NIPISSING
UNIVERSITY

Experiential Learning Program for Arts & Science

Virtual Work Placement Guide for Placement Hosts

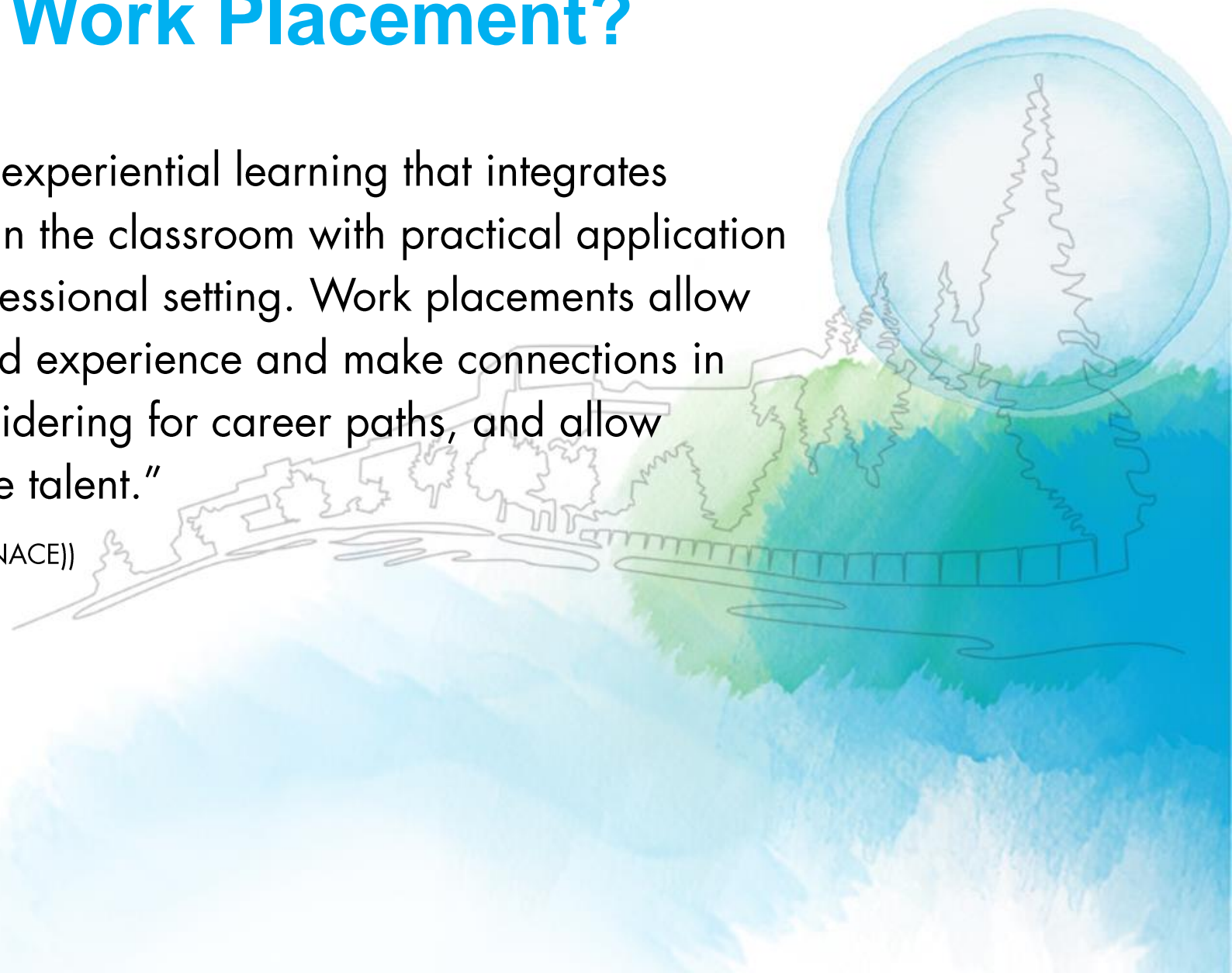# What is an ELAS Work Placement?

