



Building Infrastructure for Experiential Learning at Scale

A Strategic Guide for Institutional Leaders

ABOUT SYMPPLICITY MINDSET

At Symplicity, we believe that experiential learning is not just a pedagogical strategy - it's a transformational force for institutions, communities, and students alike. Through **Symplicity Mindset** we partner with post-secondary institutions to advance the theory, design, and strategic integration of experiential learning. Our team brings deep expertise in research, program development, and educational consulting to help institutions reimagine the student experience as a vehicle for equity, purpose, and lifelong growth.

As part of the broader Symplicity ecosystem, Mindset works in tandem with **Symplicity Outcome**, the enabling platform that operationalizes experiential learning at scale. Together, we support institutions in turning experiential learning into measurable institutional insight, verified student records, and a strategic advantage in student success.

Let's begin the journey toward a more connected, reflective, and impactful future for experiential learning on your campus.

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INTRODUCTION

The Moment for Experiential Learning

Higher education is undergoing a profound shift. As students, employers, and communities call for more meaningful, applied, and equitable learning experiences, institutions are being challenged to reimagine how learning is delivered - and how it is recognized.

Experiential learning (EL) is no longer a “nice to have” co-curricular add-on. It is emerging as a **strategic pillar** that supports student success, drives institutional performance, and signals value to external stakeholders. Yet, for many campuses, experiential learning remains fragmented, under-recognized, and inconsistently tracked.

This guide is designed to help your institution change that.

Whether your campus is already rich in experiential learning or just beginning to define a strategy, this playbook will help you move from isolated initiatives to an integrated, data-informed ecosystem powered by Symplicity Outcome - a purpose-built platform that helps institutions scale, validate, and showcase experiential learning across the full student journey.

Why This Playbook Exists

Experiential learning (EL) is essential to preparing students for a complex, changing world. Yet despite its recognized value, EL is often fragmented, inconsistently tracked, and disconnected from institutional strategy.

This playbook provides a framework for institutions ready to scale experiential learning across academic and co-curricular domains. It blends educational theory, institutional best practices, and enabling technology to support a holistic, data-informed EL strategy.

What This Playbook Covers

- Reframing EL as a strategic framework (pedagogy + philosophy + infrastructure)
- Embedding EL across the student journey, from onboarding to graduation to earning
- Building a coordinated EL ecosystem across all stakeholders
- Identifying & overcoming common barriers to scale
- Leveraging technology to validate, measure, & showcase learning
- Creating & deploying institution-branded Experiential Records
- Using data to support equity, retention, & institutional storytelling
- A five-phase roadmap for implementation & continuous improvement

How to Use This Playbook

This playbook is part strategic guide, part technology roadmap. Use it to:

- **Build a shared understanding** of what experiential learning really is - & why it matters now more than ever
- **Anchor your EL efforts in proven theory**, including Kolb's learning cycle & widely adopted student development models
- **Identify gaps and opportunities** across your student journey, stakeholder ecosystem, & data infrastructure
- **Envision an integrated strategy** that spans academic, co-curricular, & community-engaged learning
- **Discover how Symplicity Outcome can serve as your enabling infrastructure**, supporting cataloging, tracking, recognition, & reporting
- **Map your next steps** toward scalable implementation & long-term impact

Whether you're a provost, director, faculty champion, or student affairs leader, this document offers a practical blueprint to design, deploy, and sustain a campus-wide experiential learning strategy that meets both **student needs** and **institutional goals**.

What You'll Learn

By the end of this guide, you will:

- Understand the **pedagogical & strategic foundations** of experiential learning
- See how EL can be embedded throughout the **student lifecycle**
- Learn what it takes to build a **thriving ecosystem of stakeholders**
- Explore common **barriers to scale** - & how to overcome them
- Discover how **technology can power the EL lifecycle**, from opportunity to transcript
- Identify key metrics & analytics that demonstrate **institutional ROI**
- Receive **concrete recommendations** to guide action at your own institution

Who This Is For

This playbook is intended for:

- Senior academic leaders designing institution-wide strategies
- Faculty & instructors embedding EL into curriculum and assessment
- Student affairs professionals managing leadership, residence life, & co-curricular records
- Institutional effectiveness teams focused on outcomes, reporting, & equity
- Experiential education offices, career centers, & co-op directors managing EL logistics
- Any cross-functional group working to scale & recognize learning beyond the classroom

SECTION 1

Reframing Experiential Learning

EL is not a program. It's a paradigm shift.

For decades, experiential learning (EL) has been recognized as a powerful instructional tool - one that engages students in real-world, applied activities outside traditional lecture formats. But to meet the evolving demands of today's higher education landscape, institutions must move beyond viewing EL as an "add-on" or departmental initiative.

Experiential learning must become a campus-wide framework for student development, academic integration, and institutional strategy.

When designed and implemented at scale, experiential learning connects theory and practice, strengthens reflection and identity formation, and prepares students for a workforce increasingly focused on adaptability, emotional intelligence, and applied skillsets.

