

# Community Consultation Overview Report

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## **Experiential Learning at St. Francis Xavier University**

### **Community Consultation Overview Report**

Prepared for: Experiential Learning Advisory Committee (ELAC)

Date: March 3, 2026

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## Executive Summary

Between October and December 2025, St. Francis Xavier University conducted structured consultations with faculty, students, and alumni stakeholders as part of the Experiential Learning (EL) Project. The purpose was to understand how experiential learning is currently delivered, experienced, and supported across the institution, and to identify structural gaps requiring attention in the development of a comprehensive EL strategy.

Consultations confirm that experiential learning at StFX is extensive, deeply embedded across faculties, and highly valued by faculty, students, and alumni. Co-op, service learning, clinical placements, undergraduate research, simulations, applied projects, and lab-based experiences are widespread.

At the same time, consultations identified recurring structural gaps related to coordination, workload, risk management clarity, student access, reporting alignment, equity barriers, and documentation of community partnerships. One significant reporting gap—the absence of a clear typology classification for lab-based and simulation-based curricular EL—was addressed during the consultation process through a lab classification clarifier approved by Deans and the EL Steering Committee.

This report consolidates what was heard. It does not provide recommendations. Findings will inform the development of a comprehensive institutional requirements framework and the StFX Experiential Learning Strategy.

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## 1. Purpose of This Report

This report provides a comprehensive synthesis of consultation findings across three evidence sources:

- Faculty consultation sessions (November–December 2025)
- Student focus group synthesis report (October 2025)
- Alumni engagement framework and related strategic data

The objectives of this report are to:

- Present a detailed, defensible account of what was heard.
- Identify institutional gaps and structural challenges.
- Highlight areas of cross-group alignment.
- Establish a clear evidence base for the development of the StFX Experiential Learning Strategy.

No assumptions have been introduced beyond what is reflected in the consultation materials.

## 2. Faculty Consultation Findings

### 2.1 Experiential Learning is Deeply Embedded

Faculty consistently emphasized that experiential learning is not new at StFX. It exists in multiple forms:

- Co-op and internship models.
- Service learning and community-engaged courses.
- Clinical placements and practica.
- Lab-based experiential learning.
- Simulation-based coursework.
- Undergraduate research.
- Applied industry projects.
- Consulting-style capstones.
- Field schools and field visits.

Experiential learning was described as academically integral, not supplemental.

### 2.2 Co-op and Service Learning as Structured Models

Co-op and Service Learning were frequently cited as examples of EL models that:

- Have defined processes.

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- Include established community/employer relationships.
- Provide administrative coordination.
- Offer clear student recognition structures.

Faculty identified these models as more sustainable due to centralized support. In contrast, other forms of EL often rely on individual faculty effort.

## 2.3 Administrative and Coordination Gaps

A recurring theme across faculties was the administrative burden associated with experiential learning when not centrally coordinated.

Tasks identified include:

- Securing and maintaining placements.
- Drafting agreements and waivers.
- Managing onboarding requirements.
- Ensuring insurance and liability clarity.
- Preparing students for professional conduct.
- Troubleshooting issues mid-placement.
- Maintaining community relationships.
- Tracking participation for reporting.

Faculty repeatedly described this work as occurring “off the side of the desk.”

Programs with dedicated coordination staff (e.g., Nursing clinical coordination, certain Coady initiatives) were described as more stable and less vulnerable to burnout or program fragility.

This indicates a coordination gap rather than a lack of EL activity.

## 2.4 Community Partnership Sustainability

Faculty described community partnerships as foundational assets built over years through trust and reciprocity.

However, they raised concerns about:

- Institutional memory loss when faculty retire or change roles.
- Lack of centralized documentation of agreements.
- Uneven clarity around expectations.
- Informal reliance on personal relationships.
- Risk exposure when expectations are unclear.

Faculty emphasized that community relationships are institutional, not individual, assets.

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## 2.5 Risk Management and Institutional Responsibility

Variation exists across programs in:

- Student safety preparation.
- Insurance coverage clarity.
- Incident response protocols.
- Community supervision expectations.
- Documentation standards.

Some programs operate within professional accreditation frameworks; others do not.

Faculty indicated that off-campus EL carries institutional liability and should not rest solely at the course level.

## 2.6 Typology Reporting Gap (Lab and Curricular EL)

Multiple consultations highlighted difficulty mapping the following to provincial EL learning typologies:

- Structured teaching labs.
- Simulation-based coursework.
- Inquiry-based advanced labs.
- Embedded applied course projects.