A work placement is "a form of experiential learning that integrates knowledge and theory learned in the classroom with practical application and skills development in a professional setting. Work placements allow students to gain valuable applied experience and make connections in professional fields they are considering for career paths, and allow employers to guide and evaluate talent."

(National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE))

What is an ELAS Work Placement?

To ensure that an experience - whether it is in person or one conducted virtually - is educational, and thus eligible to be considered a legitimate work placement all the following criteria must be met:

- The experience must be an extension of the classroom: a learning experience that provides for applying the knowledge gained in the classroom. It must not be merely to advance the employer's operations or work that a regular employee would routinely perform.
- The skills or knowledge learned must be transferable to other employment settings.
- The experience has a defined beginning and end, and a job description with desired qualifications.
- There are clearly defined learning objectives/goals related to the professional goals of the student's academic coursework.
- The experience must be supervised by a professional with expertise and educational or professional background in the field.
- There is regular feedback from the experienced supervisor.
- There are resources, equipment, and facilities provided by the host employer that support learning objectives/goals.

What is an ELAS Work Placement?

ELAS work placements coincide with the academic calendar typically fall within the following time frames:

- Fall Semester (September - December)
- Spring Semester (January- April)
- Summer Semester (May-August)

Placement blocks are either 30 or 60-hours throughout the semester. Students can work more or fewer hours, but 30 is the minimum number of hours needed to complete an ELAS placement.

What is an ELAS Work Placement?

ELAS placements provide many benefits. A few of those employer benefits include:
- Short-term support without a long-term commitment
- Management experience for supervisors/mentors who direct the students' work activities
- Opportunity to evaluate student job candidates before offering permanent employment
- The best source of new permanent employees
- Higher retention rates for employees with company work placement experience
- Source of new ideas and a fresh approach to problem-solving, critical thinking, communications, etc.
- Highly enthusiastic, capable, and motivated students
- Company name recognition and increased visibility on-campus

What is the Difference Between In-person and Virtual Placements?

Work placements performed online, or remotely are virtual wok placements. Virtual placements allow the student to work on a global scale, but stay local. They are placed with an NBDCC organization and report to a supervisor. They are also in regular contact with the supervisor/team via virtual methods such as video call, phone call, email, and instant messenger.
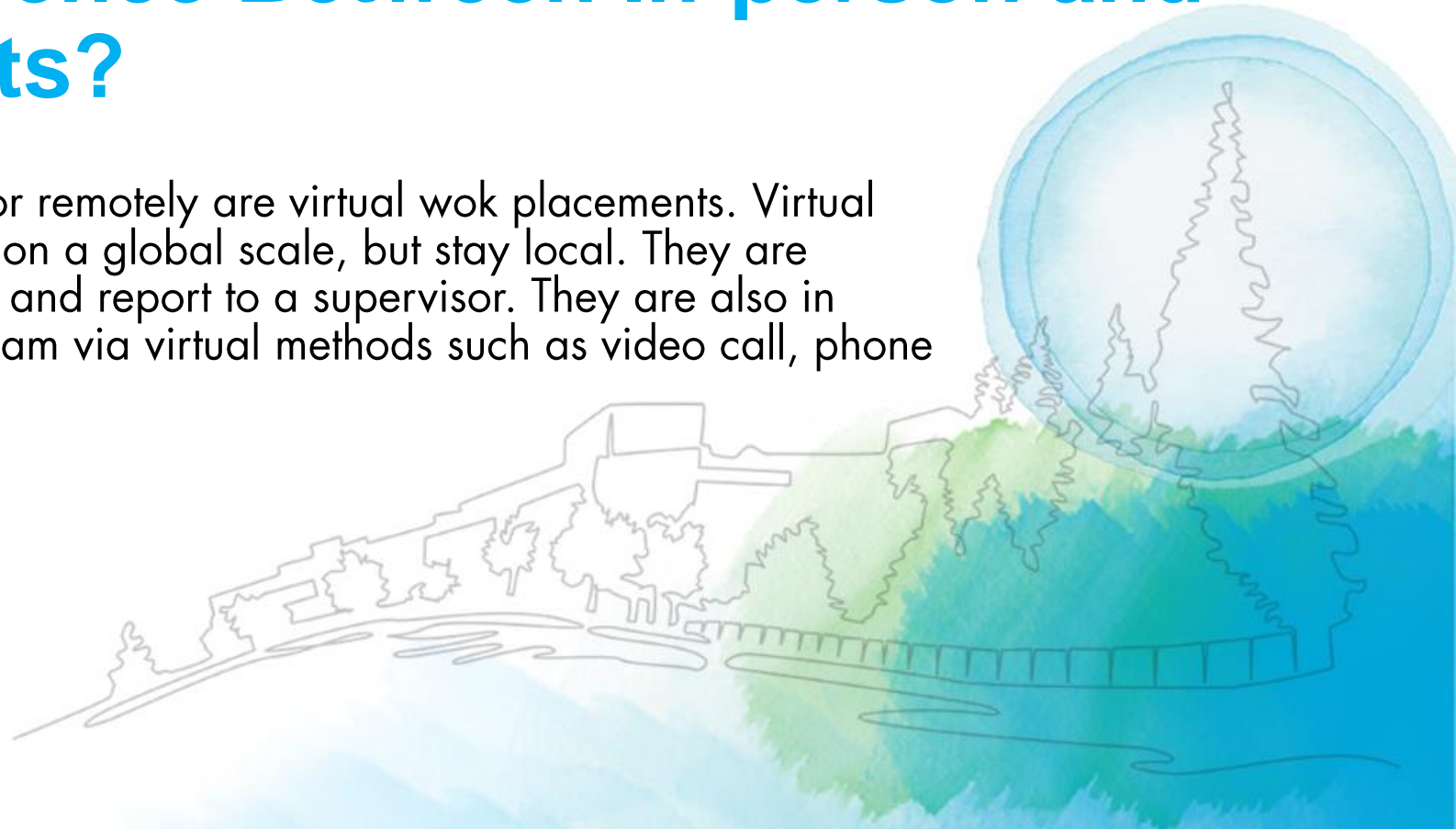
What are the Benefits of Virtual Placements?

