

# A Social Justice Perspective on Professional Development and Work-Integrated Learning: Transformative Experiential Learning (TEL)

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## Introduction

The popular and largely accepted conceptions of *professional development* are static, outdated, and largely come to reinforce the status quo. The road to *professionalism* is too often paved with mere résumé development, how to write a cover letter, a LinkedIn demo, maybe a mock interview or two, and a speech on what not to wear. Boxes are checked, young people are ushered off into the “real world,” educators wash their hands, so to speak, and prepare for their next batch of students. Professional development: check. What’s missing from this skeletal model of professional development for college students is everything else that comes along with being a working professional-citizen in a complex, multicultural, global society. >>>

Most specifically, what is missing from our popular notions of professional development (PD) in higher education are diversity and social justice competencies that, when consciously coupled with PD, can broaden student perspectives, expand worldviews, and tear-away at the various unjust paradigms of justice. Through this conscious coupling of professional development and social justice competencies, students will begin to see how this fixed, inert “real world” they’ve come to know is constructed, and thereby malleable. Professional development must be infused with elements of social justice education, and vice versa. There can be a dialectical tension between the two concepts, to be sure, but in the United States of America, in 2016 — we, the educators, professionals, and practitioners should not accept one without the other.

Within this paper, we as practitioners seek to interactively explore this tension: professional development and social justice. A model of work-integrated learning (WIL) called Transformative Experiential Learning (TEL) will be introduced that embraces this dialectic and provides a solution to the outdated notions of professional development for college students across majors and colleges.

Examples from three distinct WIL programs at the University of Cincinnati will be provided for how to develop social justice competencies within a professional development classroom or organization. The three programs that will be discussed

are: The Academic Internship Program primarily for liberal arts students, the Pre-Health Internship Program for science and exploratory students pursuing professional school, and the Cooperative Education Program (Co-op) for engineering students. All three of these programs are housed in the Division of Experience-Based Learning and Career Education. The curriculum from each program includes professional development courses in preparation for responsible engagement beyond the walls of the classroom, primarily in the forms of co-op and internship.

## **The Integration of Social Justice and Professional Development**

Each of the University of Cincinnati WIL programs is purposeful in teaching students about professionalism through a wide, inclusive, socially just lens. Professionalism, in this way, can be seen as committing to more than the day-to-day grind, more than collecting a paycheck, more than simply checking the appropriate boxes, and something more than one’s self-interests. Instead, professionalism becomes about being a part of something bigger and more meaningful — a profession, a tradition, a culture, a craft, a unique history — a new way to engage with and make meaning as a change-agent in the world.

In our courses/programs, when the discussion turns to professionalism and navigating work culture, students will often recite the usual professional development banalities. They suggest professionalism can be defined as respecting the

hierarchical work culture (written and unwritten rules), meeting expectations (rules), having business acumen, and being analytical enough to separate the personal and professional (keeping emotions at bay). This is all well and good, but being a part of something larger than yourself can mean playing by the rules. It also means being able to change rules as society evolves; and this is where social justice and consciousness-raising intersects with professionalism. Cassuto (2015) asserts that, essentially, “professionalism is about conformity.” However, we live in a culture of change. Students in WIL programs at the University of Cincinnati and beyond should be compelled to push the organization forward, to raise consciousness about the meaning of one’s work, how this work will impact communities, and the importance of inclusive leadership.

In the University of Cincinnati’s internship programs, professional development is defined as the exploration of employer performance expectations and the development of strategies and skills for effective participation in the employment process. Purkerson Hammer (2000) says, “you know it when you see it, and you certainly know it when you don’t see it” (p. 455). Some scholars have drawn distinctions between what would ordinarily be considered career preparation and what can be considered professional development (Blau 2013; Bowers 2001; Wessel 2003). Career advising can be understood narrowly or broadly (Carlstrom & Hughey, 2014). The narrow view essentially

addresses finding a major and steps in the process of securing a job post-graduation. For example, Milsom & Coughlin (2015) define career development as “a lifelong process requiring individuals to navigate numerous academic and work-related transitions as they strive to achieve career goals” (p. 5). Résumé development, networking, teaching the standards of business dress and etiquette, and mock interviews are part of the repertoire in most career centers on campus (Blau, 2013; Elrath 2010; Wendlandt & Rochlen, 2008; Wessel, Christian, & Hoff, 2003). The broader view addresses work values which “involve helping students understand and plan for the interaction of work with their other roles as contributors to a meaningful and beneficial life” (Carlstrom & Hughey, 2014, p. 5). This professional development includes applying these skills in WIL opportunities such as paid or unpaid internships, job shadow programs, and cooperative education (Elrath, 2010). It is our contention that this idea should be further extended to include a specific integration of values that lead to an increased understanding of social justice issues, both local and global, that are of growing importance in an already interconnected, global marketplace that recognizes value in diversity and inclusion.