Foundations of Effective EL

Drawing from leading frameworks such as the *Society for Experiential Education and Kolb's Learning Cycle*, a sustainable EL strategy requires alignment across **three critical dimensions**:

1. PEDAGOGY

The academic scaffolding that ensures experiences are structured, rigorous, and learning-centered.

- Rooted in intentional design
- Anchored by guided reflection
- Supported by clear learning outcomes and assessments

2. PHILOSOPHY

A belief in student agency, growth, and the transformative potential of lived experiences.

- Honors student voice and self-authorship
- Encourages critical thinking, empathy, and identity formation
- Emphasizes inclusive and accessible pathways for all learners

3. INSTITUTIONAL STRATEGY

The systems and structures that allow EL to scale and drive meaningful, measurable impact.

- Integrated with campus priorities and mission
- Supported by infrastructure (data systems, policies, funding)
- Aligned with accreditation standards, employer expectations, and public accountability

Why This Matters Now

Institutions that reframe EL as a strategic framework - not just a teaching method - are able to:

- Elevate student success, retention, and purpose-driven engagement
- Improve workforce readiness by aligning experiences with career competencies
- Demonstrate institutional ROI through participation data, equity metrics, and stakeholder engagement
- Differentiate themselves in a competitive higher ed landscape with compelling narratives of student transformation

Case-in-Point: Many institutions embed EL in their Quality Enhancement Plans (QEPs) or strategic mandates for employability, but lack a system to support, track, and validate the work. Reframing EL enables these mandates to move from aspiration to implementation.

Recommendations for Campus Leaders

1. CREATE A SHARED DEFINITION OF EL

Develop an institution-wide definition that spans curricular, co-curricular, and community-based learning - supported by clear criteria and reflection requirements.

2. CONDUCT A LANDSCAPE AUDIT

Map where EL is already happening across departments, programs, and services. Include non-credit, high-impact practices that may be under-recognized.

3. BUILD A CROSS-FUNCTIONAL EL TASK FORCE

Engage academic affairs, student services, IT, institutional research, and experiential education offices to align on goals and infrastructure needs.

4. LINK EL TO STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Demonstrate how experiential learning supports existing institutional goals: student retention, equity, employability, alumni outcomes, and community impact.

SECTION 2

Experiential Learning: Process & Steps

Learning isn't complete without reflection and application.

At the core of experiential learning is a structured, cyclical process that transforms activity into meaningful, transferable learning. Dozens of modern experiential learning approaches follow a Process Learning Approach-that is, they follow between 3-8 steps through a well-designed experience. Using an experiential learning process that reflects and extends your content supports how students learn not just by doing, but by intentionally processing and applying their experiences.

Too often, institutions emphasize the activity itself - volunteering, internships, research - without guiding students to reflect, extract insight, and test new ideas. Your EL process ensures that every experience becomes a learning opportunity.

STRENGTH IN DIVERSE APPROACHES

David Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle is one such process. While popular, the ELC is grounded in management studies and may not work for all applications in higher education. Check out different theories as needed and decide which one works best:

Borton's What, So What, Now What? (1970)	Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle, (1984)	Rodgers' Reflective Cycle, (2002)
Joplin's Experiential Learning Model (1981)	Gibbs' Reflective Writing Cycle, (1988)	Moon's Five Stages of Learning, (2004)
Schön's Reflection in/on Action (1983)	Kiser's Integrative Processing Model, (1998)	Ash, Clayton & Moses' DEAL Model, (2009)

For institutions, focusing on a process that reflects your stakeholders' understanding of EL is the best way to proceed, and helps encourage broad participation from faculty, co-curricular educators, students, administrators, and employers!

Example: Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle

<p>1. Concrete Experience <i>Students participate in a hands-on, authentic experience.</i></p> <p>.....</p> <p>Examples: service project, co-op placement, group simulation, peer leadership</p> <p>Relevance and intentionality are key - students must understand why the experience matters</p>	<p>2. Reflective Observation <i>Students analyze what happened, how it felt, what worked, & what didn't.</i></p> <p>.....</p> <p>This phase encourages critical thinking, emotional insight, & metacognition</p> <p>Reflection may be structured (journals, prompts, discussion) or guided by mentors/faculty</p>	<p>3. Abstract Conceptualization <i>Students connect their reflection to theories, frameworks, & learning outcomes.</i></p> <p>.....</p> <p>Here, they answer: "What did I learn?" & "How does this relate to my academic or personal goals?"</p> <p>Institutions can support this stage through rubrics, reflection templates, project deliverables, or portfolio prompts</p>	<p>4. Active Experimentation <i>Application may happen immediately (in another experience) or over time (in future roles)</i></p> <p>.....</p> <p>Application may happen immediately (in another experience) or over time (in future roles)</p> <p>This stage supports lifelong learning and adaptability - key traits for career readiness</p>
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Cycle in Practice: A Student Example

Let's take a student completing a community-based service project:

- **Concrete Experience:** Spends 8 weeks volunteering with a local youth program
- **Reflective Observation:** Journals about challenges working with diverse age groups
- **Abstract Conceptualization:** Connects observations to developmental psychology theories from class
- **Active Experimentation:** Applies insights to a group project on youth engagement strategies

This structured process transforms a volunteer activity into a deeply reflective, outcome-aligned learning experience - especially when guided by faculty and captured in an experiential record.

