

# Chapter 18

## Testing Assessments of Integrated Experiential Learning

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### ABSTRACT

*Design thinking is a powerful platform that provides the structure and process to measure integrated experiential learning (IEL). IEL situates the activities of experiential learning in an interdisciplinary setting that facilitates learning through reflection on experiences that engage deep knowledge in broad applications and span co-curricular and curricular environments. Using courses developed at two institutions as case studies, the authors describe pedagogy, instruction, and assessment methods, and focus the data types, collection, analysis, and implications of three assessment approaches (reflections, networks, and deliverables). They show how design thinking is essential to the assessment of IEL in courses and across institutional stakeholders, including student and academic affairs, alumni relations, employers and local businesses, and those focused on data for improvement in design (e.g., institutional research and legislators). Moreover, they show that the assessment phase of design thinking is essential to sustainability, scalability, and rigor of design thinking IEL projects.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Traditional higher education assessment is either formative, assessment for learning, or summative, assessment of learning. *We argue here that Design Thinking (DT) is a platform—or a shared context where heterogeneous ideas and activities can productively interact with each other—that reconfigures assessment AS learning.* DT is both useful for developing new approaches to experiential education and assessment, and in organizing educational design, instruction, assessment, and program management. The legibility of patterns used in DT makes it easy to apply on several levels, and to cross reference activity across those contexts. In our experience DT simultaneously informs course designs, instruction, and assessment, helps generate ideas for sustainable programming, and enables groups of people to understand their relationship to each other. DT, understood as a platform, not just changes the way we assess learning, but also how we relate to each other.

Specifically, we understand DT as a platform that brings into concert ideas of pedagogy, design, execution, learning, iteration, assessment, feedback, metacognition, identity development, and communication. Far from disrupting disciplines and departments, the courses, learning processes, and assessments we describe help learners and faculty alike internalize the lessons of their discipline by applying their knowledge to new contexts. Students improve communications across environments, learn empathy for other groups, improve confidence in their own learning, develop their individual/disciplinary identity, gain clarity on career paths, and develop a sense of purpose. Faculty benefit from exposure to other disciplinary methods for teaching, gaining practice with iterative project-focused courses, and beginning to see how modeling collaboration with peers can help students do the same in their careers.

However, to move from DT for course design method to DT as a platform, the use of assessment, and multiple frames thereof, is essential to test both course designs and platform efficacy. In what follows, we describe an arrangement of curriculum, instruction, and assessment methods, tested extensively by two innovation spaces in separate institutions for those methods' abilities to deliver on the promises of *High Impact Practices* with fidelity to engagement indicators (Kuh, 2009; NSSE, 2020), delivering intended and emergent learning leading to transformative student outcomes (Heinrich et al., 2021; Lewis et al., 2019); and stakeholder engagement needed to make these outcomes possible. This chapter drives toward two goals. First, we describe IEL assessments that we tested in multiple classes across two different kinds of institutions. Second, we examine the relationship between assessment methods and an expanded understanding of DT as a platform that can bring student affairs together with academic affairs.

## BACKGROUND

### Project Origins

This understanding of assessment (and DT as a platform) emerges out of a relationship between faculty and staff of two innovation education spaces on higher education campuses in the United States (US), both of which use DT as an instructional tool to assess student learning, and to model for students how to make professional connections with collaborators both on and off campus. Working independently, these interdisciplinary groups developed similar approaches to education and assessment for integrated experiential learning. Both sought to respond to the challenge: How can we create compelling, IEL and

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