The primary benefit of an online work placement now is it can provide students with a safe, work-based learning experience that is grounded in an authentic task or project for an NBDCC member organization.

Depending on the project's nature, students can also develop skills – either technical, inter-personal or intra-personal – by completing one or more professional assignments on behalf of a professional organization.

Additionally, an online placement can provide students with experience in online project management and communications, which are standard modes of the project- and task-performance in many organizations. Depending on the quality and character of the experience, an online work placement may provide some of the benefits outlined above, including new professional contacts, introduction to professional norms, and so on. Last, an online work placement includes no travel or housing costs and maybe a solution for students' studying at a distance.

What are the Challenges of Virtual Placements?

The drawbacks of online work placements include the lack of in-person relationship building, immersion in the physical and cultural spaces of a firm or organization, and fewer opportunities to engage in the ad hoc interaction that typically arise during an on-site experience.
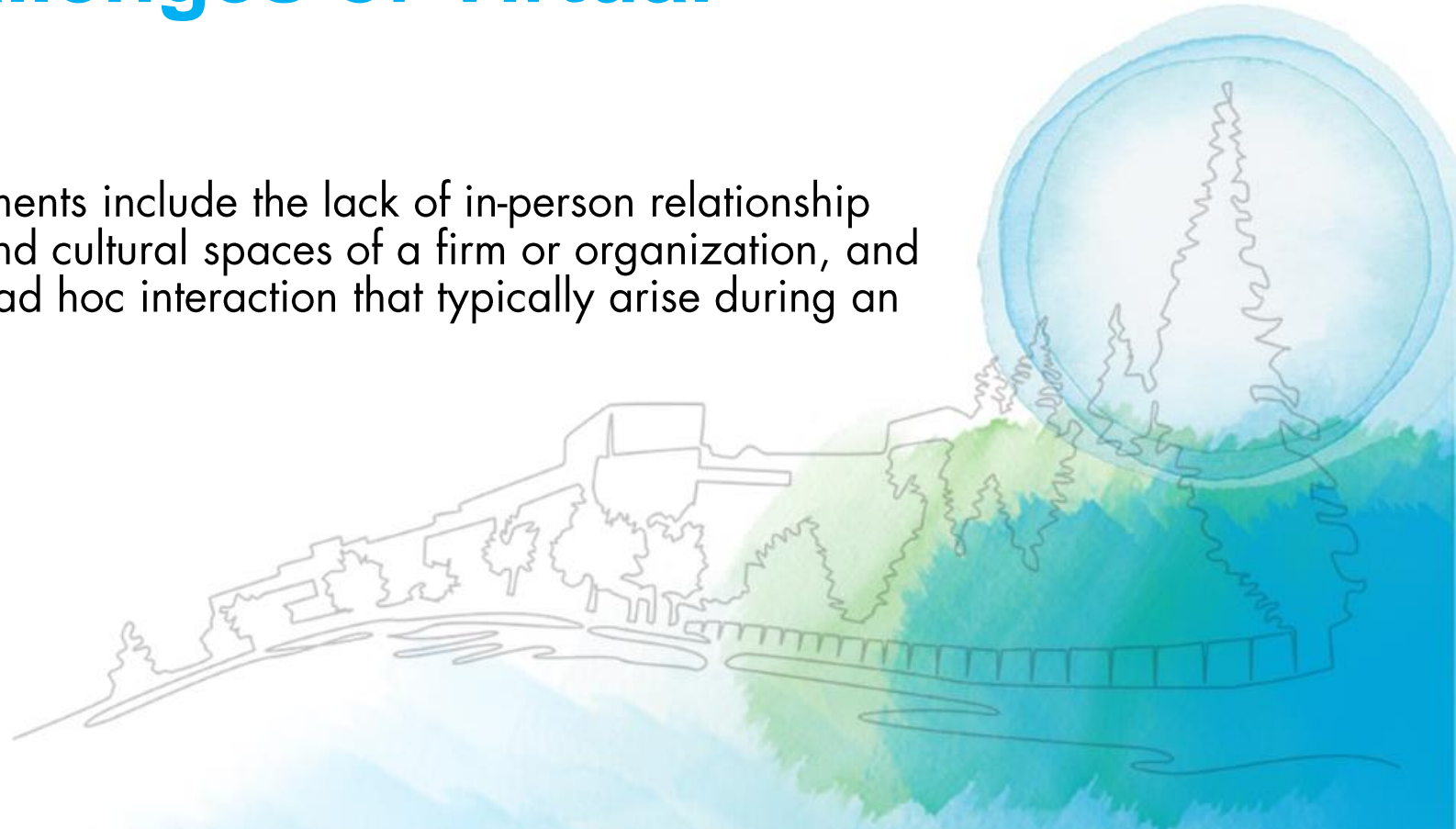
How To Set Up a Virtual Placement

The process for an online work placement can vary depending on the situation and company. However, the details below will help you develop a meaningful experience that works well for both you and the student.

1. Identify projects. Identify a real project(s) within your organization that will allow students to expand their skills. Consider your organization's current needs and develop your plans around those areas.

2. Develop Learning Goals. What will the student gain from this learning experience? The learning goals could incorporate desired industry-related knowledge, skills, and abilities required for successful career advancement.

3. Apply. Complete the ELAS Placement NBDCC Application form, including your project description and requirements. Once submitted, students will be able to view and apply based on the information that you provide. Our office will also promote your opportunity on our social media pages and on our ELAS student website.

What Should a Virtual Placement Entail?

1. **Access**. It is vital that you, the supervisor, ensure that the student has the technical capability to complete projects, maintain frequent contact with you to address questions, and submit assignments. Lack of access should not be a barrier for any student.

2. **Thorough onboarding and orientation**. For the student to become oriented and established in their virtual work environment, supervisors should plan for the student's first day to be focused on orientation and training. A virtual orientation can consist of testing the technology, meeting other students/staff members (as appropriate), learning about the organization, reviewing organization-wide communication standards and workplace expectations (including taking required legal breaks, lunches, and a system of tracking hours). Also, discuss the learning goals with the student. Work with your student to develop a plan to ensure that the established goals are met and regularly checked throughout the work placement to see if the student is on track to achieve them.