Why Institutions Should Embrace the Cycle

When institutions implement the EL cycle as a campus-wide framework, they:

- Help faculty & co-curricular staff structure experiences intentionally
- Make reflection a standard part of assessment, not an afterthought
- Improve learning outcomes by connecting experience with conceptual understanding
- Prepare students to talk about their growth - critical for interviews, grad school, & citizenship
- Create consistent pathways for collecting, validating, & reporting on experiential learning

Recommendations for Institutions

1. Embed the EL Cycle into EL Guidelines & Rubrics

Standardize reflection prompts, assessment tools, & learning objectives using Kolb's model.

3. Use the Cycle in Technology Workflows

Platforms like Symplicity Outcome allow institutions to scaffold each stage - logging the experience, prompting reflection, & capturing outcomes.

2. Train Stakeholders on the Cycle

Offer workshops or materials for instructors, advisors, & staff to use the cycle when guiding student experiences.

4. Make the Cycle Visible to Students

Integrate the cycle into onboarding & orientation so students know how to reflect & why it matters.

SECTION 3

Mapping Experiential Learning Across the Student Journey

Experiential learning shouldn't be a final-year perk - it should be a first-year promise.

Too often, students only encounter structured experiential learning in their final semesters - through internships, capstones, or senior projects. But this delayed model misses an enormous opportunity to engage students earlier, deepen their learning over time, and build a strong, verified narrative of growth and development.

The most effective institutions embed experiential learning throughout the entire student lifecycle.

This means mapping EL opportunities across academic years, student roles, and engagement levels - ensuring access from onboarding to graduation.

A Layered Model of the Student Journey

STAGE	EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES	KEY OBJECTIVES
Orientation & Onboarding	Service fairs, leadership workshops, EL introduction modules	Build awareness of EL, set expectations, invite participation
Early Coursework & Co-Curricular Engagement	Simulation activities, student government, residence life roles, project-based learning	Encourage low-barrier entry, develop identity and purpose
Mid-Program Immersion	Community-engaged learning, group research, global programs	Integrate reflection, begin mapping outcomes to competencies
Career-Aligned Practice	Co-ops, internships, field placements, undergraduate research	Apply learning in real-world contexts, validate with mentors
Capstone & Culmination	Final-year projects, portfolios, presentations, EL transcript export	Synthesize learning, articulate impact, prepare for career or further study

Why a Lifecycle Model Matters

Early engagement = stronger retention

When students see relevance and purpose in their learning from the start, they are more likely to persist.

Reflection over time = deeper development

Students need repeated cycles of experience + reflection to build transferable skills and professional confidence.

Structured growth = measurable outcomes

A mapped journey allows institutions to scaffold competencies, monitor engagement, & demonstrate impact.

Equity = intentional design

By embedding EL from year one, institutions ensure that access is not limited to students who “opt in” late in their studies.

What Gets Missed Without a Journey Map

- Missed data on early learning and engagement
- Inconsistent experiences across departments or faculties
- Underdeveloped portfolios and transcripts at graduation
- Students unaware of the relevance of their own experiences
- Inability to track developmental progression or growth over time

Institutions that wait until third or fourth year to formalize EL tracking are already years behind in capturing the full student story and are missing opportunities for integrated career preparation.

Recommendations for Institutions

1.

Map Existing EL Touchpoints by Year and Program

Identify where EL currently lives - and where it could. Don't overlook residence life, student jobs, or first-year seminars.

2.

Design for Progression, Not Just Participation

Create developmental scaffolds: early EL experiences should lead naturally into more advanced or immersive ones.

3.

Align EL Journeys with Competency Frameworks

Connect year-by-year experiences to frameworks like NACE Competencies, institutional outcomes, or career readiness models.

4.

Track and Reflect Continuously

Use platforms like Symplicity Outcome to help students log experiences, reflect at each stage, and build an Experiential Record that grows in sophistication over time.

SECTION 4

Building an Institutional Experiential Learning Ecosystem

Experiential learning isn't owned by one office - it's enabled by the whole campus.

Scaling experiential learning requires more than individual champions or one-off programs. It demands a **whole-of-institution approach**, where faculty, staff, students, employers, and leadership all play coordinated, purposeful roles in designing, delivering, validating, and measuring learning beyond the classroom.

Think ecosystem, not silo.

A thriving experiential learning ecosystem depends on shared ownership, role clarity, and strategic coordination. When these conditions are met, experiential learning becomes both scalable and sustainable. The ecosystem concept is emerging and needs to be encouraged.

