and may be unrelated to the interview questions or the researcher's initial theoretical interest, this study employs a focused deductive or 'theoretical' approach to thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The 'top-down' theoretical approach is driven by the researcher's specific analytical or

theoretical interest, and coding is conducted to address specific research questions, allowing for deeper analysis of particular aspects of the data. This study focuses on the specific themes related to the roles, understandings, and motivations of academic administrators as they relate to the delivery of specific experiential education programs. Therefore, unrelated content, codes and themes, such as those associated with the experiential learning that occurred in regular courses/labs, other elements of the administrators' roles that do not pertain to experiential education or larger institutional challenges, were not analyzed. These topics are worthy of further study as they have the potential to impact the learning and experiences of students, as well as the experiences of administrators.

Thematic analysis conducted as part of this study included analysis at both the semantic and latent levels. Semantic themes were identified within the explicit meaning of what was said during interviews, allowing for interpretation and theorizing about the meaning, implications, and significance of the identified patterns related to the administrators' motivations, experience, roles, and challenges faced (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Semantic analysis assumes a unidirectional relationship between meaning, experience, and analysis, whereas latent analysis reflects a constructivist paradigm in which meanings and experiences are shaped and perpetuated through social interactions rather than inherent within individuals. Analysis at the latent level occurred to examine the administrators' underlying beliefs regarding the importance of experiential education programs for participating students and the role these programs play in preparing future professionals. Thematic analysis at the latent level goes beyond the explicit content of the data and instead attempts to identify or examine underlying assumptions, beliefs, ideas, and potential ideologies.

Braun and Clarke (2006) outline a six-phased approach to thematic analysis, which was used to guide the analysis conducted for this study:

1. **Familiarize yourself with the data** through transcription, reading, and rereading, noting initial ideas as they arise.

2. **Generate initial codes** across the data set, connecting it to relevant extracts.

3. **Search for themes** by collating the identified codes and relevant extracts.

4. **Review themes** in relation to the extracts from Steps 1 and 2, generating a thematic map.

5. **Define and name themes** to refine specifics and the story the analysis conveys, generating definitions and names for each.

6. **Produce the report,** relating the analysis to the research questions and literature.

Through this process, more than 75 codes emerged across the four transcripts, which I was then able to sort into themes for each of my three research questions: 1) What are the perceived or expressed reasons *why* academic administrators support experiential education programs for students in undergraduate professional programs? (2) *How* do these administrators see their role in supporting these opportunities? (3) What are the *challenges* these leaders see in the administration and delivery of these programs? Appendix D provides a brief overview of the analysis conducted in phases one through five of the process, with Chapter 4 reflecting the sixth and final phase. Appendix E also contains a detailed overview of the identified codes and themes.

Chapter Summary

This qualitative study consists of semi-structured interviews with four administrators responsible for the academic leadership of undergraduate experiential education programs in

professional faculties at the University of Alberta, a large, publicly funded, research-intensive Canadian university. Participants were identified through purposive sampling and occupied comparable positions within their faculty (i.e., Associate Dean), and interviews centred on how they understood the role of experiential learning within their program, why they support experiential education programs for students, and how they work to overcome institutional challenges in the context of their academic leadership role. Thematic analysis of the interview transcripts was then used to answer the specific research questions. Prior to the study being conducted, ethics approval was granted by the University of Alberta following the successful application to the institution's Research Services Office. The next chapter includes an in-depth description of the analysis process, as well as the themes that were identified for each of the research questions.

Chapter 4 - Results and Findings

This qualitative study examines the perceived or expressed reasons why academic administrators support experiential education programs for students in undergraduate professional programs, how these administrators see their role in supporting these opportunities, and the challenges these leaders see in the administration and delivery of these programs. This chapter outlines the key themes of the semi-structured interviews conducted with four academic administrators responsible for overseeing experiential education programs for professional undergraduate faculties at a large Canadian University. It begins with an overview of the thematic analysis conducted and continues with a brief description of the programs for which the administrators are responsible.

In order to provide context for the thematic analysis that follows, this chapter begins with a description of the four experiential education programs, including program structure and stakeholders. The information in the descriptions is based on the interviews conducted as well as publicly available information from program websites. The sections that follow will then explore the identified themes that emerged through the analysis outlined in the previous chapter as they relate to each of the research questions: 1) What are the perceived or expressed reasons *why* academic administrators support experiential education programs for students in undergraduate professional programs? (2) *How* do these administrators see their role in supporting these opportunities? (3) What are the *challenges* these leaders see in the administration and delivery of these programs? This chapter concludes with an overview of additional findings from the analysis of the interviews, including the additional benefits of experiential education, the competition among students that may be created through optional or competitive programs, and program evaluation and outcomes reporting.

Experiential Education Program Descriptions

For the administrators interviewed, the programs adhered closely to the typical

cooperative education and professional practica models defined by Co-operative Education and

Work-Integrated Learning Canada (CEWIL Canada), which I refer to in Chapter 2, making them

both work-integrated learning programs. The cooperative education programs offered by

Anderson's and Smith's faculties consisted of 12 to 20 months of paid work experiences

alternating with academic terms, spread throughout students' academic programs and escalating

in complexity and responsibility as students progress through their programs. Both programs are

accredited by CEWIL Canada, the lead organization for work-integrated learning in Canada, and

both programs are competitive for admission in that admission into the programs is based on

students' grade point average in a specified amount of their coursework (1 - 2.5 years). The

programs are also optional for students in the faculty and are not required for professional

licensure, and students can receive an undergraduate degree without completing a work

experience. In both cases, the programs are administered by staffed offices of cooperative

education that support both students and employers, including the preparation of students,

facilitation of interviews, midpoint and final work-term evaluations, and the submission and

grading of work-term reports or assignments. Faculty members and staff from the co-op offices

are not involved in the day-to-day experience of the work placements and typically only

intervene if there are employment-related issues that need to be addressed. As described by

Anderson:

> If a new employer, for example, were to come on board, then, you know, one of our staff
>
> would meet with them and explain how it works, and explain what's required, what
>
> students can do, what the sequences are for the particular area they're interested in, what

preparations things might happen. They're not professionals yet; they've just finished first-year, kind of thing. So those communications are expected, and then, you know, it's really an employer-employee relationship. We're sort of the agency that kind of helps connect people, and we do have some additional requirements on both the student and employer in terms of forms, and monitoring, and things of that nature, but it's largely an employee-employer relation. (personal communication, February 13, 2023)

The professional practica offered by Jones' and Willow's faculties consist of unpaid placements directly in the workplace setting, occurring at varying points throughout a student's program and increasing in responsibility and complexity as the program progresses. In both cases, the provincial licensing body for the profession requires a minimum number of supervised hours to be completed during the student's undergraduate degree, and the practicum experience is a requirement for graduation from the program.

While the administration of these programs is also supported by staffed offices, compared to the cooperative education programs wherein the institution serves primarily as a "matchmaker" for students and employers engaging in a reasonably typical employment relationship, the practicum offices are far more involved in the preparation and support of both students and mentors, and the educational and coursework components of the program are far more integrated with the practical work-experience components. In these cases, the relationship between the student and their supervisor is also closer to a mentor-mentee relationship than the employee-employer relationship in the co-op programs.

The specifics of delivery vary slightly between the faculties offering professional practica; Jones' faculty offers work experiences every regular academic term beginning in the

second year, often concurrent to coursework, whereas Willow's faculty offers the required[11]

work experiences in two blocks: once early in the program and once later in the program. In the

case of both blocks, the work experiences are preceded by preparatory on-campus seminars, and

the practicum is a full-time obligation for its duration. During the practicum, the student is

placed with a mentor whom they have a chance to observe and be observed by while receiving

feedback on their practice, and both mentors and mentees receive support from university staff

who visit multiple times during the placements. In contrast, the experiences offered throughout

the program in Jones' faculty are integrated directly into courses, and a student's regular week

likely includes a mix of practicum days and instructional days, including lectures and labs.

Students in the program are typically placed in small groups for their practica, are supported

directly by instructors who teach and assess practical skills, and are mentored by staff at the

placement sites.

The Role of Stakeholders

The primary stakeholders immediately identified by the four administrators, that is, the

groups on which the continued existence of the programs relies (Clarkson, 1995), are students

and the placement partners, i.e., the employer or the organization with whom the student is

placed. Secondary stakeholders in the experiential education programs were also mentioned by

the administrators, that is, groups that may influence or affect, or be influenced or affected by,

the programs but are not absolutely essential for its continued survival (Clarkson, 1995). These

secondary stakeholders include the numerous staff and faculty members who support the

placement experiences as well as the larger academic programs, the relevant professional

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[11] Willow's faculty offers several other optional work experiences as part of a students program, but they are not required for graduation from the program or for professional licensure.

associations and regulators, and the profession or industry community as a whole. In discussing their program, Anderson explains that their stakeholders include:

> Students, obviously. The faculty as a whole, certainly. Individual departments to a certain extent. I mean, these are academic programs, and they're within the departments themselves, right? So these are kind of owned by the departments and almost farmed out… Employers, the industries and the industry associations and all those things connected there are very much stakeholders… [program accreditors are] an interested party, I'm not sure they're elevated to a stakeholder, but it's probably good to be inclusive. (personal communication, February 13, 2024)

Similarly, Smith describes their stakeholders as:

> Our students obviously, our alumni, they have tremendous insight because they have some time now to reflect on their experiences. I think the student that was was really important to engage with. And then, obviously our industry partners, to all the employers, the community at large. You know all those stakeholders. They tell us you know what their needs are, what they're looking for in terms of what our students should be able to do, and the knowledge that they should have. And then you know the staff and our colleagues across campus. They're doing the really important work of making sure that programs are high quality and meeting the learning needs of our students. (personal communication, February 8, 2023)

Due to the structure of their program and the necessity for instructor involvement in the professional practicum, Jones also views instructors as a primary stakeholder in the delivery of their program.

While all of the administrators consider the larger institution to be a stakeholder *to an extent*, the points of engagement were limited and included infrastructure and space, enrollment management, and the collection and distribution of student fees. However, these programs could not continue without the existence of the larger institution, making the institution a primary stakeholder. Addressing whether they consider the larger institution as a stakeholder in the delivery of their programs, Smith responded:

> Yeah, to a certain degree, you know, I think institutionally everyone works in the different kinds of layers of the system. So they can pull certain levers that help the work that you're trying to do. They can also in my view, you know, create barriers to make it harder to do what you're doing, because they're trying to balance the system out too, right? (personal communication, February 8, 2023)

Most of the interviewees mentioned that they anticipated greater institutional involvement in the years to come due to the government's plans for outcome-based funding and the institution's recent centralization, potentially elevating the institution's importance as a primary stakeholder. Still, at the time of the interviews, none of the administrators knew what changes would be made or when.