In the three WIL programs mentioned here, the term “social justice” is primarily used because it conveys a “critical” call to action to dismantle unjust systems and move towards equality. The use of the term “diversity” is becoming outdated and often is limited to represen-

tation in the form of quotas for hiring diverse employees. It's time to move beyond simply making a business case for diversity and to move towards helping prepare undergraduate students to be socially responsible — transgressing campus boundaries and extending this ethos into their professional, perhaps even personal, lives. Miller (2003) defines social justice as “the distribution of good (advantages) and bad (disadvantages) in society, and more specifically with how these things should be distributed within society. Further, social justice is concerned with the ways that resources are allocated to people by social institutions” (p. 11). In sum, the term social justice is a better fit than diversity and other descriptors because the long term goal is about teaching undergraduate students to examine their privileges and place in the world, to explore their identity and values, to voice their questions and concerns for politics, economics, and power while working for equity and inclusion.

### **Integrating a Critical Leadership Perspective**

In order for undergraduate students to consider options and choices that challenge the status quo and advance a vision for collective human interests, they need a critical leadership toolbox that can be applied in WIL environments. Students must be empowered to recognize and point out incidents of structural inequity and understand how to enact social justice leadership in a professional way, whether that is leading a diverse workforce or

providing a new form of leadership. The intersection of professional development and social justice places emphasis on leadership values. “They include emphasis on ethical concerns of our leaders, on social justice values fueled by the movements of the 1960's, on collaborative leadership given our growing recognition of our interdependence in a global society, the need for transformational change based on our vision for the future and on diversity being inclusive and valuing of differences across groups” (Chin & Trimble, 2015, p. 14). Leadership scholars have been advocating for critical social frameworks to be applied to leadership theory to question assumptions related to power and privilege (Dugan, forthcoming 2017). A critical approach assumes structural inequities exist and acknowledges agency within structures. It allows for recognizing whose voice gets heard or whose story is most often told, along with whose gets submerged, marginalized, or untold entirely.

It is important to provide evidence that justifies the need for emergent ways of thinking about the integration of social justice, professionalism, and leadership. Many studies document the gap between employer expectations and the readiness of college graduates for the world of work. In a recent AAC&U employer survey (2015), employers gave students lower scores than students gave themselves on preparedness in a variety of areas. Of particular importance to note were large gaps in perceptions about learning outcomes that related to social justice and professional

development, including “awareness of diverse cultures inside and outside the United States, working with people of different backgrounds, staying current on global developments, and proficiency in other languages.” Only “30% of the class of 2014 said that a diversity of an employer’s workforce is extremely important” (NACE, 2014, p. 3); yet work environments increasingly require regular, ongoing interaction with people from different cultural backgrounds. In short, tensions exist between students’ preparation and the importance the workforce is placing on professionalism and social justice issues. Without a theoretical framework to follow, faculty in WIL programs are left without a critical resource to prepare students for our contemporary global workforce, and student-citizens are left to flounder on the hamster wheel of the socio-professional status quo.

### Transformative Experiential Learning Conceptual Model

WIL programs (such as academic internships and cooperative education) assist students in their development as a professional, and also as leaders. Rarely do these programs include a social justice component. Chin & Trimble (2015) assert that while leadership theory has changed over time, it has remained silent on issues of equity, diversity, and social justice. Understanding this limitation, the Transformative Experiential Learning (TEL) model was conceptualized as an alternative to outdated models to consciously