3. **Timely Feedback**. Like online learning environments, supervisors should review student deliverables and provide timely feedback to students regularly. Supervisors can schedule feedback meetings for a minimum of thirty minutes each week to engage in direct mentorship with the student regarding their progress towards learning outcomes and areas of professional development. Pre-planned training topics should also be discussed during these sessions. Meeting platforms can vary and might include video conferencing or telephone.

What Should a Virtual Placement Entail?

- **Consistent Communication.** Provide summative feedback, including updates on expected work activities for the week, outcomes from prior work submissions, and other relevant announcements about the organization. A good practice is to schedule a regular email report around or on the same day each week. Rather than just assigning "to do" deliverables, communicate why the work essential. What is the work connected to or contributing to? How will this task contribute to the greater good of the project/department/organization?

- **Pre-arranged Schedules**. Although a critical feature of virtual work placements is the flexibility of the work schedule, supervisors and students should agree upon final time allotment per week and day for work placement activities. Shift caps avoid unreasonable work demands on the student and any conflict with reported work placement hours. Note: <u>Student hours are capped to an average of 10 hours/week maximum</u>.

- **Organizational Involvement** In addition to facilitating a remote or virtual work placement, supervisors should make an effort to integrate the student into the organization's work culture. This integration may include attending select virtual team or client meetings, using company tools and resources, participating in online training, and any other forms of access to other staff members.

What Should a Virtual Placement Entail?

- **Reimbursement of Expenses** Students engaged in virtual work placements should not incur any personal expenses due to the work placements. Any such costs, including the purchase of software and hardware for the work placement, should be covered by the work placement host, or deducted from the ELAS placement stipend.

- **Written Contract or Agreement** Your organization may want to consider a written agreement about the arrangement between the student and the company. Such an agreement can address issues such as expectations, compensation, nature of supervision, and so on.

- **Final Evaluation** After the experience, all parties should evaluate one another and provide feedback on the challenges and successes of the experience. This feedback can guide modifications to improve program operations and assist students in their continued professional development.

Best Practices for Organizations Considering Virtual Placements

When appropriately delivered, virtual work placements can be a rewarding experience for both the student and the employer. For companies and organizations that are considering hosting virtual work placements for the Fall of 2020, here are some additional considerations:

Allocate enough time before the start of the virtual work placement to:

- Select and test the right software for managing work

- Provide staff training to use the new software/systems (if students are expected to use new software or information technology, it should be provided free-of-charge)

- Develop a work plan for the student, training materials, activities and tools the student will need to succeed in the role

- Clearly define expectations for both the student and the supervisor/mentor. These need to be agreed upon before the start of the work placement. Goals and expectations should be reinforced regularly

- All tasks and projects must be carefully prepared and planned for the virtual student to manage the work effectively by themselves. The creation of a written work plan that covers the entirety of the experience is suggested

Best Practices for Organizations Considering Virtual Placements

- Because the student will not have the opportunity for the everyday interactions of the workplace, the materials, instructions, and task descriptions need to be well prepared and available online so that they can access that information when needed

- For the supervisor, it is suggested that you engage the rest of your team in the delivery of the virtual work placement experience. By doing this, the student will have the opportunity to interact with several individuals throughout the experience. Team members need to be committed and available to engage with virtual students daily and sometimes multiple times a day

- Create and deliver a well-balanced experience for your student that includes the opportunity for the student to:
  - Learn about your organization
  - Focus on professional development
  - Engage in meaningful projects and work that will help develop their overall ability to become valuable team members in the future

Resources for Delivering Virtual Placements

Resources for delivering a virtual work placement experience:

- Face-to-Face Communication – GoToMeeting, Zoom, Google Hangouts.

- Other communication tools – Slack, Email, Instant Messenger, etc.

- Free Project Management Tools – Asana, OpenProject, nTask, Monday, etc.

- Online file sharing – DropBox, Box, GoFile, etc

Co-operative Education and Work-Integrated Learning Canada (CEWIL Canada) Resources:

- Tips for Onboarding Students Remotely

- Tips for Supervising Students Remotely