Core Stakeholders in the EL Ecosystem

FACULTY AND INSTRUCTORS

- Design authentic, academically grounded experiences
- Guide students through reflection & conceptualization
- Assess learning outcomes and validate participation

STUDENTS

- Actively engage in diverse EL opportunities across settings
- Reflect on experiences and connect to personal/professional goals
- Curate and share their experiential record as a narrative of growth

ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP (CHAIRS, DEANS, PROGRAM DIRECTORS)

- Embed EL into program requirements and curriculum maps
- Align EL to institutional learning outcomes and accreditation standards
- Ensure quality assurance, assessment, and continuous improvement

STUDENT AFFAIRS & CO-CURRICULAR LEADERS

- Offer developmental EL experiences outside the classroom
- Integrate identity formation, belonging, and emotional intelligence
- Promote equity, access, and inclusivity in program delivery

EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP (VPS, PROVOSTS, PRESIDENTS)

- Align EL to mission, vision, and strategic planning priorities
- Invest in infrastructure and cross-campus coordination
- Represent EL outcomes to external stakeholders (government, employers, funders)

EMPLOYERS & COMMUNITY PARTNERS

- Co-create learning opportunities (internships, service projects, placements)
- Provide mentorship, real-world feedback, and external validation
- Serve as authentic audiences for student learning

Key Characteristics of a Healthy EL Ecosystem

1. Shared language

All stakeholders use common terms for experiences, reflections, and competencies.

2. Distributed leadership

Multiple departments and units are empowered to contribute - not just one central office.

3. Integrated systems

Data, workflows, and recognition mechanisms are connected and streamlined.

4. Institutional commitment

EL is formally recognized in strategy documents, budgets, and quality frameworks.

Common Breakdowns in EL Ecosystems

- Lack of coordination leads to duplicated efforts and inconsistent quality
- Faculty unsure how to validate co-curricular or community-based experiences
- Data silos prevent real-time insight or cross-campus reporting
- Students struggle to see how their learning connects across contexts
- Equity gaps persist when participation is unstructured or informal

If your institution's EL activity lives on 12 separate spreadsheets across five departments, it's time to build a coordinated ecosystem.

Recommendations for Building Your EL Ecosystem

1. Conduct a Stakeholder Audit

Identify all groups contributing to EL - and understand their goals, data needs, and pain points.

2. Build an EL Governance Model

Create cross-functional working groups or task forces to align practices, policies, and priorities.

3. Define Roles in Technology Workflows

Ensure your EL platform (like Symplicity Outcome) supports role-based access for faculty, staff, and students - allowing each to contribute without duplicating effort.

4. Recognize and Reward Participation

Offer incentives for departments and individuals to contribute to the EL ecosystem - through grants, recognition, or performance metrics.

5. Create Visibility Across the Institution

Use dashboards, public catalogs, and internal reporting to make the breadth of EL work seen and valued.

SECTION 5

Challenges Institutions Face

Scaling experiential learning requires structure, not just enthusiasm.

Even institutions with strong experiential learning cultures often encounter roadblocks when they try to **scale EL beyond departments or pilot programs**. While the passion for hands-on learning is rarely in short supply, the systems and strategy required to support it at scale frequently lag behind.

Below are some of the most common, yet solvable, challenges facing institutions working to build sustainable experiential learning ecosystems.

1. FRAGMENTATION AND SILOED INITIATIVES

Different departments track experiential learning in different ways - if at all.

- No shared definitions or criteria for what counts as experiential learning
- Disconnected systems for co-ops, student leadership, global programs, and research
- Inconsistent support structures across faculties or campuses
- Difficulty identifying what's already happening

Solution: Establish institutional standards and centralize opportunity tracking through a unified platform.

2. UNDER-RECOGNITION OF NON-CREDIT LEARNING

Transformational experiences often go undocumented or undervalued.

- Volunteer roles, club leadership, and campus employment often fall outside formal tracking systems
- Students graduate unaware that these activities contribute to skill development and career readiness
- Employers and grad schools miss out on a full picture of student growth

Solution: Create pathways to validate and showcase all high-impact practices - not just credit-bearing ones - through tools like the **Symplificity Outcome Experiential Record**.

3. INCOMPLETE OR INACCESSIBLE DATA

Without centralized data, institutional leaders lack the insight to guide decisions.

- No way to monitor participation trends or identify gaps in access
- Difficulty reporting on EL outcomes for accreditation or funders
- Inability to measure growth in skills, competencies, or reflection over time

Solution: Use a platform with real-time dashboards and customizable reports to turn EL activity into measurable institutional impact.

4. EQUITY GAPS IN ACCESS TO EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Without intentional design, EL participation can reflect systemic barriers.

- First-generation and underrepresented students may miss out on unpaid or informal opportunities
- EL often relies on self-navigation, privilege, or faculty discretion
- Lack of centralized promotion limits visibility of available opportunities

Solution: Public-facing EL catalogs, structured onboarding, and equity dashboards can help ensure fair access to high-impact learning.