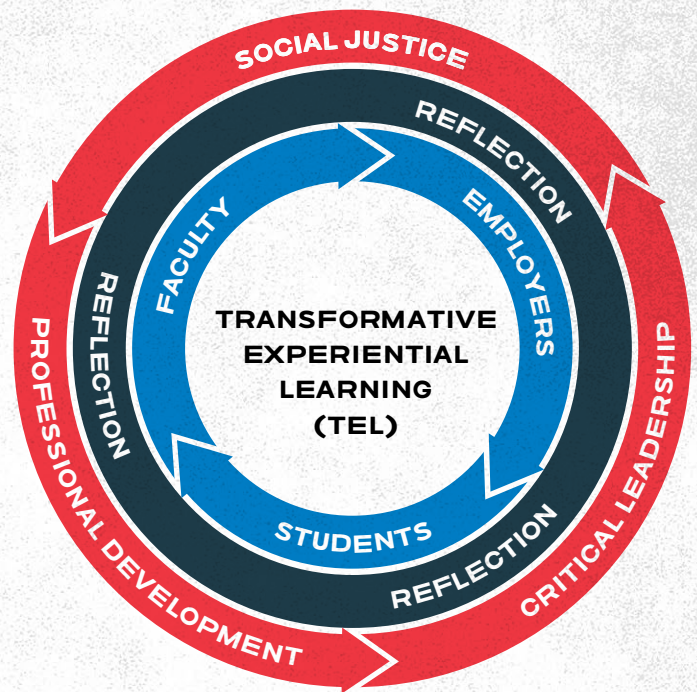


figure 1.

bring together social justice, professional development and critical leadership as integrative concepts that flow together in mutually reinforcing ways forming a theoretical framework that informs praxis (see figure A). They are not intersections with clear boundaries; rather, the concepts flow together and are integrative, you can’t talk about one without talking about the other. In short, TEL is *socially-just* leadership enacted in professional contexts accompanied by an agile reflective model. The model is layered to purposefully showcase the intersecting relationships between the WIL partners — students, faculty, communities, and employers.

Experiential learning has a transformative effect on students (Ono, 2015). In its simplest definition, experiential learning is learning by doing. Transformative Experiential Learning goes beyond this relatively straightforward

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concept. It is intentional about ensuring that undergraduate students engage in discussion about complex social justice issues and learn leadership strategies to engage these issues before they apply these lessons outside the classroom walls in WIL settings like internships and co-ops. The heart of this cyclical model is this unifying of theory, action, and reflection with the goal of transforming the learner and the world of work to be more inclusive and socially responsible.

Transformative Experiential Learning is especially necessary in this context. WIL can sometimes be misperceived as simply job training because in some cases the need for universities to demonstrate that students can find gainful employment after graduation is more paramount than any other outcome. This, however, is a transactional form of higher education where the student is seen as a customer or client (Popli, 2005). Branning (2007) asserts “Universities...must be concerned with transformative learning and education, which is then seen as a

process where students are active participants; not customers, users, or clients ...” (p. 48).

College is often a student’s first real opportunity to experience difference where inequities manifest in a variety of ways. College is also where students articulate a vision for their careers and futures. Reflecting on this exposure to diversity, higher order thinking, and career planning process enhances learning and social identity development. Rogers (2001) defines reflection as the ability to “integrate the understanding gained in one’s experience in order to enable better choices or actions in the future as well as to enhance one’s overall effectiveness” (p. 41). Reflection is at the heart of the TEL model because to create justice minded leaders in the professional workforce, students must practice self-interrogation, introspection, ponder all options in thoughtful ways, and deconstruct paradigms. These critical thinking values are embraced by TEL. Ash and Clayton (2004) assert that guided reflective practices help students examine their experiences critically; enhancing both the quality of their learning and the related co-op or internship they experienced. Furthermore, reflection can help students challenge preconceived notions while opening new perspectives (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Raskoff, 1994).

In the TEL model, students participate in courses where they are introduced to concepts of professionalism, like learning how to prepare and search for a job or create a strong application to

professional school. They are also given the opportunity to gain knowledge before working in a pluralistic professional context by focusing on the opportunity to apply their leadership skills by striving for inclusion in the workplace. These students are more prepared to understand power dynamics and to challenge the dominant discourse compared to students who receive traditional professional development only. Further, one could argue that professional development and WIL programs lacking social justice integration, leadership and professionalism with a reflective component can be perceived as irresponsible. Such endeavors fail to prepare students for today's dynamic and interconnected workforce.

### **Transformative Experiential Learning (TEL) Examples in the Real World**

The integration of the TEL concepts operationalized in the classroom and the WIL settings for each program manifest differently across programs. The WIL professional development preparation course in each program includes readings, assignments, videos, in-class active learning exercises, etc. intended to develop and raise consciousness around these issues. Critical reflection is incorporated to analyze the student's experiences inside and outside of the classroom. This reflection is guided, purposeful, and often challenging. It, too, is required and a critical component in the TEL model, creating a more complete synthesis of learning.

