EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING II

Class code
EXLII-UF 9302-089

Instructor Details
Anna LESNE
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Office hours: Monday 2-4pm, Tuesday 11am-1pm

Class Details
Experiential Learning II
Tuesday 8:45-10:45am
Location to be confirmed.

Prerequisites
GLS juniors only

Class Description
The second semester of Experiential Learning is a two-credit, pass/fail course focused primarily on a community placement, usually an internship. It includes a seminar and two and a half days per week at the placement during two months. During this time, classroom sessions are replaced by one-on-one meetings and “à la carte” activities to choose from: conferences or visits planned in the evening.

The seminar portion of the course encourages and facilitates an individual and group reflection on the internship experience and immersion in a foreign work environment. It extends the knowledge gained in Experiential Learning I on Paris and France, and their place in the modern global framework, with an emphasis on social practices and the notion of work culture. Each student also analyzes the company or organization she or he works for, including the context in which it operates, and develops an academic project that grows out of her or his workplace experience.

Desired Outcomes
By the end of EXL II, students will have:
- Sought out, secured, and completed an internship in a professional setting
- Built a personal network of resources and contacts to support their junior year Experiential Learning projects
- Used language to engage in study and experiential learning and reflected on the manner in which language reflects social and cultural practices and assumptions
- Understood that formal classroom and informal learning are part of a continuum

Assessment Components
In order to pass the course, students must be committed to their placement and achieve a passing grade in each of the assessment categories.
- Attendance, participation in class, involvement at the placement: 30%
- Informal reflective writing: 30%. This includes weekly posts to the class blog during the placement (500-700 words on average) and short responses to readings due before class sessions. Students are strongly advised to regularly take notes on their work experience, or to keep a journal.
- Individual project: 40%. In March, students develop a research question that relates their placement experience to their academic interests. The project involves some use of both fieldwork material and secondary sources. Students present their internship site and research in class (10 minutes, first two weeks of April) and write a 5 page essay due on April 15th. The essay and presentation count for a combined 40% of the seminar grade.

Failure to submit or fulfil any required course component results in failure of the class.
Session 1

January 19

Introduction: Anglo-American views on French at work

We will examine common representations and recent Anglophone media coverage on French labor laws, which produce rather consistent images of French people at work: on strike, or enjoying the good life with long vacation, short work weeks, long breaks... These images, which could appear at odds with France high labor productivity (and fairly low unionization rate), are often set against that of a stronger work ethic in the US. Does this reveal different attitudes toward work, different uses of words, different perspectives? We will analyze the meaning, origin and connotations of “work ethic” and “métier”, and their respective emphasis on diligence and hard work on the one hand, “amour du travail bien fait” on the other hand. What narrative can we build from there, and do we avoid oversimplification? We will analyze discourses on French at work as an example of value conflict and rivalry, also obvious in French perspectives on Americans at work.

Session 2

January 26

What you are prepared to see: discussion on the notion of distortion and experience

- Presentation of Beyond Learning by doing, by Jay W. Roberts, and how a year abroad can allow you to fulfill many outcomes desired in experiential education.
- Focus on “the critical current”. Has the cycle of experience and reflection that you have been encouraged to engage in last semester allowed you to perceive some effects of the “distortion”, at home or in France?
- What does it mean to “take off your American goggles”? Can we apply the notion of distortion to the vision that a nation can have of another nation? In the case of France-US relations, is there a political dimension in these representations? Can some of these images and discourses be understood as part of a hegemonic project?
- Critical analysis, shifting perspectives, acute awareness: what you can gain from decoding your internship experience.


Weeks 3-11

No class sessions: class blog, individual meetings on appointment and “à la carte” activities

February-March

Placements dates: Feb. 1 - March 25

1. Three one-on-one meetings: set up a time, using the Doodle polls
   - We’ll be discussing the specific circumstances of your placement, challenges, problem-solving; I’ll give you feedback on your blog posts; we will examine how to interpret your observations from the disciplinary standpoint of your concentration and how your experience in turn informs your understanding of theoretical positions in your field. We will discuss your research question, method and resources (contents or methodology: for instance an article on interviewing).