5. ADMINISTRATIVE OVERLOAD

Manual tracking and inconsistent processes create burnout and missed outcomes.

- Staff and faculty spend hours chasing evaluations, logging hours, and managing spreadsheets
- No automation or alerts for reflection completion, deadline tracking, or experience approval
- Fragmented communication between departments and students

Solution: Automate tracking, reflection, and approval workflows through systems like **Symplicity Outcome**, which reduce manual effort and increase reliability.

SELF-ASSESSMENT: IS YOUR INSTITUTION STUCK IN REACTIVE MODE?

- Do you know how many students engaged in EL last year - campus-wide?
- Can you name the top 5 skills your students are developing through EL?
- Do your students receive a transcript or record that reflects all their learning?
- Can you see where equity gaps exist in EL participation?

If you answered “no” or “not sure” to most of these, your institution may be ready for a centralized strategy supported by enabling infrastructure.

Recommendations for Institutions

1.

Inventory Your Current Gaps

Review your EL tracking methods, access points, and reporting tools to identify weak links.

2.

Engage Frontline Stakeholders

Collect feedback from those implementing EL day-to-day - faculty, advisors, co-curricular staff - to understand where pain points occur.

3.

Prioritize Quick Wins

Identify one or two areas where EL is already strong and pilot centralized tracking and reflection tools there.

4.

Create a Long-Term Infrastructure Plan

Invest in a scalable platform like Symplicity Outcome that can grow with your campus's ambitions and reduce administrative overhead.

SECTION 6

The Role of Technology - Symplicity Outcome

Infrastructure is what turns good intentions into lasting impact.

You can't scale experiential learning with spreadsheets.

To move from scattered initiatives to a fully integrated ecosystem, institutions need more than passion and policy - they need purpose-built digital infrastructure that supports the entire lifecycle of experiential learning.

Symplicity Outcome was built specifically to meet this need: a cloud-based, student-centered platform that enables institutions to **catalog, manage, validate, and showcase** experiential learning at scale.

What Makes Symplicity Outcome Different?

Unlike systems focused solely on co-op or career data, Outcome is designed for **all forms of experiential learning** - curricular, co-curricular, and community-based.

1. Catalog & Promote Opportunities

Outcome centralizes every experiential learning opportunity into a single, searchable, public-facing hub.

- Filters by skill, activity type, duration, eligibility, location
- Promotes EL across the full spectrum: co-ops, leadership roles, volunteering, global programs, undergraduate research
- Helps students and advisors easily find and apply to experiences that align with learning goals

Key Benefit: Increased access and visibility for students - plus insight into what is actually being offered campus-wide.

2. Deliver & Track Engagement

Once a student engages in an experience, Outcome automates the full lifecycle of participation and validation.

- Students log hours, submit reflections, and receive reminders for deadlines or milestones
- Faculty and staff validate participation and assess reflection quality
- Staff dashboards monitor progress and trigger alerts for incomplete steps
- Role-based workflows support faculty, co-curricular staff, and employers - all within the same system

Key Benefit: Less chasing paperwork. More consistent, real-time data. Better student engagement.

3. Recognize & Report on Outcomes

Outcome transforms tracked activities into meaningful institutional and student-facing assets.

For Students:

- Institution-branded Experiential Records: Verified co-curricular transcripts, skills-based resumes, digital badges
- Shareable portfolios for job applications, grad school, or mentorship conversations
- Personalized achievement reports showing growth over time

For Institutions:

- Custom dashboards showing:
 - Participation by student type, department, or equity category
 - Skill development and reflection quality
 - Impact reporting for funders, accreditors, and executive leadership

Key Benefit: Tells the institutional story of learning, while empowering students to tell their own.

4. Seamless Campus Integrations

Outcome integrates with the systems you already use - reducing manual entry, enhancing data integrity, and improving adoption.

- Compatible with:
 - Student Information Systems (Banner, PeopleSoft)
 - Learning Management Systems (Canvas, Brightspace)
 - Career Platforms & CRMs (Handshake, Salesforce)
- Supports:
 - Single sign-on (SSO)
 - Robust APIs
 - WCAG 2.1 AA accessibility standards
 - Mobile-friendly access for students on the go

Key Benefit: Outcome complements - not competes with - your digital ecosystem.

5. Built for Security and Compliance

Institutions trust Symplicity because of our enterprise-grade compliance infrastructure.

- Fully compliant with FERPA, GDPR, and SOC 2
- Encryption at rest and in transit
- Audit trails and multi-factor authentication
- Privacy controls for student-facing transcripts and reflections

From Activity to Insight: The Real Power of Outcome

When experiential learning is centralized and digitized, institutions gain insight into what's working, where gaps exist, and how to improve.

Outcome makes it possible to:

- Identify students who are under-engaged early
- Link EL to strategic goals like retention or career outcomes
- Report on real-world learning to executive leadership and external stakeholders
- Inform funding decisions, staffing, and future programming

Data moves from anecdotal to actionable.