### **Pre-Health Internship Program**

The role of healthcare professionals is evolving and health professions curriculums are changing to include content on professionalism. STEM fields have moved from rote memorization of facts to skill building like critical thinking and the application of ideas (Branan, Hart, and Kreke, 2015). "Today, the fundamental components of medicine go beyond the biomedical sciences to include its humanities, legal and management aspects" (Ezekiel, 2006, para. 4). There is an art and a science to medicine, and it is important that the art not get lost. Kirk (2007) made the explicit connection of professionalism to medicine by calling it an "important component of medicine's contract with society."

Pharmacy schools are also now incorporating an understanding of diversity and behavior that promotes fair treatment of all people as examples of professional attitudes and behavior (Purkerson Hammer, 2015). In addition, medical schools have been known to prioritize metrics like grades, standardized test scores, and GPA. However, they have also recently shifted to focusing on competency-based assessments to make admissions decisions. The most significant change in medical school admissions though is the revision to the Medical College Admissions Test (MCAT). In January 2015, test content was revised to include psycho-social bases of behavior. "Being a good doctor is about more than scientific knowledge. It also requires an understanding of people," (Kirch, 2012,



para. 3). It's about time that admissions criteria and health professions curriculums catch up with what is important: focusing on the healthcare professional-patient relationship. All of this ultimately leads to better clinical decision-making and better health outcomes for patients (Rooney, 2016).

Diverse representation within the student body at medical schools is slowing increasing. Tracking research shows that minority physicians are more likely to practice in underserved communities (AMA Wire, 2015). A recent report from the American Association of Medical Colleges (AAMC) reported that the number of black males applying to medical school hasn't changed since the 1970's (Vassar, 2015). Disparities exist and the pre-health internship program addresses why inclusion should be a priority from the time of application to professional school through the time of actual practice with patients.

According to Moore (2013) in a 1966 speech to the Medical Committee for Human Rights, Martin Luther King Jr. said, "Of all the forms of inequality, injustice in healthcare is the most shocking and most inhuman." Learning outcomes have been developed for the pre-health internship program that infuses social justice into professional development. For example, one outcome is as follows: Utilize different points of view to understand the human side of healthcare pertaining to cultural difference, sensitivity, and humility. Student's read the text, *The Spirit Catches*

*You and You Fall Down* (Fadiman, 1997), a widely referenced book in pre-health advising circles. The book tells the story of a Hmong refugee child, Lia Lee, and her clash with American/Western medical culture. Key terms like "cultural humility" (Tervalon & Garcia, 1998) and "narrative medicine" (Charon, 2007) are introduced so the students can learn how to have conversations about cross-cultural care and begin to see themselves in relation to their customer — the patient. Cultural humility is used over cultural competency because it begs the question of whether someone can actually be competent in another person's culture. Providing students with real patient stories and the language to use is one way to advance the integration of social justice and professional development. In reflection on the text, one student commented, "A young girl's life was compromised due to cultural barriers. It is an important example of how important the roles of a deeper relationship/trust between patient and doctor, cultural humility, and empathy all have on patient care. What seems as trivial as becoming aware and appreciative of one's culture can literally save lives."

Another learning outcome is to recognize and articulate the meaning of health care disparities. Healthy People 2020 (2015) defines health care disparity as "a particular type of health difference that is closely linked with social or economic disadvantage." Students view the documentary, *The Waiting Room*, and

are taken into an emergency department with uninsured and underinsured patients. This type of empathy induction is extremely important for future healthcare professionals. Students become acutely aware of their privilege in terms of access to care when asked to reflect on the film. They begin to see the larger debate around healthcare as a human right and that some people systematically experience greater social and economic obstacles to health than others. One student reflection captured this. She said, “After seeing this documentary, I realize that the lack of healthcare is a HUGE problem in this country. I had never had this experience before. I have always been covered by the military. I see that people lose their jobs and their health insurance is gone. The whole family is affected. It’s not just homeless people, it’s hard working Americans that have lost their job.” Social determinants of health like food deserts, neighborhood pollution, access to transportation, and affordable and safe housing are also addressed. Students are also provided with an opportunity to intern for an organization with the mission of closing these health gaps.