All of the administrators consider the government to be an important stakeholder in the delivery of their programs, but in the case of Anderson and Smith, the relationship was primarily 'arms-length,' related to institutional funding, and managed by the larger institution. Still, Anderson and Smith both emphasize the necessity of government in the continued existence of their programs, elevating them to the level of primary stakeholder. As described by Anderson:

> Government. Yeah, they fund us right, so they want to see that it's to their benefit to have people leaving here contributing to the economy, so people with better skills, better pre-

socialized, I guess, just to avoid some of the difficulties that could occur with recent

graduates. (personal communication, February 13, 2024)

Similarly, describing the impact that government could have on their program as a stakeholder, Smith explained:

at the level that they operate at, they can just simply say "we are going to fund more

work to be that learning." And just by having that position, they are then going to create a

lot more work integrated learning programming because people want the funding. And

yeah, so certainly they're a stakeholder from that point of view. And you know, if you

think in a more theoretical sense, you know [the] government, if they reflect the… needs

of the citizens that vote them in, they should be a mirror of you know where society is

going and the values of society. And so, in a way, theoretically, if you're, you know,

maybe more optimistic about politics then that's a good thing. If governments [are] the

voice for the people, then it kind of keeps things in check, that institutions are aligned

with the needs and the voice of the people. (personal communication, February 8, 2023)

Due to the nature of their professions and their deep connection to public interests, both Jones and Willow have a greater level of engagement with the government, and their programs are impacted by government decisions on public policy, and government desires to train, recruit and retain more professionals to work in the province. In discussing government involvement in their program's operations, Willow states that they:

don't have that much interaction with the Government, because we don't sit on any of the

government committees, and when they come to our committees… their scripts are

mostly set... When they say "do this", and we [will] try our best to do it. (personal

communication, June 5, 2023)

In the case of Jones and Willow, both administrators consider the public as stakeholders in the delivery of their experiential education programs, and in the case of Jones' faculty, the communities in which students are placed, serve, and sometimes live for the duration of their placements.

Since Anderson and Smith's co-op programs are accredited by Co-operative Education and Work-Integrated Learning Canada (CEWIL Canada), both administrators consider this organization to be a stakeholder in the delivery of the program as they are required to meet the accreditation requirements and receive regular accreditation visits. While CEWIL accreditation standards serve as a benchmark for program quality, it is not required for these programs to operate, thus making CEWIL Canada a secondary stakeholder in the delivery of these programs.

Stakeholder Consultation

All administrators reported consultation with stakeholders as important in the delivery of their experiential education programs, guiding both the day-to-day operations of their programs as well as larger curricular or faculty-level decisions. The degree of involvement varied according to faculty and stakeholders, however. Anderson and Smith, the administrators responsible for the cooperative education programs, reported that a large portion of employer feedback regarding the program is provided to staff through unstructured, informal or ad hoc means, e.g., working with employers to coordinate work experiences.

According to Smith, employer stakeholders will often tell them "what their needs are, what they're looking for in terms of what our students should be able to do, and the knowledge that they should have" (personal communication, February 8, 2023), however, they also note the difficulty in responding quickly to industry demands that might require changes to the overall academic program. Jones and Willow report a greater degree of formal consultation with their

placement partners, in comparison, with both reporting focus groups, advisory committees, and formal surveys as feedback mechanisms for both the experiential education programs as well as the larger academic programs. These advisory groups also include representatives from the government, their professional organization, or other post-secondary institutions that offer the same program and need to place students.

Similar to employer consultation, Anderson and Smith report that the majority of their student feedback is received through informal methods, e.g., through social media or staff working with students as part of their work experience, but Jones and Willow both describe a greater degree of student consultation and, at times, responding to student advocacy through their relationships with the student governance organizations for their faculty. When asked about consultation or involvement from government or the larger university, including institutional leadership, all of the administrators reported that they were relatively 'hands-off' regarding the delivery of the experiential education programs, and their concerns were primarily related to policy, program funding, and in the case of government and Jones' faculty, the number of professionals entering the field. As mentioned by Smith, "work-integrated learning hasn't been a huge focus in terms of [institutional] governance" (personal communication, February 8, 2023). All of the administrators referenced either the recent institutional centralization efforts and/or the recently announced outcome-based funding models as potentially impacting the stakeholders' relationships and involvement in the future. Still, at the time of the interviews, no specifics were available.

Why Academic Administrators Support Experiential Education Programs

Three themes emerged through the thematic analysis of responses related to the expressed reasons why academic administrators support experiential education programs for students: 1)

personal values, beliefs, and experiences that motivated them to support students and their educational experiences, 2) the intrinsic benefits that students gain through their participation in experiential education, and 3) the extrinsic or instrumental benefits that students gain through their participation. The last two themes are also the primary area of divergence between the administrators interviewed, with the administrators responsible for the co-op programs highlighting the extrinsic or instrumental benefits of participation in their programs.

Personal Motivators for Administrators: Values, Beliefs, and Experiences

In discussing *why* they work to support experiential education programs, the academic administrators most often cited their own personal values, experiences, and beliefs about education as the main reasons for working within their role. Codes that emerged through the thematic analysis process included 'desire to improve professional practices,' 'personal experience in program,' 'power and authority to make things better for students,' 'reforming education for the profession,' 'EL essential to education for the profession,' and 'experiential learning as pedagogy.' Through the thematic analysis process, 'personal motivators' emerged as a theme, which I define to include the values, experiences, and beliefs the administrator possesses.

Unsurprisingly, all of the administrators valued the opportunity to work with and help students, either by supporting them directly or positively influencing their educational experiences. For Willow, the student-centredness of the role and having "the power and authority to make things better" that they did not have in other administrative positions drew them to the role (personal communication, June 5, 2023). For Anderson, their identity as a "supporter of students" drew them to the position, and they saw it as an opportunity to do good and treat students fairly (personal communication, February 13, 2023). Smith expressed a strong

commitment to experiential learning, even before the popularization of the term in post-secondary education, and cited personal experience in the co-op program and a desire to change and improve things for future students as a driving force for accepting the role:

> It was rooted in those personal experiences that I had and thinking the [faculty] could change a little bit. We can tweak our practices and encourage… collaborations across sectors more, and that's really been kind of the thing that's deep-seated in me, you know, that drives me all the time in terms of what I do. So taking on this position was really just aligned to helping reform [faculty] education and making sure our students have the opportunities to contribute to society in a way that they want to contribute. (personal communication, February 8, 2023).

Not only did Jones identify a desire to support and influence students through their role, especially as it relates to the influence of the practicum on developing good practice in the profession, but they also identified a desire to support the teaching faculty involved in the delivery of the program and a dedication to the profession:

> So I'm just very committed to [the profession]... The [practicum] experiences are some of the most important things that we can do, in terms of influencing good practice… [and] judgment. Those things cannot always be tested out in the lab, and so the lab is still experiential but that [practicum] setting is the most important... So I'm very committed to it; I'm committed to trying to make that large number of faculty who are just out there in those [practicum] settings with the students and rarely come to the University, to make them feel connected. (personal communication, March 8, 2023)

Intrinsic Benefits for Students of Participating in Experiential Education

In analyzing the benefits that the administrators expressed for students participating in their experiential education programs, 'intrinsic benefits' emerged as a theme. For the purposes of this study, 'intrinsic benefits' are defined as those benefits that have value for their own sake, often related to teaching, learning, and preparation for the profession rather than an explicit external or instrumental reward for the student that is related to participation in the program or opportunity. This theme consisted of several subthemes: (1) the development of workplace skills and knowledge, (2) socialization into the profession, (3) mentorship and (4) improved learning and educational experience. Codes from the analysis process included 'application of theory and knowledge into practice,' 'socialization into the profession,' 'mentorship,' 'development of soft skills, 'and 'career exploration'

All four administrators identified the development of workplace skills, knowledge, and socialization into the profession as intrinsic benefits of the practica or co-op experiences. In discussing workplace skills and knowledge, the administrators believe that these experiences provide students the opportunity for structured career exploration (i.e. understanding the profession, what professionals do 'on the job,' and areas that they would and wouldn't like to work), develop an understanding of their scope of practice, apply the learning from their classes (and deepen that learning), and develop critical thinking and 'soft' skills such as communication and collaboration skills, intercultural competence, resiliency, professionalism, leadership, and delegation. The administrators also provided numerous examples of how the experiences introduce students to the 'non-technical' aspects of the workplace; Anderson remarked that students would better understand their profession through these experiences because:

the [technical] work isn't 24/7... There's a lot of meetings and reporting and feasibility

and all the other stuff that's important to do aside from just the technical stuff, which

informs things. I just think it is -- students are much better prepared to enter the

workforce and be successful. (personal communication, February 13, 2024)

In the case of both Jones and Willow's faculties, the programs must also adhere to specific

competencies outlined by the professional regulator, so the experiential education programs are

also an opportunity to practice and demonstrate the specific competencies required to practice.

Willow and Jones also commented specifically on the vital role that mentorship plays in

developing these skills and socializing students into the expectations of employment, with

Willow commenting that:

Because it is a lived experience, the [experiences] are very significant and very

important, and being around other [professionals]... that collaboration, cooperation,

supporting each other, mentoring each other, is very important" (personal

communication, June 5, 2023).

In discussing the role that these opportunities play for students in preparing students for their

specific profession, both Jones and Willow commented on the vital role these practica play in

educating future professionals and acknowledged a history of incorporating experiential learning

into educating young or pre-service professionals. As Willow notes, "without that experiential

part, it would be very difficult for our students to have success in their first years [in the

profession], and we might have to look at an apprentice model" (personal communication, June

5, 2023). Smith also offered similar comments regarding the impact of experience on learning,

stating that "the most impactful education… that they can have is to couple what they learn in

the classroom with applying that in the real world" (personal communication, February 8, 2023).

The intrinsic benefits of participation in experiential education that the administrators expressed serve to answer the question of *why* they support these opportunities, and the administrators all expressed a strong belief in the power of these opportunities for the preparation of future professionals. These benefits also have a reciprocal relationship with the motivating factors expressed by the administrators, both serving as motivation as well as reinforcing their beliefs, values, and strong desire to serve students.