Recommendations for Campus Implementation

1. Start with Visibility

Launch the opportunity catalog as a tool to engage students and surface underutilized EL offerings.

2. Streamline Reflection and Validation

Use built-in workflows to collect reflections and approvals from students, staff, and faculty.

3. Enable the Experiential Record

Let students build a verified transcript over time - and use it in advising, mentorship, and career development.

4. Use Dashboards Strategically

Train leadership and IR staff to pull metrics for decision-making and continuous improvement.

SECTION 7

Turning Data into Institutional Insight

What you track is what you can improve.

Experiential learning becomes truly transformative - not just for students, but for institutions - when it's not only delivered, but also **measured, analyzed, and acted upon**.

Unfortunately, many institutions struggle to extract meaningful data from their EL efforts. Information is often buried in siloed reports, incomplete spreadsheets, or anecdotal feedback. Without a centralized system, it's nearly impossible to:

- See where EL is happening (and where it's not)
- Track which students are engaging - and which are being left behind
- Understand what competencies are actually being developed

Symplicity Outcome turns experiential data into institutional intelligence.

Key Dashboards and Analytics in Outcome

1. Participation Analytics

- Track how many students are engaging in experiential learning - by program, year, identity group, or modality
- Compare participation rates across credit-bearing and non-credit experiences
- Monitor EL uptake in priority programs or strategic initiatives

2. Skill & Competency Development

- Map student experiences to frameworks like NACE Competencies, program outcomes, or institutional learning goals
- Analyze trends in critical thinking, teamwork, leadership, communication, and more
- Evaluate reflection quality using custom rubrics or AI-assisted tools

3. Equity Dashboards

- Identify access gaps by race, gender, major, first-gen status, or financial aid level
- Disaggregate data to detect where targeted support or outreach is needed
- Align EL participation with your institution's equity and inclusion goals

4. Program & Employer Feedback

- Collect and report on evaluations from faculty supervisors and community partners
- Use dashboards to assess partner quality, student preparedness, and outcomes
- Make data-informed decisions about renewing or revising EL partnerships

From Insight to Action

Outcome doesn't just generate charts - it provides actionable insights that support:

- **Retention strategies:** Identify students who are under-engaged early in their academic journey
- **Funding justification:** Show grant makers or donors how EL is driving impact
- **Accreditation evidence:** Supply robust data on learning outcomes, reflection, & competency development
- **Program review:** Use EL dashboards to support curricular revisions or quality assurance processes
- **Strategic storytelling:** Share visual, institution-branded impact data with boards, media, and prospective students

When EL data becomes visible, it becomes strategic.

Recommendations for Using EL Data Strategically

1. Identify a Data Stewardship Team

Involve Institutional Research, IR staff, academic leadership, and student affairs in reviewing dashboard data regularly.

2. Build EL Metrics into Strategic Plans

Use participation, equity, and outcome data to inform your strategic planning KPIs.

3. Use Dashboards in Regular Reporting Cycles

Include EL metrics in board reports, internal audits, and academic program reviews.

4. Share Success Stories with Data + Narrative

Use a mix of experiential records, visual dashboards, and personal student stories to communicate the full picture.

Sample Use Cases

A career center uses skill mapping data to realign employer outreach with student development trends.

An academic dean uses equity dashboards to make the case for funded global learning access for underrepresented students.

An IR director pulls a 3-year report showing growth in experiential learning participation across faculties and presents it at a leadership retreat.

SECTION 8

The Experiential Record

Students graduate with more than grades - let's help them prove it.

A GPA doesn't capture leadership.
A résumé can't verify growth.
A transcript alone can't tell the full story.

Students today are participating in dozens - sometimes hundreds - of impactful experiences across their academic careers: leadership roles, community service, global travel, research, and work-integrated learning. Yet these rich experiences often go **undocumented, unvalidated, and under-leveraged**.

The Experiential Record changes that.

What Is the Experiential Record?

The Experiential Record is a **verified, institution-branded document or digital profile** that consolidates and showcases a student's full range of experiential learning.

Built within Symplicity Outcome, it can include:

- Experience descriptions
- Learning reflections
- Skills and competencies developed
- Time commitments and hours logged
- Supervising department or employer
- Endorsements from faculty or partners
- Digital credentials and micro-certifications

This record is not just a list - it's a **narrative of growth** supported by evidence, aligned to outcomes, and validated by the institution.

Why the Experiential Record Matters

For Students:

- Makes learning visible and shareable for employers, graduate schools, and mentors
- Builds confidence in articulating what they've learned
- Helps connect co-curricular and academic work into one story
- Supports equity by recognizing diverse forms of learning

For Institutions:

- Demonstrates the value and scope of experiential learning
- Showcases commitment to career readiness and holistic development
- Differentiates your graduates in the job market
- Tells a measurable, mission-aligned story to boards, donors, and accreditors

A validated experience is not just a memory - it's an asset.