A third learning outcome addresses “exploring personal values and ethical guidelines related to complex problems and controversies in health care.” Ezekiel (2006) states that the prominence of the Hippocratic oath demonstrates that ethical dilemmas are inherent in medicine. In this lesson, students explore global health ethics abroad and the concept of medical

voluntourism. Melby et al (2016) define medical voluntourism as short-term experiences in global health that “may exacerbate economic and power differentials between provider and host communities” (p. 3). Students are encouraged to reflect on cultural superiority and think through the exploitation of communities that have less resources. As the rules and regulations around shadowing physicians tighten, there has been a recent increase in pre-health students seeking out “hands-on” patient care international experiences in developing countries to impress admissions committees. Evert, Todd, & Ziteck (2015) stated, “Many stakeholders have pointed out that students accessing hands-on patient care under the guise of learning or practicing that is beyond their educational level is unprofessional and goes against the very social justice principles that concerned students and enabling organizations purportedly aim to address” (p. 61). In the course, guidelines for best practices are shared, as well as stories of students who have violated these recommendations. Students distinguish learning from service while remembering that the patient is a vulnerable. The outcome emphasizes the connection between both ethics and professionalism in a global context.

All of these examples of the TEL model at work allow students to deconstruct stereotypes, bias and oppression in the healthcare workplace and problem solve by restructuring their ideas with these values in mind.

## TEL in Co-op

### Cooperative Education for Engineering

There is a real need for infusing social justice and transformational leadership education into the engineering curriculum, but most faculty are underprepared. “Many professional development opportunities aimed at helping STEM faculty enhance their teaching practices overlook the role of cultural competence in teaching and learning and fail to inextricably combine cultural sensitivity with advanced pedagogies” (Mack et al., 2015, p. 8).

Johnston (2007) called upon cooperative education faculty and staff to critically analyze our role in how issues of social justice, equity, and inclusion were being addressed in the co-op curriculum. Most co-op preparatory programs, including the majority of the University of Cincinnati’s engineering co-op programs, do not include an in-depth critical analysis of identity, privilege, inclusion, and social justice. There are many reasons for this; the least among them is the questioning of whose role it is to educate students in this way. However, Johnston contends in many ways co-ops can be seen as an “educational model that supports the business and industry status quo” (p. 25). Because of this, Johnston urges cooperative education educators to “more fully consider the risks and responsibilities associated both with introducing, and not introducing, a critical pedagogy to its work preparation curriculum” (p. 26).

At the heart of this debate is the responsibility for educating students on

the mission of higher education that is to be critical thinkers and engaged citizens. This creates a divide between the mission of higher education and role of the university, which is to prepare students for the world of work. Giroux (2003) claims that “Situated within a broader context of issues concerned with social responsibility, politics, and the dignity of human life, higher education should...offer students the opportunity to acquire the knowledge, skills, and ethical vocabulary necessary for critical dialogue and broadened civic participation” (p.189). Johnston (2007) goes on to state, “From a critical perspective, co-op program goals should therefore reflect more than the securing of employment as an outcome, they ought to also reflect the broader educational goals of the institution within which the program operates” (p. 27).

However, as Johnston (2007) contends, most employers, as well as educators, want students to transition successfully to the world of work and not critique or challenge assumptions. This can be very risky as it can have the potential to damage the relationship between the university and the employer or industry partner. It is our responsibility as educators to not only train our students in how to be good workers, but how to be good “worker-citizens” and to “help build the social awareness and capacity within the leaders of tomorrow that could provoke such change...or at the very least explore the possibilities” (p. 28).

Topics for exploration within this new paradigm for cooperative education

preparation may include “corporate social responsibility, worker/management tensions and resulting worker movements, and various workplace practices around justice, equity, and democracy” (Johnston, 2007, p. 27). Others may include multicultural, ethnic, and social identity formation, power and privilege, professional values-based ethics, and transformational leadership.

### **Infusing Transformational Experiential Learning into Cooperative Education for Engineering**

An example of how to integrate the Transformational Experiential Learning Model, which addresses many of the issues presented above with regard to cooperative education, can be seen through the University of Cincinnati’s cooperative education program for Computer Engineering. The variations in this program, in comparison to its counterparts across the College of Engineering and Applied Sciences, are focused within the curriculum of the introductory course students take prior to their first co-op placement semester and a mid-curricular course students take after their second co-op placement semester.