Extrinsic Benefits for Students of Participating in Experiential Education

In addition to the intrinsic benefits of participating in experiential education programs, Anderson and Smith also commented upon the explicit instrumental benefits of participation, primarily related to post-graduation outcomes. The theme of 'extrinsic benefits' emerged through the thematic analysis process, and I define the theme as the explicit rewards the student receives due to their participation in the program or opportunity. Codes for this theme included 'employment rate,' 'employability,' 'salary,' and 'financial benefit.'

In the case of their cooperative education program, in which the relationship is more akin to employer-employee, Anderson remarks that the final work term in a student's co-op program is often treated as an extended job interview and that many students go on to work with those same companies after graduation (personal communication, February 13, 2024). Describing the benefits of participation for students, Anderson says that students gain:

> experience and employability for when they graduate. Yeah. Financial, these are jobs,
> there are some of them that can be very well paid, and that's -- I'm not sure that's a goal.
> Our ultimate goal is the experience, but it is certainly is of a benefit for the students…
> Certainly for international students, they want Canadian North American experience. And
> so if they're in co-op it's great. If they're not in co-op then they have just the harder

time… during summers and so forth. So experience and the financial aspect of it helps

finance their education. (personal communication, February 13, 2024)

Similarly, Smith recognizes that the experience gained through a student's co-op experience sets

them apart from others who do not have co-op experience and can help with competition for jobs

after graduation, noting that their faculty's co-op grads have both a higher employment rate and

make more money upon graduation compared to their peers who do not participate in the

experience:

They're more employable. Basically, our co-op grads have a higher employment rate.

They tend to make more money as well when they graduate as well. So there's lots of

other benefits to it. (personal communication, February 8, 2023).

Smith also describes the support that students in the co-op program receive compared to their

peers who are not in the program:

Often the students that are in co-op, they really do rely on the opportunities and the

events and job board, and all the things that the co-op and careers office offers them. And

you know, some of that career coaching and just kind of helping them figure out what

type of job would they really excel in, that kind of thing. (personal communication,

February 8, 2023)

These extrinsic benefits also serve to answer the question of *why* these administrators support

these programs, but they also reveal a difference between programs. While Jones and Willow's

opportunities are required for all undergraduate students in their faculty, Anderson and Smith's

programs are optional, and admission is competitive. As such, students in these programs receive

a very real advantage compared to their peers who aren't in the program.

How Academic Administrators See Their Role in Supporting Programs

While there was variance in roles and responsibilities between interviewees, two main themes emerged in the data analysis: administration and leadership. Codes associated with administration included consultation, outreach, policy, decision-making, and management, whereas codes associated with leadership included strategy, direction, relationships, and motivation. Leadership, including the challenge of definition and differentiation from management, will be explored in greater detail in the following chapter, but for coding and analysis, I considered leadership as a *process* that involves influencing a group of people to achieve a common goal (Northouse, 2022).

In most cases, the administrator's roles are primarily administratively and operationally driven; however, Jones was unique in noting a responsibility for guiding the educational content of the practica experiences and setting evaluation standards. Describing a recent instance of their involvement, Jones stated:

Our [practicum] courses have been pass/fail in the past; since this new curriculum was brought in since I've arrived, and I just felt that we had too many credit hours in our program that were pass/fail, credit/non-credit, and for several reasons, in that, I don't think it gives students a really good idea where they sit in in their learning... And so we're incorporating, instigating now, where every clinical course must also have a side that is creating testing and measurement of the content, of what they're supposed to be learning… So that's -- that would be directed by me and my undergrad leadership team; I said, "I think we need to do this, yes." So then we decide how we're going to roll it out. How do we implement it? How do we, you know, meet with the clinical teachers and say, this is going to happen now? So, how do we help you develop this in your course? So

those kinds of things are very much led by myself in my office. (personal

communication, March 8, 2023)

 Because of the nature of their role and the integration of experiential education within their

program, Jones also notes that they are deeply involved in the academic delivery of the entire

undergraduate program, including supporting instructors.

Administration

Specific functions within each role varied; however, three common administrative

functions emerged across the interviews: (1) setting, navigating, and applying policy; (2)

'escalated' student support or interventions; and (3) program and staff management. All of the

administrators mentioned that their programs were subject to policy dictated internally (e.g.,

what type of experiences were determined to be 'appropriate' for each work term, requirements

for students to progress through the program, student conduct, or requirements for passing or

failing specific experiences) and/or policy dictated by program accreditors or professional bodies

(e.g., the number of required hours of work experience). In discussing how their program adapts

to challenges, Anderson notes that:

It's by and large the boots-on-the-ground kind of people, but you know, the staff and I

meet weekly. And we hear about these things and make adjustments as we go, and we --

if something changes, we assess, and should we do something different?... I'm informed

of these kinds of things when they come up, and if there's trends, and again, we have

people who go to the accreditation body meetings and get a feel for the trends that are

going on in our own country. So, we try to adapt and adjust. But it's not me day to day.

It's more larger policy decisions. Things of that nature. (personal communication,

February 13, 2023)

The most common instances of direct involvement, when it came to navigating and applying

policy, overlapped with student support, as cases where policy needs to be navigated are often

related to exceptional circumstances (e.g., health or issues in the workplace), as well as concerns

regarding student conduct during work experiences. Jones described the process in which student

concerns are escalated to them as follows:

> Faculty would reach out to me if they have students who are struggling, and so they
>
> would have a process that they would normally do, starting with writing a student
>
> improvement plan… If that's not working, or if they're worried about the student and their
>
> personal health or other things, then they would reach out to myself and… our manager at
>
> Student Supports. So between the 2 of us, we would manage those kinds of situations if
>
> they're immediate, like if the students have made a severe error, then that comes to me
>
> immediately. (personal communication, March 8, 2023)

Not only do the administrators need to navigate their internal policies and procedures as well as

those dictated by accreditors or professional organizations, but also those set forward by the

institution, i.e., in instances where a student needs to be withdrawn from participating in a

practicum "because of public interest, public safety or public health considerations" (University

of Alberta, 2018, p. 1), the University's Practicum Intervention Policy for professional programs

outlines the process in which the Dean, or in this case, the Dean's delegate, would be empowered

to do so. As Jones stated:

> I have to protect the public. And so, having a practicum intervention, it's called in the
>
> policies of the code of student behaviour. The practicum intervention is up to me, and I
>
> have to push it and it, you know, probably 3 or 4 times this term. And that's too many
>
> times, as far as I'm concerned but -- so it's a huge amount of monitoring then, well, what

did we miss before? Well, where are we missing students that we didn't get them prepped

up to that well practically where they need to? (personal communication, March 8, 2023)

In describing their role, Anderson also acknowledged that policy, as written, may not be

appropriate and described their position as requiring a recognition that:

students are more than just students, they have lives outside of this place. They have stuff

that happens to them, and everyone's a bit unique. So sometimes the rules as written don't

fit the situation, and sometimes you just need to, perhaps, be a little bit understanding and

make some exceptions when it's appropriate. (personal communication, February 13,

2023)

These findings highlight the importance of judgment and decision-making in ambiguous or

exceptional circumstances and the student focus that all the administrators possess.

In regards to the other key element of administration, all of the interviewees discussed a

variety of managerial responsibilities, ranging from supporting the staff, instructors and faculty

responsible for the delivery of the experience to managing stakeholder relationships and

addressing concerns. One of the critical areas of responsibility that varied between the

interviewees was the focus on external engagement, with both Jones and Willow noting

responsibilities for stakeholder engagement and outreach with government and non-government

groups, professional organizations, and service providers, especially related to generating

opportunities for student placements when needed. In discussing their outreach to service

providers and their role in generating placements, Jones notes that:

We work so hard to be together, and I'll say to them, "Look, we really had, you know,

these many placements refused, can you do something to help them? Can you support

your clinical people a little bit more so we can get our students in there? Or, you know, is

there another spot you can suggest that we can get students into those spaces? And so I

think that it's that constant communication and collaboration. How can we think

differently? (personal communication, March 8, 2023)

 In contrast, Anderson noted that their staff is primarily responsible for outreach and external

engagement, and their involvement is only on an as-needed basis:

We have a director, and that individual is more directly involved with the accreditation

body or the employers when there's issues. So, it doesn't always come directly to me. So,

there's more communication going on that just comes from me, but I set policy and

direction for others to follow, and I get involved when the situation calls for it. (personal

communication, February 13, 2023)

Leadership

A theme that emerged in discussions with interviewees was their role in 'leading' their

programs. Codes associated with this theme included "strategy,' 'setting direction,' 'big picture,'

'relationships, ''creating community,' and 'inclusion,' however, it should also be noted that the

fuzzy boundary between conceptions of 'leadership' versus 'management' made this task

challenging and, depending on the definition of 'leadership' adopted, codes could be likely be

assigned to the other theme.

All of the interviewees described the overall direction of their programs as a function of

their role, e.g., Anderson explains their role as setting "policy and direction for the co-op

program" (personal communication, February 13, 2023), and Jones describes their role as the

"big picture person" for the program (personal communication March 8, 2023). A notable

difference, however, is Jones's role in supporting and mentoring their practicum instructors:

The other thing I like to try and do is make sure that I'm including those [practicum] instructors, like I say, to make sure that they feel they have a voice with me, so I usually have Town Hall once a term or something, so that anyone can hop on and chat to me, or you know, they can have a general discussion, and I think they learn so much from each other, and they also hear that if they're having struggles with the way they're teaching something, that someone else has a way that they can, they tell them, you know, "Oh, I do it this way, or this is how I do this." So, they each need to establish their own way of dealing with the… patterns of their units. And sometimes we have expert [practicum] instructors who can support that. So that's sort of one way I try to support the big picture in the learning and the teaching that occurs there. (personal communication March 8, 2023)

Jones's efforts to create a community of support and build an educational team exemplify a definition of leadership that goes beyond setting direction and towards building and empowering teams.

Challenges In The Administration and Delivery of Programs

Through the coding and analysis process, three key themes emerged related to the challenges of delivering experiential education programs: (1) administrative and operational complexity, (2) financial considerations, and (3) stakeholder expectations.