How Symplicity Outcome Powers the Record

Symplicity Outcome enables institutions to:

- Automatically compile records based on validated activities, reflections, and evaluations
- Allow students to export PDF transcripts or share dynamic web-based profiles
- Customize record fields to match institutional language, learning outcomes, and branding
- Offer badges, certificates, and endorsements that stack onto a student's record
- Integrate Experiential Records with career tools and e-portfolio platforms

What Makes a Strong Experiential Record?

Verified by instructors, employers, or program staff

Reflective, showing student insight and growth

Mapped to skills and institutional learning goals

Consistent, drawing from all areas of the student experience

Shareable, accessible to advisors, employers, and external reviewers

Pro Tip: Advisors and career coaches can use the record as a tool during 1:1 coaching to help students prepare for interviews and applications.

Recommendations for Implementing Experiential Records

1. Decide What Counts

Work with academic and student affairs to determine what types of experiences should feed into the record.

2. Standardize Reflection Prompts

Develop consistent templates that prompt students to articulate learning, not just participation.

3. Train Faculty and Staff to Validate

Empower campus partners to review and approve experiences in real time.

4. Incorporate Records into Advising and Career Services

Help students treat their Experiential Record as a living document to support ongoing development.

SECTION 9

Getting Started – A Campus Playbook

From inspiration to implementation.

You've seen the framework.
You understand the theory.
You're exploring the technology.

Now the question becomes: **How do we begin?**

Scaling experiential learning across an institution is a complex process - but not an impossible one. It doesn't require overhauling your entire campus overnight. What it does require is **clarity of purpose, a phased roadmap**, and the right support infrastructure.

This section outlines a **step-by-step implementation guide** for institutions ready to turn vision into reality - whether you're just starting out or refining a mature strategy.

Five Phases of Institutional Readiness

PHASE 1: DISCOVERY & LANDSCAPE MAPPING

Goals:

- Understand your current experiential learning footprint
- Identify gaps, strengths, and uncoordinated efforts
- Engage a cross-section of stakeholders to get a full view

Key Actions:

- Conduct a campus-wide EL audit
- Inventory opportunities by department, program, and unit
- Interview faculty, student affairs staff, and students
- Assess current systems (manual, digital, or otherwise)

Outcome: A clear snapshot of where EL is happening - and where it's not

PHASE 2: STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

Goals:

- Connect EL to institutional goals, learning outcomes, and equity priorities
- Establish shared definitions and values
- Align stakeholder motivations and build governance

Key Actions:

- Define what counts as EL institution-wide
- Map how EL supports mission statements, QEPs, and strategic plans
- Create a cross-functional EL working group or advisory council
- Draft or revise an EL philosophy and recognition framework

Outcome: A foundation for consistent implementation and campus buy-in

PHASE 3: INFRASTRUCTURE DESIGN

Goals:

- Identify or adopt the systems and tools needed to support tracking, validation, and reporting
- Ensure infrastructure supports scale, equity, and sustainability

Key Actions:

- Select an enabling platform like Symplicity Outcome
- Define workflows for opportunity posting, reflection, and validation
- Establish technical integrations (SIS, LMS, CRM)
- Configure access for faculty, staff, students, and employers

Outcome: A scalable, student-centered platform ready to capture the full lifecycle of EL

PHASE 5: SCALING, EVALUATION & CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Goals:

- Expand EL integration across the student journey
- Use data and feedback to strengthen outcomes and impact

Key Actions:

- Monitor dashboards and equity metrics
- Share experiential records with advisors and employers
- Publish institutional reports or dashboards
- Continuously train new departments, staff, and faculty on using Outcome

Outcome: A sustainable, strategic, and fully integrated experiential learning ecosystem

PHASE 4: PHASED IMPLEMENTATION

Goals:

- Launch strategically - starting where energy, visibility, and readiness already exist
- Build momentum through early wins and pilot champions

Key Actions:

- Begin with 2–3 high-impact areas (e.g., co-op, service-learning, residence life)
- Offer support and training for faculty and staff users
- Collect feedback, iterate on workflows, and refine reflection tools
- Celebrate early success with leadership and students

Outcome: A functioning model that can be adapted and expanded across campus

Tips for Change Leaders

- **Start where the energy is.** Pilot with units already doing strong EL work.
- **Communicate often.** Regular updates build trust and keep momentum.
- **Celebrate stories, not just stats.** Pair dashboards with student voices.
- **Invest in champions.** Support those driving the work on the ground.
- **Frame EL as a mission-aligned solution.** Show how it meets existing institutional goals - don't frame it as "extra."

What Success Looks Like

By the end of your first year of implementation, you should be able to:

- Demonstrate a clear growth in EL participation
- Identify and begin addressing equity gaps
- Generate verified Experiential Records for students
- Report EL impact to leadership with confidence
- Expand platform adoption beyond initial pilots
- Tell a richer story about what students are learning - beyond the classroom

SECTION 10

Let's Build It Together

Every institution is different - its mission, its students, its path forward. But what unites forward-thinking campuses is a shared need: to make experiential learning visible, validated, and valued across the student journey.