Faculty expressed concern that lab-based and classroom-embedded experiential learning was being undercounted or forced into inappropriate categories. This was identified as a reporting and classification gap, not a delivery gap.

In response, the institution developed and approved a lab classification clarifier:

- Introductory/structured labs → Simulation
- Inquiry-based/advanced labs → Undergraduate Experiential Research

This adjustment was supported by Deans and the EL Steering Committee and implemented prior to strategy completion to ensure accurate representation.

## 3. Student Focus Group Findings

### 3.1 High Value Placed on Experiential Learning

Students described experiential learning as:

- Essential for connecting theory to practice.
- Critical for confidence-building.

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- Important for career readiness.
- Valuable for resumes and interviews.

They see EL as preparation for transition to employment or graduate study.

## 3.2 Awareness and Access Barriers

Students repeatedly described information as:

- Scattered.
- Circular.
- Dependent on knowing the “right person.”
- Uneven across faculties.

Requests included:

- A centralized hub.
- Integration with MyData/Banner.
- Clear contacts and step-by-step instructions.
- Early awareness (Year 1).

Students emphasized that missing deadlines due to lack of visibility is common.

## 3.3 Recognition and Credit

Students indicated:

- EL participation increases when credit-bearing.
- Transcript notation matters.
- Volunteer and society leadership roles should count.
- Degree-focused peers prioritize activities tied to academic requirements.
- Recognition is directly tied to participation rates.

## 3.4 Timing and Progression

Students prefer a scaffolded approach:

- Exposure in early years.
- Deeper engagement later.
- Not waiting until fourth year.

They described a desire for “a little every year.”

## 3.5 Equity and Accessibility Barriers

Barriers identified:

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- Financial cost (unpaid placements, travel, materials).
- Scheduling conflicts with work and course load.
- Transportation challenges.
- Confidence barriers.
- Uneven program access.

International students emphasized:

- Information fragmentation.
- Added financial pressures.
- Desire for structured in-class EL.
- Clear eligibility guidance.

## 4. Alumni Engagement Findings

Alumni data indicates:

- Strong interest in supporting students.
- Preference for clear, defined roles.
- Desire for flexibility in engagement.
- Interest in tangible student impact.
- Willingness to engage at varying levels of commitment.

Alumni engagement pathways include:

- Guest speakers and panels.
- Mentorship and mock interviews.
- Hosting internships and applied projects.

Alumni engagement aligns strongly with student demand for career-linked EL.

## 5. Cross-Group Alignment

### 5.1 Shared Belief in EL Value

Faculty, students, and alumni all see EL as central to:

- Career readiness.
- Confidence development.
- Applied learning.
- Institutional distinctiveness.

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## 5.2 Structure and Clarity as Enablers

Faculty: Sustainability requires coordination.  
Students: Participation requires clear navigation.  
Alumni: Engagement requires defined expectations.

All groups identify structure as critical.

## 5.3 Variability and Inconsistency

Faculty describe uneven support structures. Students describe uneven access.

Both observe cross-faculty variability.

## 6. Identified Institutional Gaps

Based strictly on consultation data:

1. Administrative Coordination
2. Community Partnership Documentation
3. Risk Management Consistency
4. Student Information and Navigation
5. Recognition and Transcript
6. Equity and Accessibility
7. Typology Classification (lab/simulation) — now addressed
8. Reporting and Tracking
9. Workload Recognition

These are structural gaps, not gaps in faculty commitment or student interest.

## 7. Conclusion

Consultations confirm that experiential learning at StFX is a defining institutional strength. Faculty commitment is strong, student interest is high, and alumni engagement potential is significant. The gaps identified are structural rather than cultural. Addressing these structural requirements through a coordinated institutional strategy will position StFX to strengthen experiential learning in a sustainable, equitable, and accountable manner over the next five years.

## 8. Next Steps

1. Incorporate employer consultation data to complete the multi-stakeholder evidence base.

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2. Develop a comprehensive institutional requirements framework that translates the gaps identified in this report into a clear articulation of the administrative, risk, reporting, equity, and partnership supports necessary to sustain experiential learning at StFX.

3. Develop the StFX Experiential Learning Strategy. The strategy will articulate what experiential learning should look like at StFX over the next five years and how the institution will move from current state to future state. It will reflect the vision identified with ELAC, address the concerns and opportunities surfaced through consultations, and outline phased actions to strengthen coordination, equity, reporting alignment, and community engagement. The strategy will define priorities, timelines, and institutional roles required to meet faculty and student needs while ensuring sustainable growth and accountability.

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