Administrative and Operational Complexity

Challenges related to the administrative and operational complexity of the experiential education programs were identified most commonly by the administrators, including: the number of students participating in the program; the number of staff and faculty required to deliver the program; training, mentoring and retaining staff; the limited number of placements and

placement sites available; and fitting experiential education programming within the sequencing of academic programs. Jones and Willow also commented on the difficulty presented by finding a sufficient number of appropriate placements, noting that other institutions in the province are trying to place a large number of students. Overwhelm, burnout, staff shortages, and an inability to adequately supervise students also pose significant challenges:

> The staff just can't take any more students. But it's such a vicious circle because then that means that they can't have any more [professionals] because no one's familiar with their area. We need to have these students educated. So, it is a huge balancing act. (Jones, personal communication, March 8, 2023)

In these cases, Jones notes that constant collaboration and communication with the relevant government organization is essential in identifying creative solutions. Willow also mentions that collaboration with other provincial institutions has been helpful in the past, with 'handshake' agreements that their faculty would focus on placing students in specific geographic regions in the province while avoiding others.

Lastly, the COVID-19 challenge pandemic presented various logistical, geographical and human challenges for administrators and their programs, but all remarked upon the creative solutions and resiliency demonstrated to overcome these challenges.

Financial Challenges

Financial considerations also pose a challenge in the delivery of these programs. All of the administrators commented on the cost of running the programs, with some providing examples of ways in which they have either needed to adapt (e.g., changing the staffing structure of the office and number of staff members visiting practica sites) or ways in which budget considerations were limiting the growth of their programs. Students do pay a fee to participate in

each of the programs or opportunities, but Jones notes that the institution's fee structure does not take into account the resources needed to deliver their program:

> they don't change our fee structure much, a three-credit course, they don't care that we have, you know, 25 [practicum instructors] in there instead of one… it's this lack of understanding of the program and the depth of the program, and the requirement of this experiential learning… I don't think that they quite get that enough to fund this appropriately. (personal communication, March 8, 2023)

Anderson notes that, at times, students question the necessity of paying these student fees and how *precisely* their fees are used to deliver the experience, a question to which they have sought answers from the larger institution but have not received a satisfying response regarding the proportion of co-op fees that end up with the faculty. This challenge is exacerbated for Anderson as their program is also seeing an increasing number of employers hiring 'outside' of the co-op program, i.e., employers posting co-op opportunities on their own website rather than through the program's job posting board. This practice effectively removes the co-op program from the relationship and makes it more difficult to track, manage, and enforce rules.

Since the funding model is different for international students, Anderson also recognizes that international students pay a premium to participate in the co-op program: "They get here, they're ready to earn some money, start to pay for their tuition, and they get a $10,000 bill for tuition for that term" (personal communication, February 13, 2023). While North American work experience and the ability to fund their studies were described as beneficial for these students to participate in the program, this financial model also puts them at a significant disadvantage. Jones also notes the financial burden these experiences place on students participating:

> We expect them to travel up to 150 kilometres for their [practicum]. So whether they're driving to Wetaskiwin or wherever, they have to figure it out. And so that can be really expensive for students. (personal communication, March 8, 2023)

Stakeholder Expectations

The varying and, at times, competing stakeholder expectations also present challenges in the delivery of these programs, e.g., direction from the institution to grow enrollment in program competing with concerns around a lack of appropriate placements for these new students, government policy or expectations surrounding the profession, unrealistic student expectations about co-op or practica experiences, and unrealistic expectations on the part of employers regarding what students are capable of. Anderson notes a perception that student expectations are also changing, creating challenges when they choose not to apply for or accept positions they have been offered:

> Their expectations are somewhat changing. They -- they're not as keen to get experience as they are keen to get an *awesome* experience, right? I'm finding that there's less interest or acceptability of, you know, paying your dues… and maybe having a lower level experience to get good references and to get good knowledge of the industry. (personal communication, February 13, 2023)

Discussing the question of expectations with Smith, they also remarked upon the faculty's desire to change and be responsive to student and employer desires (e.g., to increase the number of seats available to students). Still, they noted that the processes embedded within the larger institution made it difficult to respond as promptly as desired.

Additional Findings

In addition to addressing my research questions, a number of additional findings emerged through the interview and thematic analysis process: (1) the additional benefits of experiential education programs to secondary stakeholders, (2) the competition among students that may be encouraged through the delivery of optional or competitive experiential education programs, and (3) the lack of formal evaluation and reporting on post-graduation outcomes of participation in experiential education programs.

Additional Benefits of Offering Experiential Education Programs

In addition to the intrinsic and extrinsic benefits of participation to students, the administrators also mentioned the benefits of these programs to employers, who can access well-trained students as they are just entering the workforce, as well as to the profession as a whole, who benefit from better-educated students as well as 'new blood' that supports the continued growth and evolution of the profession (Willow, personal communication, June 5, 2023). Other benefits mentioned by the administrators include the co-op program's positive impact on faculty reputation (both for student recruitment and fundraising); however, none of these benefits were the focus of any of the administrators interviewed, and the primary concern was preparing students.

Competition and Experiential Education Programs

Smith, whose faculty admits students into the co-op program on a competitive basis, also recognizes that the advantage presented by participation in the cooperative education program also has the unintended effect of breeding competition among students:

> Whenever you have a program that's a little bit more competitive to get into, the students
> that are not in it might, you know, develop a sense… [that] 'I'm not one of those students.

They're on a track. I'm not necessarily on the same track as them.' I feel, and this is more

from just anecdotal observations and conversations that I've had, students feel like they

are behind, or they're not doing as well as their peers, because, you know, this other peer

has lined up a job already… and so that sense of kind of comparing themselves against

their peers is something that I'm sensitive about… And so I think we need to do a better

job at addressing that for the students. (personal communication, February 8, 2023)

Since the experience gained through a student's co-op experience sets them apart from others

who do not have co-op experience and provides tangible employment and financial benefits post-

graduation, participation in optional or competitive programs can also serve as a significant point

of inequality between students graduating from the same faculty or program.

Program Evaluation and Outcomes Reporting

Follow-up and reporting on expected or desired program outcomes varied between

administrators. While all of the work experiences include ongoing, midpoint, and/or final

evaluations to ensure students are meeting acceptable standards, and multiple faculties have

students complete exit surveys at the end of their program, only Smith mentioned that their

faculty currently conducts post-graduation follow-up surveys. These surveys are intended to

gauge satisfaction with the program and are distributed six months after graduation, but they do

not compare outcomes for students who completed the co-op program with students who did not,

something that Smith mentions the faculty would like to do.

Both Willow and Jones mentioned that their faculties had done post-graduation surveys

in the past, but Anderson was not aware of any formal assessment of post-graduation outcomes

that their faculty had conducted; all three expressed a desire to begin surveying their graduates

and acknowledged that outcome-based funding would likely impact this practice. Despite the

Alberta government's focus on post-graduation outcomes and 'work readiness,' it is notable that the assessment of post-graduation outcomes or the impact of experiential education programs was largely not formally evaluated at the time of the interview.

Chapter Summary

Through thematic analysis of the transcripts of four interviews, I was able to determine that the expressed reasons *why* administrators support these programs are the desire to support students and positively impact their educational experiences. The administrators also expressed beliefs in the intrinsic and extrinsic value of participation in these opportunities for students, with the administrators responsible for the cooperative education programs emphasizing the extrinsic benefits. I also determined that the primary means of support the administrators see themselves as offering is administrative and focused on setting, navigating, and applying policy, addressing 'escalated' student support or interventions, and program and staff management. While the administrators addressed leadership, the descriptions of leadership roles primarily focused on the overall guidance and direction of the program. Lastly, I determined that the critical challenges the administrators see in delivering these programs are the programs' administrative and operational complexity, financial limitations, and stakeholder expectations.

In the next chapter, I will return to the initial conceptual framework of the study, updating and addressing changes that further illustrate the experiences of these academic administrators. The chapter also explores the implications of the study, specifically as they relate to how institutions prepare academic administrators for these roles and how programs could be improved, and concludes with the limitations of this study, as well as further areas of study.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This qualitative study examines the perceived or expressed reasons why academic administrators support experiential education programs for students in undergraduate professional programs, how these administrators see their role in supporting these opportunities, and the challenges these leaders see in the administration and delivery of these programs. This chapter begins with a return to the initial conceptual framework of the study, updating and addressing potential changes that further illustrate the experiences of these academic administrators. Following this, I explore the study's implications, specifically as they relate to how institutions prepare academic administrators for these roles and how programs could be improved through the intentional integration of experiential learning theory and the creation of significant learning experiences. This chapter concludes with the limitations of this study, as well as further areas of exploration and study.

Why, How, and Challenges Faced: Updating the Conceptual Framework

The experiences of the interviewed administrators largely align with those identified in the literature and reflected in the conceptual framework established earlier in this thesis, however, several adjustments have been made to reflect the possible influences of previously unidentified factors on the experiences of the academic administrators. Based on the interviews and subsequent analysis, this section will first outline the additional reasons why administrators may support these programs, the additional ways they may support them, and the additional challenges they face. Following this, an updated conceptual framework (Figure 3) will be provided and explained.

When addressing the question of *why* the administrators support these programs, all expressed a belief in experiential education as an effective pedagogical approach (although some

were more explicit than others), all referenced their own personal values and motivations for taking their role, and all communicated numerous benefits of participation. A major point of divergence, however, was the administrators responsible for the co-op programs' focus on the instrumental or extrinsic benefits gained through student participation, whereas the administrators responsible for the professional practica focused on the importance of these experiences for the preparation of future professionals. While the administrators responsible for co-op programs did still refer to the intrinsic and educational benefits of their programs, they also referenced post-graduation outcomes and tangible rewards that participation in their programs offers.

While there are any number of personal factors that might influence these administrators to focus on these particular benefits (e.g., personal or political beliefs about the purpose of a professional university education, institutional factors, etc.), it does also point towards the possibility that different educational priorities for the fields, as well as beliefs regarding the best way to prepare professionals, may also dictate the 'type' of programs offered and the ways in which administrators support. Both Jones and Willow, whose programs offer embedded practicums, emphasized the importance of these experiences as part of the overall educational experience of their students. As Jones states, they come from a "practice-based profession" (personal communication, March 8, 2023), and these experiences are vital for preparing professionals in their field. In comparison, the fact that the co-op programs are optional implies that they are not *required* for the preparation of professionals, but they are a beneficial 'add-on' to the standard program. As such, students in these programs may not *need* these experiences in order to be successful, but they certainly set them up for a greater degree of success within their programs. The established standards for educating professionals in the given field, including the

challenges they create and the influence they have on how and why administrators support these programs, should be included in the updated conceptual framework.

