

Highlights from Spring Perspectives on Active Learning 2019

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In the fall of 2017, I had the pleasure of embarking on the most unique and memorable academic experience I've had so far at Western: a Community-Engaged Learning (CEL) course. The course was English 3580F – Creativity & the Local with Professor Manina Jones.

Some of the highlights were the field trips (Museum of Ontario Archaeology, Weldon Archives – Rare Books, Museum London, and Eldon House); guest lectures (local authors, artists, and small publishing presses); and a mental map assignment. But, by far, the best part of the course for me was the placement with a community partner.

The class was invited to rank our top choices; there were organizations such as the Grand Theatre, WordsFest, Poetry London, and many more! Given the breadth of opportunities, it wasn't easy to select even a top three, however—for me—it was an easy decision, and I was lucky enough to be assigned to my top choice: the Grit Uplifted Creative Writing group, sponsored by the London InterCommunity Health Centre. The structured reflections and supportive learning environment cemented the application of course concepts and learning outcomes, which only strengthened the benefits of this active learning experience.

Some of the learning outcomes, specific both to the course and my particular placement included: an enriched understanding of local literature and culture; involvement within the community and the chance to give back; honing of professional skills, such as collaboration, project management, and communication, to name just a few; a more clear-cut understanding of the types of career options for liberal arts grads; the opportunity to see a project through from conception to execution; the chance to be creative; and facilitation skills, both throughout my placement and in a class presentation.

In terms of instructor support, Manina was phenomenal. Students were given encouragement and detailed feedback at each step of the process, along with thoughtful, guided reflection exercises, designed to reinforce the value of our active learning tasks and increase our understanding of the impact of each experience. Emphasis was certainly placed on the transferrable skills we were gaining, in order to increase our employability after undergrad. Not only did we have support from the professor, we also had our community partner and an Experiential Learning staff member as resources with whom to consult.

Overall, the CEL course I took was an incredible experience that truly embodied the concept of active learning. I believe that Arts & Humanities could benefit from a wider variety of CEL courses that allow for active, community-based learning experiences that prime students for the world of work, as well as demonstrating the multitude of career opportunities available.