

How Experiential Learning (EL) moves from pedagogy into an organization in 4 phases

By Bill Heinrich, Director of Mindset by Symplicity | Co-chair, SEE Research & Scholarship Committee | Member, SEE Board of Directors (2024-2028)

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After the well-organized and thought-provoking inaugural SEE Symposium on February 10th, 2026, I was reflecting on the conversations I heard at the Symposium and in the SEE community over a few years. Conversations mirrored a recent [podcast conversation about EL growth](#) on campus, several leaders talked about how EL an organizing idea for their campuses is to rally around. I frequently get asked in my own practice: How does EL move from [being a great pedagogy to a campus-wide strategy](#)? And why should we?

Here's a summary of what I've been reading:

First the Why: EL makes academic knowledge and learning applicable and relevant. Authentic engagements approximate or match the kinds of scenarios learners need to be ready for in their careers and lives. Learners succeed when they have deep understanding and can apply knowledge. In EL, learners build relationships in teams, solve complex, multi-faceted, diverse problems, and communicate through tensions and disagreements. EL creates the conditions for learners to thrive in developing their [durable skills](#).

Now the How: As college and university educators have adopted EL in courses and programs, students become more engaged and successful. More EL is added and we noticed a pattern of how institutions begin to support and scale EL in 4 distinct phases.

Scaling Experiential Learning: The Road Ahead

Phases 1-2 work slowly at first—often over the span of decades. **Phases 3-4**, in turn, move very quickly—sometimes within just 12-24 months.

The risk in rapidly rolling out new experiential learning (EL) is that some educators and program leaders will need to adjust more quickly than they might be ready for. And as always, funding presents an ongoing challenge when launching new and exciting priorities. We'll talk more about change leadership in another post, but the bottom line is this: EL leaders are change leaders.

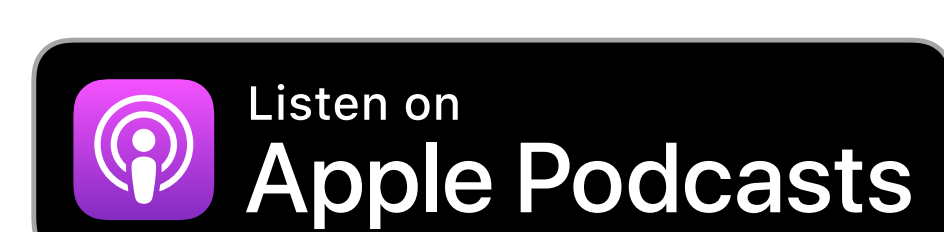
The good news is that there are professionals in the Society for Experiential Education showing us how to lead through these changes—and how EL scaling is getting done.

I'm excited to share findings from research on this topic. With my coauthors, I identified key needs and strategies in our forthcoming book, *Leading Experiential Learning on Campus* (Routledge, Summer 2026).

In the meantime, check out these links to see where you are on the journey to Scaled-Up Experiential Learning!

Curious how campuses are moving from great pedagogy to institution wide impact?

Hear real-world stories and strategies from leaders advancing experiential learning at scale.



PHASE 1 – Distributed EL

Distributed EL Practice and Pedagogy

There are several dozen types of EL that are regularly practiced in Higher Ed, since the introduction of HIPs, there has been a vast expansion of EL in courses and programs: ongoing

PHASE 2 – Coordinated EL Support

Coordinated EL Support

Realizes efficiencies in logistics, budgets, training, and implementation; can be at unit, department, college and/or division level; typically organizes multiple EL activities in a college/faculty or one EL activity across campus (i.e., study abroad; undergraduate research)

PHASE 3 – The First EL Leader

1st EL Leader

The appointment or emergence of a (centralized) campus EL leader sometimes coincides with and sometimes catalyzes an EL strategy. This person wrangles data, effort, and analyses aimed at providing equitable, scaled access to more kinds of EL across all units, departments, & divisions

Some key initializing strategies include

- [Tagging all EL courses](#)
- Defining EL by [pedagogical types](#) such as [WIL](#) or [HIPs](#)
- [Defining EL by process](#) (i.e., follows a specific theory, Plan-Do-Reflect)
- [Training faculty to teach EL](#)
- Implementing an experience [Record](#) (or LER) and encouraging students to add experiences to their new digital wallet

In all approaches, [measuring how students perform](#) is a key activity and reportable outcome!

PHASE 4 – The First EL Leader

Campus EL Priority

The Campus EL Priority typically appears in a strategic plan or special accreditation effort. The approaches mirror and extend the EL Leader approaches and supplemented with alumni, donor, industry partnerships, government coordination, and campus leadership to help new (read: risky) efforts come online.