The introductory course for students in the Computer Engineering co-op program touches upon the same objectives as would be for other majors, such as résumé development, interviewing skills, networking skills, the history and philosophy of cooperative education, and general job search strategies. Additionally,

the TEL version of the introductory course includes sections on strengths-based learning and development (Hodges & Clifton, 2004), reflective practice as a form of adaptive leadership (Heifetz, 1994), transformational leadership and teamwork, and courageous followership (Chaleff, 2009). These components serve as a backdrop not only to provide students with an overview of ways in which leadership can be developed in the workplace, but to also provide students the language to be able to articulate strategies on how to create social change. Finally, students in the introductory course in the Computer Engineering co-op program also participate in lessons on social identity and power and privilege. Students are introduced to concepts that for many of them are foreign and uncomfortable. However, through mutual understanding and solidarity, students begin to see how the way they interpret the world around them begins to change.

After their second co-op placement semester, students in the Computer Engineering program participate in a mid-curricular course designed as a crossroads of their professional career and identity. Many students at this point are beginning to determine what kind of professional they want to be and in what ways they want to engage in their professional community. The class is intended for students to reflect upon their co-op experiences and begin to make career-level decisions. In this course, students engage in activities to help them further their knowledge of their chosen

profession and continue exploring their role as worker-citizens. Several topics from the introductory course are reviewed and expanded upon including transformational leadership and teamwork, reflective practice, strengths-based learning, and followership. New concepts of equity and social justice in engineering and engineering for a better world (Clough, 2004) are introduced in this course as well. These final two components serve as the catalyst for preparing students to engage with their profession in ways to bring about social change and to address the inequities and injustices that may be prevalent in the world of work.

To be clear, Transformational Experiential Learning in the context of cooperative education does not have at its core, the role of creating social justice

advocates out of students, but rather gives students the knowledge, awareness, and skills needed if the occasion arises in which they may wish to act. Johnston (2007) put it this way, “The goal is to raise individual consciousness about the self as a social being and, once raised, inspire the individual to see how their beliefs, opinions, self-image, and treatment of others are influenced by dominant perspectives. This self-reflection is intended to result in a changed perspective and perhaps even changed behavior within the individual” (p. 25). Therefore, our role as educators in this context, with cooperative education, is “not [to] present sets of laws but rather present a lens through which to view information and the world in which it, and we, are situated” (p. 25).

**To be clear, Transformational Experiential Learning in the context of cooperative education does not have at its core, the role of creating social justice advocates out of students, but rather gives students the knowledge, awareness, and skills needed if the occasion arises in which they may wish to act.**

Two examples of the TEL model within this context at the University of Cincinnati, that can be easily adapted in other contexts, have included discussions of the cultural contexts of the “shop floor” and the “office” (i.e. workers vs. management), and a critical examination of women in computing.

Oftentimes when college students return from their first co-op placements they are introduced to the culture and indoctrination of how their profession acts and interacts with others in the profession. This can sometimes be very educationally beneficial, as it is when architecture students work for the first time with construction management professionals or when student computer software developers work with computer software designers (i.e. frontend vs. backend technologies). These interactions are often very positive and provide a significant perspective for students to which they have never had yet to this point in their academic pursuits. However, in some cases the indoctrination of students into the profession can sometimes lead to cultural divides. In one such incident, students learning how to be an engineer were asked to interact with laborers on the “shop-floor” and were told they had to “dumb-down” their language when speaking with shop-floor employees. The students came to class after their co-op term and engaged in a lengthy discussion on public education in America, the rights of workers, unions, and worker movements.

According to Mack, Soto, Casillas-Martinez, and McCormack (2015), “undeniably professions in science, technology, engineering, and Math (STEM) are among the fastest growing occupations in the US economy” (p. 8) however computer science degrees earned by women shrank from 28% to 18% between 2002 and 2012 (NSF, 2015). There is a substantial need within the computing industry to specifically address the masculinization of the discipline. Students in the mid-curricular course were provided articles and other media to help them explore how women in computing are treated and how a lack of diversity can be potentially devastating for corporations.

## TEL in Internships

### TEL in The Academic Internship Program

Academic Internships are a powerful complement to any student’s undergraduate college experience. Beyond providing students with valuable, hands-on experience and the increased likelihood of employability after graduation (Gault, Redington, & Schlager, 2000), increased confidence and competence as it relates to workplace culture (Narayanan, Olk, & Fukami, 2010), internships matter because they situate one’s academic learning and professional preparation within the context of the “real world” waiting for them after college (Binder, Baguley, Crook, & Miller, 2015). To put it another way, internships matter and hold great capacity to provide the sort of transformational

experiential learning opportunities we as TEL practitioners are seeking for our students.