In discussing the *challenges* these administrators face, their views aligned with those identified in the literature review and conceptual framework, with the common themes of financial challenges, administrative and logistical challenges, and stakeholder expectations. Through the theme analysis process, however, it was clear that the administrative and logistical challenges were ultimately related to the complexity and size of these programs. All clearly had a long history of success, and most day-to-day challenges, including those posed by stakeholders, were well-handled. However, internal and external pressures to increase enrollment and expand their work-integrated learning programs while also potentially dealing with budgetary challenges and limited numbers of possible placements, were clearly felt by all of the administrators. This, too, calls into question the desire to expand experiential education programs within post-secondary, with the obvious questions being 'with what money?' and 'where do we put students?'

While many professional programs, especially those in the health sciences and education, have a long history of integrating experience into the education of future professionals, this development is also relatively new for many other fields, professional and otherwise, including the natural and applied sciences, business, and the social sciences. Whether there is a shift in the prevalence of these programs educating students through required or mandatory experiential education remains to be seen, however, the recent trends of vocationalism and market influences in higher education point towards this possibility. The Alberta 2030: Building Skills for Jobs strategy is a tangible example, with one of the goals intended to ensure that institutions "teach learners the future-proof skills and competencies they need for successful careers" (Government

of Alberta, 2021, p. 22) and "become the first province in Canada to offer access to work-integrated learning to 100 percent of students" (p. 23). With the expense and logistical challenges associated with the delivery of these programs, this is a lofty goal indeed. Regardless, the impact of emerging vocationalism and market influences on the experiences of these administrators, including the challenges these forces pose and the influence they may have on how and why the administrators support these programs, should also be represented within the conceptual framework.

In discussing *how* these administrators support, the primary focus of the administrators was on self-described leadership activities, which were, at times, often indistinguishable or closely intertwined with administrative activities. One point of variance between whether they were responsible for professional practicums or co-op programs, with the administrators responsible for practicums being far more involved in the educational content and structure of these experiences. Otherwise, their primary responsibilities largely aligned with those identified by Kallenberg (2015): (1) administrative activities, such as managing, monitoring, and controlling people, structures and processes, help to keep the organization running, (2) relational activities, such as trust-building and meetings with colleagues, maintain cohesion within the institution, (3) intervening activities, such as proposing new ideas for educational or administrative processes, help the administrator realize their vision, purpose and strategy, and (4), results-oriented activities focus on achieving specific goals or metrics, such as student performance or administrative efficiency. These activities can be broadly organized under the two major themes of 'administration' and 'leadership,' with administrative and results-oriented activities falling under the former and relational and intervening activities falling under the latter. Responding to challenges also influenced the ways in which the administrators support these

programs, such as Willow and Anderson's efforts to secure additional placements when the

number of students exceeded the number of available spots.

Figure 3 serves as an updated conceptual framework intended to further illustrate the

potential relationships between the various research questions.

Figure 3

Updated Conceptual Framework: Understanding the Role of the Academic Administrator
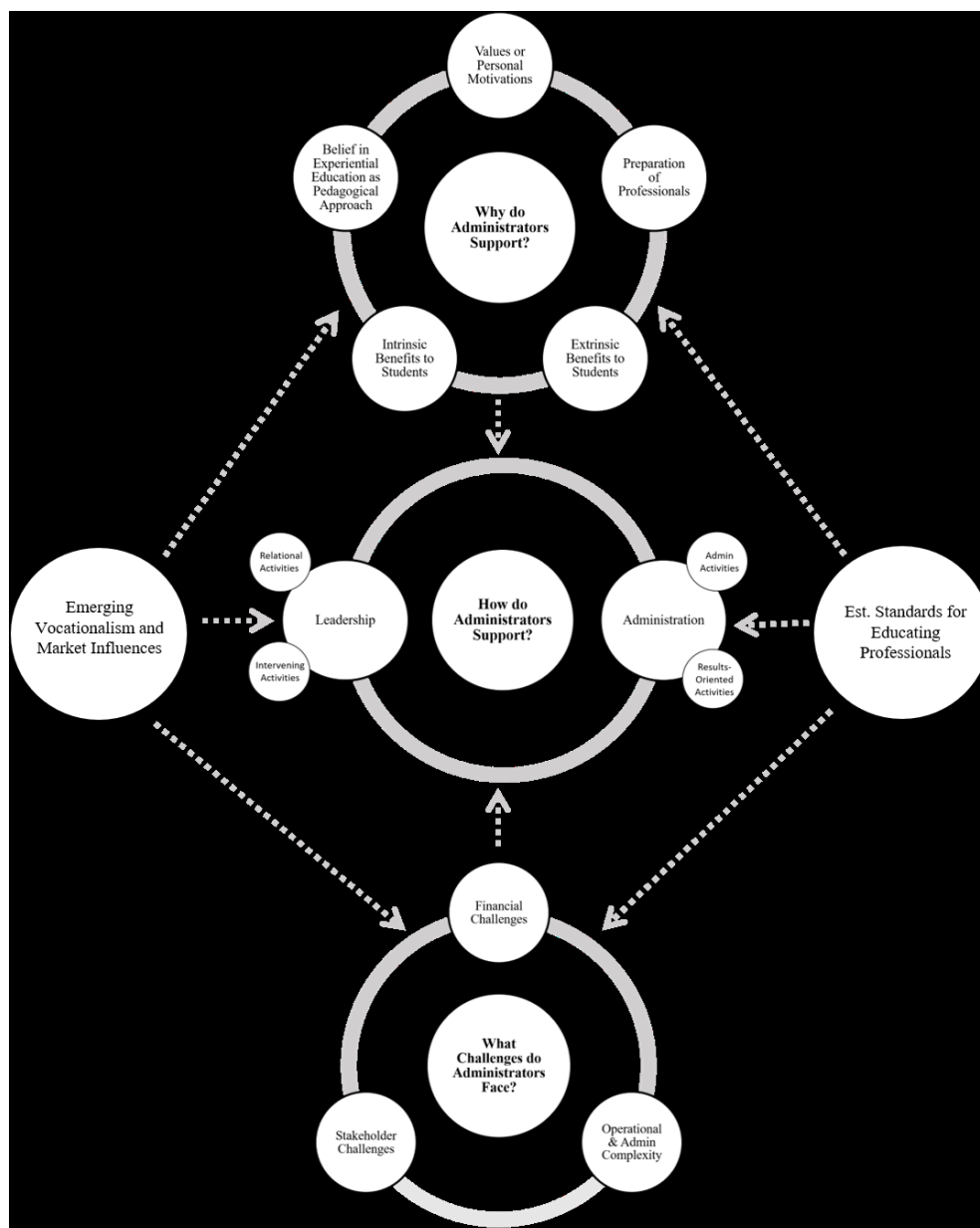
As was the case with the previous framework (see page 52 of this thesis), each large circle serves as a representation of one of the research questions of this study but also a key question towards understanding the motivations and lived experiences of the administrators. The small circles that surround each question serve as possible answers to each and have been updated to reflect the experiences of the administrators interviewed. 'Emerging vocationalism and market influences,' as well as 'established standards for educating professionals, ' have also been added to represent their potential impact on the experiences of the administrators. Additionally, the influence of *why* administrators support on *how* they support, as well as the influence of the *challenges* they face on *how* they focus their support, are now represented by the arrows within the diagram. The impact of 'emerging vocationalism and market influences' and 'established standards for educating professionals' on the reasons why the administrators support, how they support, and the challenges they face is also now represented by arrows between these factors and these questions.

Implications of the Study

The following section outlines a number of implications for post-secondary institutions, as well as academic administrators, that emerge from the analysis. Most immediately, the significant complexity and challenges involved in delivering these programs highlight the importance of appropriate training and preparation for the academic administrators responsible for leading these programs. Additionally, the pressure from stakeholders to expand these programs based on their perceived effectiveness in preparing students for their future careers necessitates an examination of how these programs could or should be structured to ensure that they meaningfully facilitate the experiential learning process rather than simply serving as a token response to stakeholder pressures.

Preparing Academic Administrators for Leading Experiential Education

Within the relatively small body of academic literature on the experiences of academic administrators, including associate deans, a significant focus is on the lack of formal training and preparation that administrators receive for their leadership roles (Jackson & Gmelch, 2003; Martin, 2022; Preston & Floyd, 2016; White, 2014). While training was not included as a part of the interview protocol, the nature of their administrative and managerial responsibilities, the complexity of the challenges described, and the possibility of significantly impacting student experience and stakeholder relationships warrant further discussion and investigation regarding how administrators responsible for experiential education programs are prepared for their roles.

In a survey of more than 1000 academic leaders, including associate deans, Morris and Laiple (2015) found that one of the areas in which respondents felt least well prepared was responding to appeals and grievances. While none of the administrators interviewed mentioned their own training or preparation, nor did any express feelings of being unprepared or unequipped for their roles, the majority mentioned addressing grievances and appeals as a significant part of their roles. A broader study of academic administrators responsible for experiential education programs is needed to verify that this responsibility is common between roles and institutions and how these administrators are formally and informally prepared for their roles. However, efforts focusing on the formal preparation of individuals in these roles may lessen the stress and difficulties associated with accepting an administrative position, including the necessity of on-the-job learning and imposter syndrome (Martin, 2022; Preston & Floyd, 2016; White, 2014).

Jackson and Gmelch (2003) propose three 'spheres of influence' that associate deans should develop in order to be successful:

(a) conceptual understanding of the unique roles and responsibilities; (b) the skills

necessary to achieve the results through working with faculty, staff, students, and other

administrators; and (c) the practice of reflection to learn from past experiences and

perfect the art of leadership. (p. 106)

In order to develop in these three 'spheres,' the authors propose a three-phase training model, addressing each stage of the leader's development: (1) pre-leadership training that prepares the administrator for their role, (2) 'induction' training on the skills needed for the first six months in their role, and (3) ongoing professional development training on leadership skills and abilities (Jackson & Gmelch, 2003). If adapted for the unique requirements of leading experiential education programs, this model may serve as a meaningful way to train and prepare associate deans for their responsibilities and lessen the stress and challenge many face.