2. “À la carte” activities: please choose one visit or conference
   - Guest speakers on different themes (evening):
     - “Paris art scene”, March 14th (TBC)
     - “A world without borders? Beyond language differences, the challenge of differing sets of laws and legal systems”, March 29th (TBC)
     - “The Welfare State and social work in France”, April 11th (TBC)
   - Visits will be offered at different dates, in the evening as much as possible, each of them illustrating an aspect of Paris’ economy through one neighborhood or institution: fine craftsmanship as a “vitrine d’excellence”, tradition and innovation; the French tech and start-up incubators (March 7th); the corporate world (March 21st). (Dates TBC)

3. Homework: Weekly blog posts due every Monday at noon.
   - Here are themes and questions that should guide the writing of your posts. You are encouraged to write in French as often as you can. You can post on a different topic, if there is something of special interest that you would like to write about. You can also choose to respond to another student’s post, or to several posts. If you write on the suggested theme you don’t have to answer all the questions. Whatever you decide to do, spend some time reading the prompt and considering each question before writing your post, as part of the ongoing reflection I want you to develop during this placement.
   - There will be a special section in the blog that you should also feed: “Oh... so French!”. List here all the things that you notice and that you associate with “Frenchness”. Subheads: “Is it just me or...?”, “That’s so annoying...” (or charming...), “Have you noticed how they...?” An entry can be a short sentence or a commentary, and you can post once in a while or all at once towards the end of the placement.
   - Post 1: due February 1 at noon
Research on the organization you work for. What is your first impression of this organization: from your first contact (interview), and the analysis of their website. Analyze the language they use, the words they highlight and the values they put forward. How much do you know about the sector and this type of organization, in France or elsewhere? Include the link to their website.

Post 2: due February 8 at noon
First impressions from your week at work. How would you describe the atmosphere? The attitudes, the work rhythm and work hours, the social interactions and informal conversations? Did anything surprise you? Is there a discrepancy between the image they present (discourse, website) and the reality as you perceive it? Analyze the way your different coworkers behave with you and how you present yourself at your placement. Which aspects of your personality and competencies do you bring out, and do you feel you have modified anything given this new cultural space? How do you think you are perceived?

Post 3: due February 15 at noon
Describe your work environment: give us a picture of the location, the building, how the space is organized, how it looks, how it is furnished and equipped, maybe how the use of the space differs at different times of the day, and how you are positioned in this picture. Where do meetings take place? Are there places that are more public or private, does this workplace receive visitors/clients? Are there clear demarcations (separate spaces, separate times) between work and breaks or informal conversations? Describe social/work interactions you have observed, and where they take place, paying particular attention to lunch and coffee breaks. Do some coworkers work from home or in cafés once in a while (and are work hours thus flexible)? Did you expect anything to be different? Do you compare it to another workplace that you have seen, fictional or real? What do the physical characteristics of your workplace and the way this space is used tell you about your company/organization? How does it influence the way you feel at work?
-I will give you links to articles you can look at: on the evolution of offices’ spatial configuration in the last decades; on the physical space in relation to creativity and interaction patterns; on the blurring of the distinction between the domains of “work” and “leisure” and its influence on workplace culture.

Post 4: due February 22 at noon
Who does what? Explain the composition of the team(s), roles and hierarchy. Are tasks and responsibilities fixed or flexible? What is your opinion on how well people communicate and how well the organization functions? On their performance and quality of their work? Is there much distance (behavior and space) between the different hierarchical levels? Do power relations reflect the organizational chart? Observe who is asked when help is needed (different kinds of help), who is trusted/doubted/fear, whose presence is sought for/who’s popular/set aside? How are interns, how are you, considered and treated by other employees? Did you expect this attitude? How important is the work done by interns in this organization?
-I will provide some texts on this theme, depending on the type of company or organization you work for

Post 5: due February 29 at noon
How much do you get to interact with others, how much of an outsider/insider do you feel, and how much is it related to language? Do you find it difficult to be yourself in a foreign language? Reflect on language proficiency, status and self-image (gain and/or loss in self-confidence), as well as processes of inclusion and exclusion in the workplace dependent on language. Is your proficiency sufficient to do your work well? Do you manage to understand and participate in quicker, more informal conversations? To understand jokes and not just mimic laughing? To show how interesting a person you are? Do you usually understand the codes and the context or are you “lost in translation”? What is the status of English at work and did you notice tensions/rivalry concerning dominant languages (think of our discussion on language in the Fall)?