The Academic Internship Program (AIP) at the University of Cincinnati (UC) is housed in the Division of Experience-Based Learning and Career Education. The program was launched in 2010-2011 academic year to meet the growing demand for meaningful, work-integrated learning opportunities for students in non-co-op majors at UC. In the years that followed, AIP has evolved considerably from its original conception. In the past year, AIP has moved away from course titles like, “Exploring Academic Internships” in favor of more topically inclusive titles like, “Professionalism and Purpose.” The programmatic evolution demonstrates a conscious shift from only preparing students for success on a semester-long internship and the development of certain baseline professional skills (résumé, cover letter, interviewing, and so on). AIP has come to a place where introspection/outrospection, student *mindset*, inclusion and empathy, self-authorship and consciousness-raising, and holistic professional development have become the cornerstones of the program — in addition to maintaining our commitment to academic internships for students. Further, AIP continues to build and grow partnerships across campus with student programs whose PD is often not fully understood or integrated into their curriculum: first-generation college students, student-athletes, and liberal arts majors to name a few.

The Academic Internship Program requires a two-semester commitment from students. The process consists of first, a 3-credit-hour, pre-internship professional development course, *Professionalism & Purpose* or *Exploring Professionals Paths*, then a subsequent semester-long academic internship in which the student is working in a full or part-time internship while also enrolled in an online reflection course facilitated by AIP faculty. The opportunity for students to apply and reflect on their cross-curricular learning while on internship is one of the most valuable aspects of the experience. And by infusing consciousness-raising learning objectives within our pre-internship professional development course, students begin their respective internships more prepared and with eyes open to various social, political, and cultural elements of their new internship environment that otherwise might have been perceived and processed in less productive ways. Through this online reflection course that students enroll in while working in their internship, active and engaged reflection becomes a critical component to the effectiveness of the integration of the TEL model. This is accomplished, documented, and assessed through the production of an e-portfolio — a web-based, self-authored, creative multi-media presentation of the student’s professional, academic and personal narrative.

This nexus of academic inquiry, critical reflection, and the internship experience — praxis — is at the heart of the Academic Internship Program, and

drives the work we do with students across campus at the University of Cincinnati. Committed to placing each student in their internship search through both digital tools and one-on-one/person-to-person attention, to bolstering student employability after graduation, to enhancing career-readiness and success skills through *classic* professional development content (résumé, cover letter, interviewing skills, LinkedIn, etc.), and to creating an academic, pre-professional culture rooted in a socio-political consciousness, reflection, vocational & self-exploration, AIP seeks to provide students with comprehensive and value-added internship experiences that prepare them to be socially-conscious professional citizens in an increasingly complex society.

Active learning exercises are used throughout the term to address these higher-order learning objectives. Notably, the *Global Village*, or *Village of 100*, has proven to be an engaging and effective two-class exercise intended to challenge our assumptions about the world, while revealing where much of our misunderstandings and misconceptions arise from. In this activity, students are placed into groups and challenged to “shrink” the world’s population to one-hundred people, keeping all existing ratios equal, while addressing a variety of prompts revolving around a great many social justice oriented themes. This allows students to more easily manage questions that require groups to numerically breakdown existing ratios of the global population as it relates to gender, race, religion, economics,

politics, healthcare, education, poverty, climate, and more. The results of this exercise, the revelation of our own ignorance, in most cases, is palpable and seized on by students. By paring down seven-plus-billion people to one-hundred, one finds seeing the forest through the trees to be a bit more manageable. Students begin to understand and see the world, often anew, and report as much through dialoguing in diverse groups, reporting-out to the larger class, and in written-reflection that serves as the culminating assignment of this TEL-bolstering exercise.

AIP students are from just about every non-co-op required major on campus. We are a “one room schoolhouse” of sorts, with an interdisciplinary and diversity that is somewhat unique. We have freshmen, sophomores, juniors, seniors, international students, domestic students, first-generation college students, athletes,

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seized on by students.**



non-traditional students, and exploratory/undeclared students. In other words, we transgress boundaries, identities, and academic disciplines. Accordingly, AIP strives to use this inherent diversity within our program to our advantage through rich dialogue, active-learning classroom engagement, and collaborative projects. Classroom exercises, such as the Global Village and the corresponding multi-level reflection, reinforce to AIP students that their diversity and inclusion is valued within the program, and critical to our collective social justice and well-being in the “real world.”