Experiential Learning Theory, Significant Learning, and Experiential Education Programs

Experiential education, including work-integrated learning experiences, is seen by some as a panacea for the problems of modern post-secondary education, however, it is clear there is a great deal of complexity and intentional design behind the delivery of experiences that genuinely foster the experiential learning process. There are undoubtedly extrinsic and instrumental benefits to participation that are independent of student learning and may be sufficient in achieving the desired outcomes of students, faculties, institutions, and government, e.g., financial benefit, measures of employability, 'getting experience,' or even serving as a point of differentiation for institutions in the post-secondary market. Pressure from these stakeholders to expand necessitates an examination of how these programs could or should be structured to ensure that they meaningfully facilitate the experiential learning process rather than simply serving as a response to stakeholder pressures. Administrators seeking to develop experiential

education programs or improve students' learning experiences in them may want to examine their programs through the lens of experiential learning theory. Pre-existing models of experiential education, or Fink's (2013) approach to designing 'significant' learning experiences to ensure the extrinsic and instrumental benefits of these programs do not overshadow their intrinsic and educational benefits.

Kolb (2015) suggests that the key lesson of experiential learning theory for educational design is to create programs that address the entire experiential learning cycle. This lesson means that programs must provide students with an opportunity to shift from concrete experience (getting involved), to reflective observation (listening and reflecting), to abstract conceptualization (forming an idea), to active experimentation (making decisions) (Magro, 2001). According to Kolb, this approach allows students to utilize and develop all learning styles, facilitating a comprehensive and profound learning experience. Without an educational environment that appropriately fosters the experiential learning process, programs touting 'experiential learning' may be limited in their ability to produce deep learning for students.

Joplin's (1981) five-stage model for experiential education serves as a potential exemplar for teaching 'around' Kolb's experiential learning cycle. Educators hoping to develop or support experiential education programs may want to consider the intentional inclusion of the following stages for learners:

1. Focus: "presenting the task and isolating the attention of the learner for concentration. It defines the subject of study and prepares the student for encountering the challenging action that is to follow" (p. 18).

2. Action: "This stage places the learner in a stressful or jeopardy-like situation where he is unable to avoid the problem presented, often in an unfamiliar environment requiring new skills or the use of new knowledge" (p. 18).

3. Support: "Support provides security and caring in a manner that stimulates the learner to challenge himself and to experiment. Support demonstrates that the learner is not working alone but has human responsiveness that accepts personal risk taking" (p. 19).

4. Feedback: "Feedback provides information to the student about what he has been doing. It can include comments about how the student works, his manner of interactions, or the substance of his work. Feedback works best with an equalization of power between learner and facilitator" (p. 19).

5. Debrief: "Learning is recognized, articulated and evaluated... Debrief helps the student learn from experience. Debrief is a sorting and ordering of information, often involving personal perceptions and beliefs" (p. 19).

Work-integrated learning programs generally offer opportunities for focus through associated coursework, action through the work itself, support through staff and faculty, and feedback through evaluations. However, programs may also risk falling short in reflection and debrief, depending on their structure, especially if the experience is not actively integrated with teaching. According to Joplin, debrief may occur within the individual; however, in experiential education, debrief should be public, occurring through activities such as presentations, group discussions, shared personal journals, or class projects. While final reports, assignments, or evaluations can be useful, they may not fully enable the learning potential of integrated work experiences if they do not encourage reflection on the part of the learner. When conducted effectively, public debriefs can confirm and broaden the learner's insights, with reflection offering insights on future

actions. As Joplin (1981) writes, "experience alone is insufficient to be called experiential education, and it is the reflection process which turns experience into experiential education" (p. 17).

Similarly, Fink's (2013) approach to creating 'significant' learning experiences for students may serve to guide administrators hoping to improve students' learning. Attempting to address challenges with traditional instruction in higher education, Fink proposes that learning should result in a significant change for students; it should make "a difference in how people live -- and the kind of life they are capable of living" (p. 7). Rather than encouraging students to simply store course content in their short-term memory, long enough to make it to the end of the term, significant learning should become a part of how students think and behave and what they believe and value. This ambitious goal requires multiple types of learning by students -- six, in fact -- and instruction that helps students connect their learning directly to their life rather than just their coursework, drawing from current and previous experiences and linking new learning to future experiences. Fink observes that all significant learning can impact students' lives by enhancing their social interactions, preparing them for citizenship activities and work through the development of knowledge, skills and attitudes.

Addressing the limitations of the types of learning outlined in Bloom's taxonomy of learning, Fink (2007, 2013) provides his own taxonomy better suited for important learning, such as interpersonal and leadership skills, learning to learn, or adapting to change. These six types of learning include:

1. Foundational Knowledge: the information, ideas, facts, principles, or relationships that the student should understand and remember.

2. Application: the application of foundational knowledge through problem-solving, creative thinking, or decision-making.

3. Integration: the interaction and connection between theories, trends, ideas, people, or realms of life.

4. Human dimension: learning about oneself and how one interacts with others.

5. Caring: changing or developing new feelings, interests, or values.

6. Learning how to learn: becoming a better, more self-directed student and learner.

Rather than being hierarchical, as Bloom's taxonomy of learning is, the taxonomy of significant learning is interactive and relational, with each type of learning informing and strengthening each other type of learning. Through learning-centered, systematic and integrated design, any educational experience can address all six kinds of learning and promote a more significant learning experience. Learning goals for the course or experience should reflect the taxonomy of significant learning (e.g., 'through this experience, students will be able to relate this subject to other subjects and identify the personal and social implications of the subject), and learning activities should directly enable these goals. Feedback and assessment are also vital to the process and should focus on whether students can apply the content, have clear criteria and standards, and provide opportunities for self-assessment; it should also be frequent, immediate, discriminating, and delivered in a user-friendly manner.

As such, administrators seeking to provide significant learning experiences through their experiential education programs should work to address all six kinds of learning in these experiences, not just the foundational knowledge (and occasionally application) that is favoured in post-secondary education. These programs should also provide explicit learning goals that

reflect the six types of learning, provide learning activities that actively enable these goals, and provide feedback and assessment that assesses and reinforces these specific goals.

Limitations and Further Areas of Study

As is the case with many investigators who engage in qualitative research, I undertook this study to understand the constructed meaning that a particular phenomenon or experience has for a specific group of individuals, in this case, the experiences of academic administrators responsible for the delivery of experiential education programs in professional undergraduate faculties. Through interviews, I attempted to understand how the subjects construct and interpret their role in delivering these programs and the meaning they attribute to their own experiences in academic administration; however, this is only an initial step towards understanding the experiences of these administrators and those in similar roles.

Compared to quantitative research, which aims for large numbers of participants separated from their context, this qualitative study consisted of a small sample size of people "nested in their context and studied in-depth" (Miles et al., 2014, p. 31). My approach, as well as my small sample size, means that I am not able to seek statistical significance, identify causal relationships, or create a generalizable model; however, this was also not the intention of this study. These experiences are also 'nested' in the context of the University of Alberta, an institution undergoing significant change and upheaval. They may be dramatically different from the experiences of academic administrators at other institutions across the country and the world. This study has focused exclusively on Western paradigms and forms of experiential learning; a notable limitation is the absence of non-Western and Indigenous forms of experiential learning that have existed long before those explored here. Further study to address this gap, conducted by those better positioned to do so, would provide a more comprehensive and inclusive

understanding and application of experiential learning approaches within post-secondary education and point towards opportunities to decolonize and Indigenize our educational institutions, curriculum, and professions.

In addition, while my focus was intended to be on experiential education programs broadly, all of the administrators interviewed were responsible for work-integrated learning programs, and it is likely that their experiences differ from administrators responsible for other forms of experiential education such as project-based learning, place-based education, or service learning. Finally, my research questions were intended to serve as an initial exploration into the experiences of these administrators and were necessarily broad. As such, further studies could 'drill down' on any of the topics discussed by the interviewees, further revealing both conscious and unconscious beliefs and understandings about their experiences. Despite these limitations, as Crouch and McKenzie (2006) write, my small number of respondents was "the way in which analytic, inductive, exploratory studies are best done (p. 496), and I was able to generate 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973) of the administrators' experiences that point towards a variety of other areas of further study.

One such area of further study is the impact of the administrators' beliefs about the purpose of post-secondary education on their administrative and leadership practices. While questions regarding the 'purpose' of a university education were not part of the interview protocol, nor were they research questions, the benefits of participation in experiential education that the administrators expressed may serve as an indicator of their beliefs, conscious or otherwise. In turn, these beliefs may influence the administrator's actions as they carry out the responsibilities of their position.

Returning to Labaree's (1997) three 'competing' perspectives on the purpose of modern education, an administrator's focus on the extrinsic or instrumental benefits of participating in their programs, such as higher salaries or greater employability upon graduation, may hint towards the social mobility perspective that views education as a commodity, a private good distributed unequally and intended to provide its consumers with an advantage in competition over desirable social positions. An administrator who holds this perspective may focus their attention and action on increasing the advantages or rewards that participants of their program gain compared to those who do not participate. Similarly, a focus on preparing professionals for employment may point towards the social efficiency perspective that represents the interests of the taxpayer and employer and positions the role of schooling as the preparation of workers for productivity and economic contribution, i.e., human capital. An administrator with this perspective may focus their attention and actions on the explicit skills needed for employment rather than broader social questions relevant to their field.

It would certainly be understandable that the social mobility and social efficiency perspectives would be favoured by the administrators interviewed, especially when compared to the democratic equality perspective that emphasizes the preparation of young people for participation in a democratic society. The four administrators interviewed are responsible for professional programs explicitly intended for preparing professionals in specific fields. Combined with the growing influence of vocationalism and the shift for higher education to be more responsive to the demands of its 'consumers,' both seen in the Alberta 2030: Building Schools for Jobs plan, these programs, as well as their administrators, are primed to favour these perspectives. Related avenues of exploration include the experiences of administrators responsible for other experiential education opportunities, such as service learning or place-based

education, as well as a comparative study between administrators from professional faculties and administrators from liberal arts and science faculties. There is no doubt that these programs are also subject to the influences of vocationalism, human capital, and market influences; however, these programs with a grounding in the liberal arts and sciences may still demonstrate a more substantial influence of the democratic equality perspective and highlight the preferences of professional faculties and their administrators.

Similarly, the expressed benefits of participation in their programs may serve to highlight the impact of the administrators' understanding of learning and pedagogical theory, including experiential and active learning, on their administrative and leadership practices. While understandings of theory were not part of the interview protocol, nor were they research questions, a focus on the intrinsic benefits of these programs, including experiential learning processes being essential to education for the profession or resulting in more impactful education, may demonstrate a greater understanding of experiential education as a pedagogical approach. As such, these administrators may focus on fostering an environment that encourages experiential learning through reflection and active experimentation. Likewise, a focus on the extrinsic benefits of participation in these programs may demonstrate a lack of understanding of experiential education as a pedagogical approach, and the programs may not be as impactful or successful as they could be.