Post 6: due March 7 at noon
Analyze the way you’ve been adjusting to this workplace. Self-presentation, mannerisms, way of speaking, working, communicating: have you changed in any way or did you feel it was unnecessary? If there were some adjustments, was it forced, spontaneous, a source of satisfaction? Are there things that felt foreign or difficult to understand and are starting to make sense now? Think about the conversations you have heard, the attitudes, opinions etc. What is relatable? What indicates a different perspective on everyday life, work, or even a different worldview? Do you find it easy to put yourself in the shoes of one of your colleagues? Would you prefer to work with people more similar to you (age, gender, nationality, language, life experience, values, political opinions, cultural tastes etc.)?

Post 7: due March 14 at noon
How much have you learned on the job? Analyze new (hard and soft) skills, knowledge gained on the trade, the sector, useful contacts. What is the most useful to you, the most related to academic
interests, and how can you develop this new knowledge further? You could for example interview a senior coworker on a specific topic, extend your network and speak to your new contacts to better understand a question, participate in an event (important team meeting, professional event outside of the organization with a colleague), or write a paper that would be your essay for EXL II but could also be used by your organization. Propose at least one idea for a research question/project for your essay.

Post 8: due March 21 at noon
Update on the progress of your individual project (reading, writing, interview, problems)

Post 9: due March 28 at noon
What are your feelings now that the placement is over? If you think back to your first blog posts, do you view your workplace differently: the way your coworkers work and interact, your understanding of how the organization functions, or its place in the larger picture (national or global context)? How do you look back to the overall experience? What are you the most pleased with? What would you have done differently? What type of work, workplace and professional relationships do you feel (un)comfortable and (un)happy with? Does it help you (re)consider a possible career path?

Session 3
April 5
Presentations and discussion: insights into various sectors, experiences and approaches

Students present their placement (5 minutes) and the research question they have chosen to examine (5 minutes). Each presentation (or series of presentations, for placements in the same field) is followed by a discussion on a point of particular interest: an aspect of the industry, of the French marketplace in the global framework, an interesting approach to how an academic project can grow out from a workplace experience, a successful attempt at networking, etc.

Session 4
April 12
Presentations and discussion continue

Essay due on April 15th.

SPRING BREAK

Session 5
May 3
Place and placement. One year of place-based experiential learning

What did you learn just from being uprooted? From changing your routine? From engaging in different cultural and social practices? From being forced to speak another language? From shifting perspectives? How do you relate learning and emotions? What was the strongest aspect of your learning experience (individual, social, political)? How do you compare the placement experience to the rest of this year-long process of experiential learning? We’ll analyze the characteristics and outcomes of this kind of immersion, and the notion of “transformative experience”, based on your experiences and on Beyond learning by doing.

How does your placement experience enable you to reflect on the notion of national differences in work cultures? Would you say you left your placement with a firmer, vaguer, a more refined, a more puzzled vision and discourse on “French people”? Do you feel more of an insider in France? Has your appreciation of the people and the place changed, and in what way? Do you go home with a project to live abroad in the future? How much of what you learned in Paris is transferable to another place? Can you illustrate the fact that what we say about others also speaks about who we are? Are you satisfied with how much you have learned about you, as a worker, maybe as a future professional in the sector you have tested, and as a person, in the different facets and dimensions of your identity?

Homework:
-Read one chapter in Beyond learning by doing by J. Roberts (see with me which chapter) and read our blog (“Oh... so French!” and at least ten other posts).
-Write a 1 page reflection on your and your peers’ experience and interpretations: try to decode perceptions, remaining assumptions, reactions. What are, in your opinion, the possible limitations of this type of experience, its interest and most important outcomes?

Session 6
May 10
Farewell session (one hour)