The TEL model is deployed in AIP through a variety of methods that reinforce the lessons of the Global Village, while extending this learning into professional and WIL environments. Our learning objectives, assignments, classroom discussion panelists, and dialogue reflect and embody the goals put forth in the TEL model. Specifically, students are encouraged/required to conceptualize, contemplate, know, and eventually share their own unique *story* in our classes — to understand her or his professional narrative that consists of one’s lived, academic, work, and extracurricular experiences. And within this narrative, we embed that appropriate professional development activities and artifacts (résumés, cover letter, interviewing skills, etc.), but students begin to see the *Why* through guided dialogue relating to issues of social justice, the culture of professionalism, and their own unique positionality and development within each these constructs.

Paulo Freire, in *We Make the Road by Walking* (1990), describes this pedagogical process as the “illumination of reality,” and it’s of critical and equal importance to both students, teachers, and the community. “Being engaged in a permanent process of illuminating reality with students, fighting against the opacity and obscuring of reality” (1990) is a critical component of the higher education ethos, especially at the University of Cincinnati. There is no reason this should not be the case in a professional development classroom setting. Further, it is our contention that the PD classroom provides a powerful opportunity to illuminate the social injustices in reality, and to allow students a place to synthesize and apply their cross-curricular learning and lived experience in a “real world” setting through their WIL experience.

## Future Directions

The demographics of the United States are changing. The United States is changing. The world is changing. And rapidly. Young people, as opposed to their parents and grandparents, have very different conceptualizations of what they want the world to value. Millennials are recognized the most ethnically diverse generation in American history (Howe & Strauss, 2007). Given this change, it will be important to measure whether students are integrating learning across the domains of social justice, professionalism, and leadership in preparation for the world of work. Not just for profit margins or for the sake of the organization in which one is employed —

but the training, knowledgebase, and socio-political awareness that students leave college with will be utterly critical to the quality of life on this planet for all people and future generations.

Future studies by career services professionals should seek to define specific work readiness competencies associated with the TEL model. A grounded theory research design could be used to do this. Since we know high impact programs like co-op and internships increase college student retention (Ono, 2015), persistence in WIL programs should be measured to show financial implications. Lastly, it is our assertion based on collective lived professional experience that integrating social justice and professional development deepens relationships with students. This is a possible research idea to be explored in the arena of the scholarship of teaching and learning.

## Conclusion

Preparing students for the workforce is an essential part of what colleges do. Whether a student is studying liberal arts or STEM disciplines, it is the responsibility of educators to challenge students to engage and examine social justice topics while they grow professionally. This is a revelatory way to develop inclusive leaders — and it deepens student relationships with faculty, the community, and the university. Furthermore, faculty must teach students to develop critical consciousness in preparation for the workplace. To get started, it is important to create social

justice oriented learning outcomes for professional development courses so that assignments can be aligned and assess the student's understanding professionalism through contextual lens of our contemporary social, political, and economic realities. We are not advocating that professional development objectives be eliminated or watered down, we are however advocating for a more holistic and culturally relevant approach to the instruction of these concepts. At minimum, there could be multiple touch points during the course on particular hot button topics. Teachers have a privileged perspective in the college classroom and should use it to purposefully and with great care to create awareness of how valuing diversity, inclusion, and equity prepares students to be more effective professional leaders and global citizens.

The increase of technology and global interdependence affect the way we prepare colleges students for success in the world of work. Specific skill sets are required. We live in a culture of change, and our students need to be equipped to adapt. We must rise to meet this challenge of embracing a social justice oriented employability imperative or risk that stakeholders, like employers and parents, may take their educational and talent sphere investments elsewhere. While people in general may be hesitant to discuss issues of social justice, effective educational leaders should not be. There is an urgent need for professional development to be consciously connected to social justice awareness to adequately

prepare the 21st century workforce for success. The TEL model allows for disruption of normativity when it comes to preparing students to thrive as leaders, and not just survive in the changing, global professional world. Students become transformative leaders as they dismantle oppressions in the workplace and challenge outdated notions of what it means to be a professional.



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