Lastly, the administrators' personal leadership styles and approaches have the potential to impact the delivery of their programs. While academic administration is generally understood to be a combination of administration and leadership functions, the degree of behaviours associated with leadership varied between the administrators interviewed. As this was neither a research question nor included in the interview protocol, data is limited, and no specific conclusions can

be reached. Additionally, the lack of agreement on what qualifies as management and what qualifies as leadership muddies the waters, and I made no effort to explore this differentiation in the limited time I had with the subjects. However, in describing their roles, multiple administrators described a greater number of functions associated with administration and management compared with leadership behaviours, indicating the possibility that the roles of these particular administrators may be more managerial than anticipated. Further study in this area would be required to draw specific conclusions about these positions and understand the impact of different styles on programs. For example, what impact would a servant leadership approach that puts followers first and helps them to develop to their full capacities have compared to an adaptive leadership approach that prepares and encourages people to adapt to change (Northouse, 2022)?

Mirroring the approach used by Floyd and Preston in multiple studies of academic administrators (2016, 2019), any or all of these topics could be further examined using a mixed-methods approach of semi-structured interviews followed by the distribution of a follow-up survey. This approach could yield both meaningful qualitative and quantitative data, shedding further light on the experiences of academic administrators responsible for overseeing experiential education programs. This approach could also be used to examine the experiences of administrators from across Canada and even further afield.

Conclusion

As described earlier in this thesis, I have a deep connection to the University of Alberta. I have completed an undergraduate degree, pursued graduate studies, and worked for more than ten years as an administrator at the institution; my interest in the topics explored in this thesis stems directly from various personal and professional experiences within the post-secondary

system. I have occupied various roles, primarily in professional faculties, and my current position involves the administration and management of experiential education alongside an academic administrator responsible for overseeing a work-integrated program.

All of this is to say the results of this study will directly inform my professional practices moving forward, both through understanding the challenges that other administrators face as well as the role of academic administrators in the delivery of their programs. This study has also caused me to examine my own underlying beliefs regarding the purpose of the university and experiential education programs. Considering Alberta's political climate and the creeping influence of vocationalism and market approaches to post-secondary, it can be challenging to look beyond the social mobility and social efficiency perspectives that seem to dominate in post-secondary. I hope that there continues to be room for democratic equality in post-secondary, one in which our schools continue to prepare young people for participation in an egalitarian, democratic society.

I was heartened by the dedication and student focus that the administrators all displayed. Despite the challenges of their position, and regardless of their faculty or the specific duties of their role, each administrator demonstrated a significant commitment to their profession and their program stakeholders. It behooves institutions to better support these individuals in their unique roles.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Experiential Learning in University Undergraduate Programs

1. Program Background (Structure and Stated Goals)

    a. Can you briefly describe the structure of the experiential learning opportunities for students in your program? How do these opportunities fit into the sequence of a students' undergraduate program?

    b. What are students typically expected to do during these opportunities?

    c. Why does your faculty offer opportunities for experiential learning?

    d. What are the desired outcomes of experiential learning? Upon completing these experiences, what should students know and be able to do?

    e. How are these desired outcomes determined and assessed?

    f. What role, if any, do post-graduation employment outcomes for students play in the delivery of these opportunities? Are these outcomes assessed?

    g. How do these opportunities socialize students to the expectations of the profession?

    h. If participation in these opportunities is optional, how are they advertised to students? How are students selected for participation?

2. Participant information (Personal Motivation)

    a. Why did you accept a leadership role related to experiential learning specifically?

    b. Can you briefly describe your role? How does your role support experiential learning opportunities for students in your undergraduate program?

c. Do you personally believe that experiential learning opportunities are important for undergraduate students? Why or why not?

3. Stakeholders

   a. Which groups do you consider to be stakeholders in experiential learning? Please consider stakeholders internal to the institution as well as external stakeholders, i.e. regulators, professional associations, government, etc.

   b. Why do these stakeholder groups support or participate in these opportunities?

   c. How are these stakeholders consulted or involved in the delivery of these opportunities?

   d. What are your stakeholders expectations of these opportunities? Assuming employers are a stakeholder, what are their expectations of participating students while in their employment?

   e. How are the desired outcomes of these opportunities communicated to stakeholders?

   f. What is your role in managing stakeholders and their expectations?

4. Challenges

   a. What challenges are presented by working with your various stakeholder groups? Do their expectations differ and/or conflict with each other? How do you overcome these challenges in your role?

b. What, if any, institutional factors serve as challenges in the delivery of
    experiential learning opportunities? How do you navigate these factors and
    overcome these challenges in your role?

c. Are there any other challenges involved in delivering experiential learning for
    students? How do you work to overcome these challenges in your role?

Appendix B: Participant Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Title of Study: Experiential Learning in University Undergraduate Programs

Contact Information

Principal Investigator: Torrey Dance, MEd student, Education Policy Studies
Mailing Address: 5-101 Education Centre – North, Edmonton AB, T6G 2G5
Email: torrey@ualberta.ca

Supervisor: Jorge Sousa
Mailing Address: 5-101 Education Centre – North, Edmonton AB, T6G 2G5
Phone: (780) 492-4905
Email: sousa@ualberta.ca

You are invited to take part in a research study. Before you take part, a member of the study team is available to explain the project, and you are free to ask any questions about anything you do not understand. You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?
You are being asked to take part in this study because you are an academic administrator responsible for the oversight of an experiential learning program in a faculty at the University of Alberta. Administrators have been selected to represent faculties offering a variety of work-integrated learning opportunities (cooperative education, internships, and field placements) at the institution, and occupy comparable positions within their faculty, i.e. Associate or Vice Dean of Experiential Learning, Cooperative Education, Field Placements, etc.

The purpose of this study is to examine what goes into supporting post-secondary student work-integrated learning opportunities in programs by institutional leaders at a large, publicly funded, research-intensive university.

What is the reason for doing the study?
Experiential education and work-integrated learning offer an avenue to provide meaningful work experience and build professional skills in undergraduate students prior to entering the

workforce. In order to be successful, programs must be implemented and supported by academic leaders in a manner that achieves the intended learning outcomes while navigating complex post-secondary organizations and considering the needs of a variety of stakeholders including students, employers, professional organizations, and government.

This study will examine how and why academic leaders support experiential learning opportunities for post-secondary students at a large, publicly funded, research-intensive university.

What will I be asked to do?
You are being invited to participate in a one-on-one interview via Zoom where you will be asked questions about the experiential learning program or opportunity offered by your faculty, the challenges of offering the program, how you overcome these challenges, and why you support your program as an academic administrator. The conversation will be recorded and transcribed word-for-word using Zoom auto-transcription, the transcript will be verified and corrected using audio recordings, and then returned to you via email along with a summary. You will have two weeks to make any changes or revisions as you see fit, and following that, we will confirm with you that the transcript is accurate. Once confirmed, the transcript will become part of our data set.

Interviews will last approximately 60 minutes, depending on what you have to say, and will take place virtually using Zoom. You will have the option to turn off your camera at any time.

What are the risks and discomforts?
As one of the interview areas will involve a discussion of the challenges of offering work-integrated learning programs or opportunities (e.g., institutional factors that thwart experiential learning opportunities and outcomes for students, pressure from stakeholder groups, etc.) there is a possible risk of damage to professional reputation if anonymity is not adequately maintained. Participant identity cannot be completely guaranteed because of participant numbers (up to ten) and the fact that all individuals are from within the University of Alberta academic community. While the researcher will do their best to de-identify the participants, certain statements and experiences shared could possibly reveal their identity.

The appropriate handling and storage of field notes, transcripts and audio recordings will be ensured by the research team, and audio recordings being erased/deleted after the requisite 5 years. Anonymity will be maintained in any subsequent publications. Participants will also have the opportunity to review interview transcripts and may choose to withdraw some or all of their responses (see below). It is not possible to know all the risks that may happen in a study, but we have taken all reasonable safeguards to minimize any known risks to you.

What are the benefits to me?
There may not be any direct benefit to you for participating in this research. However, participants may find it helpful to share and explore their understanding of experiential learning and the role it plays in their academic programs. You will also be able to discuss your role in supporting the success of your faculty's program and how have overcome challenges.

While experiential education is broadly emphasized and implemented in the University setting, there is a scholarship gap when it comes to the organizational dynamics that impact the implementation and ongoing support of these programs. This research would be a step towards understanding some of the factors that support and thwart these programs.

Do I have to take part in the study?
Being in this study is your choice. If you decide to take part, you can change your mind and stop being in the study at any point prior to interviews being conducted. To withdraw from the study please contact Torrey Dance at torrey@ualberta.ca.

Even if you remain in the research study, you may choose to withdraw some or all of your responses. Interview transcripts will be sent to you via email, and you will have two weeks to review the contents and remove, change, or withdraw anything that you like. We are unable to remove your answers after that time because the information will become part of the data set and the analysis will be in-progress/complete.

Will I be paid to be in the research?
There will be no payment for interviews.

Will my information be kept private?
During this study we will do everything we can to make sure that all information you provide is kept private. No information relating to this study that includes your name will be released outside of the researcher's office or published by the researchers unless you give us your express permission. Sometimes, by law, we may have to release your information with your name so we cannot guarantee absolute privacy. However, we will make every legal effort to make sure that your information is kept private

When your interview is transcribed, we will assign a pseudonym (fake name) to protect your identity. If you would like to choose your own fake-name, please say so in the interview. If you would like us to use your real name, please indicate this on the signed consent form on the last page of this document.

During analysis, electronic data will be stored on a secure Google drive at the University of Alberta.

The information from this study will be seen only by members of the research group. On occasion, this data will need to be checked for accuracy. For this reason, your data, including your name, may also be looked at by people from the Research Ethics Board.

What will happen to the information or data that I provide?

The information you provide will form part of Mr. Torrey Dance's thesis for his Masters in Education Policy Studies. It may also be used as part of public or academic presentations, in news or academic publications, as well as for examples during teaching. At no point will you or your faculty be identified in this work. However, please understand that there are a limited

number of undergraduate programs offering work-integrated learning programs at the University of Alberta, so others may make assumptions based on anonymized information.

