

OUR APPROACH TO EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

NEWSLETTER #4 – JUNE 2021



FSAE organized a fair with beekeeping products on world bee day. Photo: Facebook FSAE

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING IN HAITI FROM QUISQUEYA UNIVERSITY

Our pilot university partners continue to implement innovative changes to their educational models. Of the five elements of success shared by the Transforming Higher Education Project, the Quisqueya University (UniQ) in Haiti is systematically incorporating **experiential learning** as the principal educational pedagogy of the Faculty of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences (FSAE in French).

We interviewed Absalon Pierre, director of research and pedagogy of the FSAE at Quisqueya University and project facilitator at UniQ, who told us about the work of this institution that has been able to go from less than 100 students before 2011 to more than 200 today.

The FSAE is one of the oldest faculties of the university, even going back to the conception of Quisqueya. With their mission directed to being the catalyst for important changes in Haiti's agricultural and agribusiness sector that will improve the lives of farmers and their families, the university leaders believed that it was necessary to implement measures that would keep young people interested in and excited about a career that has been generally ignored and discriminated against in Haiti.

How have you integrated experiential learning at Quisqueya University?

Experiential learning has been integrated into Quisqueya University (Université Quisqueya in French) through the FSAE. In this faculty, this type of learning is mandatory in all classes and its teachers must develop study plans that integrate it effectively. For this, a syllabus was developed, and must be implemented by 100% of the professors.

What challenges have they obtained when implementing this type of learning in students?

The first months were a bit difficult for everyone because of the level of involvement that it implies. Students have become accustomed to a type of learning where the teacher is the one who gives everything, while in this model it's focused on the work that they do.

How have the teachers been involved? Do they have comments from people from other faculties?

For some professors, the change was very easy because they do have the sense of putting theory into practice. With them, even if we are short on resources there are many things that can be accomplished. They use everything around them to achieve their goals.

For others, we're still lacking a lot to perform this type of activity effectively. We still have deficiencies such as farms, laboratories, materials... But usually, it's an adaptation problem. Members of other careers like what we're doing. They watch and copy.

What benefits have you seen from implementing experiential learning so far?

Students are more involved and more practical. The professor does less work, which translate to more time to focus in supporting and guiding. Everyone is looking for the best strategy to make their learning more effective and more practical.

What types of activities are done in the communities?

We've executed vaccination campaigns for chickens, rabbit production, agro-environmental and product exhibitions, production of rabbit food, agricultural diagnostics, production of disease-resistant seed varieties, among others.

Have you established alliances with the private and public institutions?

We have built an alliance with the Ministry of Agriculture of Haiti. In addition, with a beverage production company, with a technical school in agriculture with great facilities for student and teacher internships in the center of the country called Zanmi Agrikol and other companies.

How have they handled the pandemic situation?

We have been very respectful of national and international measures. COVID forced us to change many learning methods and to implement virtual classes, for example.

For more information on the activities of the FSAE make sure to follow their page on [Facebook!](#)

Pictured in the photo on the right are sweet cookies made of flour and honey, cassava, and potatoes. All are natural and local products exhibited during an agricultural and craft fair organized by the FSAE.





Students from the Technological Institute of Conkal in Mexico and the Quisqueya University in Haiti putting experiential learning methods into practice

ENCOURAGING CONVERSATIONS ON EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING IN OUR SOCIAL NETWORKS

The Experiential Learning Networking Group (ELNG) on Facebook is one of the 3 groups created by the Transforming Higher Education Project to share principles, experiences, information and publications on these key elements of success. ELNG is a platform or venue for meaningful discussions or conversations on the potential and power of experiential learning (EL) as a significant pedagogy to help transform higher education.

The project has listed explicitly 7 objectives or aims for the ELNG (these are verbatim and can be found on the page) as a social media platform or venue for:

1. Developing a conceptual understanding of the distinctive attributes of Experiential Learning;
2. Initiating awareness-enhancing conversations around the possible university contexts in which different Experiential Learning strategies may be implemented;
3. Exercising an in-depth examination of specific models and approaches for integrating Experiential Learning in higher education curricular frameworks;
4. Analyzing the considerations that must be observed for successful Experiential Learning integration in higher education pedagogical schemes;
5. Recognizing the complex and profound nature of reflection and appreciating its intrinsic role in Experiential Learning cycles;
6. Exploring virtual Experiential Learning opportunities using effective educational technologies and online platforms; and
7. Appreciating the effectiveness of Professional Learning Communities as collaborative and inquiry-driven professional support structures for enhancing Experiential Learning in higher education.

The Experiential Learning group is aimed at professors, teachers, and students interested in learning and sharing about their experiences with this pedagogy in agriculture and life sciences at universities globally.

“Currently the group has over 450 members and it’s open to all people who have graduated from university or college, and those who are working on non-academic workplaces that have powerful experiences or stories on experiential learning which have “marked” their lives for the better. We also accept students who share this same vision,” says Joy Jamago, the primary group admins and facilitator, who guarantees that sharing and discussions on relevant topics is stimulating and fluid.

Any accepted member can participate by making a comment, posting photos and videos, sharing articles and information, or asking questions, as long as it’s relevant to the group’s objectives. To become a member of this group you can join by clicking on this [link](#).

“I believe that the platform can be a very powerful place for meaningful learning, when used appropriately and responsibly. This perspective is also shared by the project leaders. Conversations that are less formal could encourage more engagement, I think, especially members’ personal stories are what we want to read the most,” Jamago closes.

TACTICS TO IMPLEMENT EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING IN TIMES OF COVID-19

One of the main challenges that universities have experienced in times of pandemic has been to continue with their experiential teaching methods despite sanitary restrictions imposed around the world. As we have seen in the last issues of this newsletter, various institutions have adapted their models to guarantee students an experience where they can continue learning, adhering to the key elements of success.

We invite you to review the [following](#) webinar entitled Experiential Learning in Times of COVID, in which we discuss some of the main lessons of teaching in this “new normal”.

We also invite you to watch our Webinar on Experiential Learning in Agriculture Education which can be found by clicking this [link](#).

VIDEO UPDATE ON OUR WEBSITE

As part of our efforts to have relevant and up-to-date teaching materials, we updated the Knowledge Sharing section of our website with new videos that address topics related to the five elements of success promoted by the Transforming Higher Education Project.

We include presentations on topics such as: What is community engagement? The role of universities in the production of ethical leaders; Basic Competencies and Skills Needed for an Entrepreneurial Education in Agriculture and much more. To see the audiovisuals, please follow this [link](#).