This playbook has outlined a research-informed, actionable framework for building the foundation of a campus-wide experiential learning strategy. From student engagement to skill development to institutional impact, the path is clear.

Now, it's time to put that strategy into motion.

Why Symplicity

At Symplicity, we've spent over 15 years partnering with colleges and universities to elevate student engagement, career readiness, and learning impact. Through our **Mindset division**, we support institutions in reimagining what experiential learning can be. With **Symplicity Outcome**, we provide the infrastructure to bring that vision to life.

But we don't just deliver software - we build strategic partnerships grounded in your reality.

We know what it takes to coordinate EL across faculties, map competencies to real-world learning, and tell a compelling story to your stakeholders. Whether you're piloting a new initiative or scaling an established

program, we meet you where you are - with a flexible, purpose-built platform and a dedicated team to support you from planning through scale.

How Symplicity Can Help

If you're ready to begin - or refine - your institutional EL strategy, here's how we can help:

1. Start the Conversation

Let's explore your current challenges, goals, and vision for experiential learning on your campus. We'll share examples, lessons from peer institutions, and options tailored to your model.

2. Schedule a Guided Demonstration

We'll walk you through Symplicity Outcome and show how it aligns with the themes outlined in this guide - from tracking and validation to visibility and impact.

3. Map Your Next Step

Together, we'll help you determine the best way to pilot, scale, or evolve your experiential learning infrastructure - supported by both technology and strategy.

Let's Partner for Impact

Experiential learning already happens across your campus - now is the time to give it structure, recognition, and the strategic visibility it deserves.

Let's build something that lasts.

Let's make student learning measurable, memorable, and mission-aligned.

Let's build it together.

Visit: symplicity.com/outcome

APPENDIX: SELECTED RESOURCES FOR DEEPER EXPLORATION

The following curated list of external resources is provided to support further exploration of the concepts discussed in this guide. For key topics such as institutional strategy, experiential learning ecosystems, student reflection models, and technology infrastructure, these references offer additional perspectives, research, and implementation frameworks. They are organized by section to align with the structure of this guide and may serve as useful materials for planning, professional development, or institutional benchmarking.

Section 1: Reframing Experiential Learning

- **Association Report: The SEE Definitions & Principles Project**
Offers a insights for defining and measuring experiential learning.
<https://www.societyforee.org/see-definitions-principles-project>
- **Podcast: What Counts as Experiential Learning?**
A discussion on validating diverse experiential learning formats across institutions.
<https://www.buzzsprout.com/1553668/episodes/16404893>
- **Podcast: Reflection in Experiential Learning**
Explores how reflection drives deeper learning and practical application.
<https://www.buzzsprout.com/1553668/episodes/16581567>
- **Peer-Reviewed Research: Defining Experiential Learning in Higher Ed**
Academic research examining implementation strategies for EL.
<https://journals.calstate.edu/elthe/article/view/4782>
- **Peer-Reviewed Research: Reframing Experiential Learning Designs**
Discusses the philosophical and pedagogical role of lived experience in curriculum design.
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1053825920915608>

Section 4: Building an Institutional EL Ecosystem

- **Podcast: How Ecosystems Enable Scale**
Focuses on building scalable infrastructure for experiential learning.
<https://www.buzzsprout.com/1553668/episodes/17150990>
- **Podcast: Faculty and EL Validation**
Covers how faculty can help validate and recognize diverse student experiences.
<https://www.buzzsprout.com/1553668/15269395>
- **Podcast: Building Purpose-Driven Records**
A look at using Experiential Records as a tool for storytelling and impact.
<https://www.buzzsprout.com/1553668/episodes/16989199>

Section 5: Challenges Institutions Face

- **Peer-Reviewed Research: Institutional Reporting & EL**
Analysis of institutional challenges in measuring non-credit learning.
<https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1326122>
- **Peer-Reviewed Research: Integrating Reflection into Outcomes**
Discusses strategies for evaluating growth and reflection quality.
<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1002/au.30252>
- **Peer-Reviewed Research: Beyond the Transcript: The Need to Showcase More**
Covers national models for documenting learning beyond the classroom.
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00091383.2017.1357091>
- **Peer-Reviewed Research: A Comprehensive Approach to Assessment of High-Impact Practices**
Offers guidelines for assessing co-curricular learning outcomes.
<https://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Occasional-Paper-41.pdf>
- **Education Design Lab – Skills Validation Network**
A national pilot to validate micro-credentials and experiential skill claims.
<https://eddesignlab.org/xcredit-skills-validation-network>

Section 7: Turning Data into Institutional Insight

- **CBEN – Competency-Based Education Network**
A national resource center advancing the use of competencies in higher education assessment and credentialing.
<https://www.c-ben.org/>

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