After the study is done, we will store your data for a minimum of 5 years. Any physical papers and transcripts will be stored in locked cabinets in the Faculty of Education at the University of Alberta. These papers will be securely shredded after the project is complete. Electronic data will be stored on a secure University of Alberta Google drive. The data will be stored for at least 5 years but may be kept longer for future research. Your name will never be associated with any electronic data. Any researcher who wants to use this data in the future must have the new project reviewed by an ethics board

What if I have questions?
If you have any questions about the research now or later, please contact Torrey Dance (torrey@ualberta.ca) or his supervisor Dr Jorge Sousa (sousa@ualberta.ca). You are also welcome to leave a message on Dr. Sousa's voicemail at (780) 492-4905 and your call will be returned.

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you may contact the University of Alberta Research Ethics Office at reoffice@ualberta.ca and quote Ethics ID Pro00124675. This office is independent of the study investigators.

How do I indicate my agreement to be in this study?

By signing below, you understand:

- That you have read the above information and have had anything that you do not understand explained to you to your satisfaction.
- That you will be taking part in a research study.
- That you may freely leave the research study at any time.
- That you do not waive your legal rights by being in the study
- That the legal and professional obligations of the investigators and involved institutions are not changed by your taking part in this study.

SIGNATURE OF STUDY PARTICIPANT

_____   Pseudonym (if necessary) _____
Name of Participant

_____   _____
Signature of Participant   Date

SIGNATURE OF PERSON OBTAINING CONSENT

_____   _____
Name of Person Obtaining Consent   Contact Number

A copy of this information and consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

Appendix C: Ethics Approval

ARISE: Your Ethics Application is Approved Pro00124675

arise@ualberta.ca   Mon, Nov 7, 2022, 11:37 AM
to me ▾

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

Ethics Application has been Approved

ID: Pro00124675

Title: Experiential Learning in University Undergraduate Programs Project

Study Investigator: Torrey Dance

                       This is to inform you that the above study has been approved.

Description: Click on the link(s) above to navigate to the workspace.

                       Please do not reply to this message. This is a system-generated email that cannot receive replies.

University of Alberta
Edmonton Alberta
Canada T6G 2E1

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Appendix D: Theme Development Process

Braun and Clarke (2006) outline a six-phased approach to thematic analysis, which was used to guide the analysis conducted for this study:

7. **Familiarize yourself with the data** through transcription, reading, and rereading, noting initial ideas as they arise.

8. **Generate initial codes** across the data set, connecting it to relevant extracts.

9. **Search for themes** by collating the identified codes and relevant extracts.

10. **Review themes** in relation to the extracts from Steps 1 and 2, generating a thematic map.

11. **Define and name themes** to refine specifics and the story the analysis conveys, generating definitions and names for each.

12. **Produce the report,** relating the analysis to the research questions and literature.

The following sections provide a brief overview of the analysis conducted in phases one through five of the outlined process, with the majority of Chapter 4 reflecting the sixth and final phase.

Familiarizing Myself with the Data

The primary data sources used in this study were the transcripts of the four semi-structured interviews conducted with the academic administrators. The automated transcription function within the online meeting platform Zoom was used to create the initial transcripts; however, relying on the audio recording, significant corrections were needed to ensure the accuracy of the transcripts. I became familiar with the data through this process, followed by multiple read-throughs of the completed transcripts. Guided by my research questions, I began to identify initial ideas during this process that would later turn into codes, including various intrinsic and instrumental benefits of experiential education, primary areas of responsibility as

well as motivation for the administrators, and the various operational and stakeholder challenges that the administrators described in the context of their roles.

Generating Initial Codes

Following the process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), in which codes are used to identify the most basic semantic and latent elements of the raw data, and guided by my research questions, I was able to generate more than 200 initial codes across the four transcripts. Based on my research questions, as well as the ideas generated during phase one of the process, I had four broad 'buckets' in which the codes could fit: (1) administrator role and responsibility, (2) expressed reasons for offering and supporting programs, (3) challenges in program delivery, and (4) 'miscellaneous' for codes that did not fit into these buckets but were still notable. For example, based on the research question, *how do academic administrators see their role in supporting these opportunities* I identified codes related to 'roles and responsibilities' (e.g., administration, leadership, management, outreach, support, curriculum) and collated relevant excerpts from the data for each code. Appendix E: Thematic Analysis Overview contains a complete list of codes and associated themes.

Searching for Themes

Once the transcripts were coded and the data collated, I sorted and combined the codes within each bucket into 'candidate' themes and subthemes. This process, as explained by Braun and Clarke (2006), was intended to refocus the analysis at a broader level than the coding process. I initially began this process with a pen-and-paper mind map for each of the buckets, but based on the number of codes and excerpts, as well as the cross-over between the buckets, I shifted to spreadsheet software so the codes and excerpts could be quickly sorted and re-sorted. For example, candidate themes produced during this phase for the 'roles and responsibilities'

bucket included 'academic policy,' 'operations,' and 'leadership.' Candidate subthemes for the 'academic policy' theme included 'creating policy' and 'navigating policy,' subthemes for 'operations' included 'management,' 'supervision,' and 'support,' and subthemes for 'leadership' included 'setting direction,' 'strategy,' and 'motivation.'

Reviewing Themes

Once candidate themes were identified, they were then reviewed for internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity, that is, was there internal consistency of data *within* themes, and were there clear distinctions *between* themes? This fourth phase of the process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) requires two levels of review: (1) reviewing the coded data extracts for each theme to ensure they form a coherent pattern and (2) reviewing the validity of the themes in consideration of the data set to ensure the themes 'work' and accurately capture the meaning present in the data. Through this process, and with the benefit of having a clear sense of my themes and subthemes, I reread my entire data set, reviewing at both of the previously identified levels and was able to refine my themes further, re-code some data and assign codes to additional data that had been missed. This process also allowed me to 'pare down' the significant number of codes initially generated to a more workable number, roughly 100 individual codes across the four 'buckets'.

Returning to my previous example of the 'roles and responsibilities' bucket, due to the crossover in tasks and hazy boundaries between them, I decided to collapse the candidate themes of 'academic policy' and 'operations' into 'administration' and additional codes such as 'outreach' and 'consultation' were assigned to this new theme. Additionally, the candidate subthemes initially identified for the 'administration' and 'leadership' themes collapsed as I

deemed the differences between specific tasks, roles, or functions within these themes as relatively unimportant at the analysis level.

Defining and Naming Themes

Phase five of the process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) consists of identifying the 'essence' of each theme and clarifying what is interesting or notable about each theme. This process considers how each theme fits into the broader story of the data and relates to the research questions to define what each theme is and is not clearly. Returning to our example for one final time, I determined that the 'administration' theme should include all operational and day-to-day functions and tasks the administrator was either personally responsible for or oversaw, and the 'leadership' theme should include functions or characteristics commonly understood to be associated with modern definitions of people-leadership, both positional and influence-based. These two themes are meaningful for the analysis as they illustrate two distinct yet essential functions that will contribute to the success of an academic administrator, but also two areas in which administrators typically receive no formal training or preparation.

Appendix E: Thematic Analysis Overview

Research Question	Theme	Code
(1) What are the perceived or expressed reasons why academic administrators support experiential education programs for students in undergraduate professional programs?	Extrinsic Benefits	Employability
		Financial Benefit
		Higher salary on graduation
		North American Work Experience (for international students)
		Post Graduation Outcomes
		Program Supports: coaching, intervention and support
	Intrinsic Benefits	Application of theory and knowledge into practice
		Career exploration
		Developing Maturity
		Development of Communication Skills
		Development of Critical Thinking
		Development of Cultural competence
		Development of Decision making
		Development of Delegation
		Development of Professional Ethics
		Development of Professionalism
		Development of Resilience
		Development of Teamwork Skills
		Mentorship

		Opportunity for reflection
		Preparation for work
		Socialization into profession
		Technical competencies taught for profession
		Understanding Scope of practice
	Personal Motivations and Understandings of EL	Changing the definition of work experience
		Commitment to the profession
		Desire to align classroom experience with WIL
		Desire to improve professional practices
		Desire to work with students / student centeredness
		EL essential to education for the profession
		EL results in more impactful education
		Expanding the reach of program
		Experiential learning as pedagogy
		Improving society
		Knowledge translation
		Personal connection to experiential learning
		Personal experience in program
		Power and authority to make things better for students
		Practice-based profession
		Reforming [profession] education
	Administration	Addressing and Overcoming Challenges

(2) How do these administrators see their role in supporting these opportunities?		Assessing Instructors
		Exceptional Circumstances and Exceptions to Policy
		External engagement, consultation and outreach
		Finding Placements
		Guiding curriculum
		Interventions / Student Behaviour / Issues in the Workplace
		Management and Oversight of Staff
		Managing and navigating stakeholder expectations
		Navigating and Creating Faculty Policy
		Navigating University Policy
		Program improvement
		Responding to and Addressing Concerns with Program Delivery
		Setting evaluation standards
		Supporting struggling students
	Leadership	Leadership
		Setting Program Direction
		Strategy
		Support and encouragement of instructors and faculty members
(3) What are the challenges these	Administrative, Institutional,	Capacity, Program Size, and/or Availability of Placements (incl. supervisors)

leaders see in the administration and delivery of these programs?	and Operational Complexity	Conflicts Between Job Application Systems / Loosening Control of Job Applications
		COVID
		Enforced Equity Across Faculties and Programs
		Enrollment Management and Expected Growth
		Integration with Academics
		Logistical Complexity
		Quality of Placements and/or Mentors
		Restructuring and Uncertainty of Centralization
		Scaling Up / Growth
		Speed of Institutional Change and Responsiveness
	Financial considerations	Budget Cuts
		Cost of Program Delivery
		Expense for Students and Student Finances
		Institutional Funding Model
		University Fee Structure
	Stakeholder expectations	Conflicting expectations between different stakeholders
		Employer expectations of experience
		Government expectations of program
		Instructor expectations of experience
		Student Expectations b/c they pay to participate
		Student expectations of experience

(4) Additional Findings	Additional Benefits	Better educated students
		Differentiation from competitor institutions
		Economic Contributions
		Faculty Reputation
		Institutional benefits
		Opportunity for the profession to grow
		Recruiting more into the profession
		Student Recruitment
	Program and Outcomes Evaluation	Employment and salary
		Evaluation of Outcomes (Lack of)
		Exit surveys of graduates
		Formal evaluation of ability/competence
		Lack of comparison between WIL and non-WIL students
		Post-graduation assessments
		Program Quality Evaluation
	Student Competition	Challenge: equity and competition
		Competition between students
		In-group and out-group