

An Examination of the Extent to which the Mount Saint Vincent University Business and Tourism Learning Passport Programme Influences Undergraduate Students' Learning Experiences using the Jones (2018) Conceptual Model

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Abstract

The Jones conceptual model includes extracurricular activities (ECAs) as one of seven microsystems that influence the undergraduate student learning experience. This case study used the Jones model as a framework to study the extent to which the ECAs, within the Mount Saint Vincent University (MSVU) Business and Tourism Learning Passport (LP) programme, met the needs of undergraduate students' post-secondary learning experience [1]. Through the LP programme students are able to engage with five of the seven microsystems in the Jones model: the degree programme (academic), ECAs, preparing for life after graduation (career), transition into student life (personal development), and university peer and friendship groups. While they are important factors which influence students' participation, or lack of participation, in the programme, the LP programme does not have control over the remaining two microsystems in the Jones model: social background of the students and expectations pre-university. This qualitative research study revealed that the LP programme contributed to undergraduate students' learning experience as demonstrated by the Jones model. Researchers adapted the Jones model based on the analysis of the LP programme. They found interaction between the LP ECAs and other microsystems in the model. Researchers also determined the LP programme should explore ways to better capture social engagement and personal development. Researchers recommended the Jones model [1] better highlight how the contribution to community through volunteering and social advocacy influences undergraduate student learning.

1. Introduction

Integrating extracurricular activities (ECAs) into student learning is a popular means of introducing students to realistic work situations, career opportunities, and employability skills. While Bartkus, Nemelka, Nemelka, and Gardner state that a definition for ECA remains ambiguous, a lack of a

definition can limit research because it does not allow for proper classification of activities [2]. In the context of higher education, Hordosy and Clark state that ECA "refers to the broad range of activities that students engage with beyond the requirements of their degree" [3, p. 415].

The MSVU Department of Business and Tourism offers the LP programme to provide coordinated and documented ECA opportunities for student participation. The programme provides a formal way of tracking the informal learning experiences of students taking business and tourism courses. The LP programme offers students more than 30 ECAs each term. Students can choose to complete the programme as part of their regular studies. LP ECAs include guest speakers, career week panels, research and writing sessions, volunteer opportunities, and study skill tutorials. Underpinning the programme is a mandate to support student development needs academically, professionally (including career development), and personally. The LP programme mandate also aims to foster students' awareness and appreciation for community needs and social advocacy. Students who participate in the programme can obtain a maximum of three LP points, toward their final marks in business and tourism courses. Students need to complete a minimum of two LP ECAs to begin earning LP points. Students who complete four LP ECAs earn the maximum number of LP points. To receive points, students must complete a reflective exercise after each ECA. The reflective exercise focuses on learning objectives for each ECA and the most salient aspects of these learning experiences.

The LP programme started in the Fall 2009 term. It was developed based on academic, career and community-based learning. Since then, the LP programme has evolved to include four pillars related to academics, career preparation/planning, personal development, and community development/social advocacy. In Fall 2018, 288 students from various disciplines, primarily business and tourism, completed the LP programme. During this term, the LP service providers hosted 35 ECAs (see Table 1).

Table 1. Thirty-five ECAs offered during Fall 2018

Name of LP ECA	Number of Students	Host/ Department
Learners & Leaders Conference	100	Business & Tourism
Tourism Management Panel	63	Business & Tourism
Accounting & Finance Panel	55	Business & Tourism
Entrepreneurship Panel	20	Business & Tourism
Human Resource Panel	40	Business & Tourism
Management Panel	51	Business & Tourism
Marketing Panel	48	Business & Tourism
Non-Profit Panel	49	Business & Tourism
Sustainable Business Tour	63	Business & Tourism
Local Tourism Tour	49	Business & Tourism
Effective Career Networking	70	Career Services
Halifax Career Fair	84	Career Services
Skills for Today's Job Market	74	Career Services
Get Hired	9	Career Services
Finding a Summer Job	29	Career Services
Interview Preparation	53	Career Services
Maximize LinkedIn Profile	16	Career Services
Professionalism on the Job	20	Career Services
Winning Resumes	34	Career Services
Strong Interest Inventory	4	Career Services
Get Motivated for a Career	5	Career Services
Using RefWorks	16	Library
Business & Market Research	22	Library
Database Searching	13	Library
Articles, Books, & eBooks	11	Library
Reading & Comprehension	1	Library
Studying & Optimism	27	Learning Strategist
Growth Mindset	29	Learning Strategist
Test-Taking & Self-Compassion	26	Learning Strategist
Exploring Entrepreneurship	2	Chamber of Commerce
Managing your Digital Self	14	Chamber of Commerce
Toastmasters	1	Other
RTK Access (Right to Know)	3	Other
Volunteer Activities	9	Other
Meet with a business leader	1	Other

LP ECAs were offered on-campus or online. LP internal service providers included MSVU Department of Business and Tourism, Learning Strategist, Library, Career Services, and Centre for Women and Business. LP external service providers included Halifax Chamber of Commerce, Toastmasters, and government departments. Additional external LP ECAs include selected and approved conferences, volunteer opportunities and interviews with business leaders. The goal of this research was to explore the degree to which participating in the LP programme met the needs of MSVU undergraduate students' post-secondary learning experience. Drawing on a case study methodology, researchers used the Jones Undergraduate Student Experience Conceptual Model to complete the evaluation [1].

2. Literature Review

Drawing on Jones model of undergraduate student learning experiences, the following section outlines research conducted on the MSVU Business and Tourism LP Programme and highlights the influence ECAs have on undergraduate student academic success, career preparation/planning, personal development, and community development / social advocacy [1].

2.1 MSVU LP Programme

Engaging students in their communities contributes to development of transferable skills, [4] a sense of belonging [5] and a sense of life satisfaction [6]. According to Blotnicky, Cormier-MacBurnie, Hicks, and Mombourquette, reasons for students' initial participation in the LP programme were LP points, enhancing personal development and career planning. As students participated in the programme they seemed to appreciate the opportunity to network with industry professionals. Reasons to continue to engage with LP ECAs included career and personal development as well as social engagement. In this context, social engagement was described as meeting with other students, strengthening relationships with faculty and others. In addition, enhancing personal development was highlighted as a student benefit of participation in the LP programme. Students noted that participation in the LP programme influenced their career aspirations, securing future employment and/or becoming an entrepreneur. Student feedback gathered after participating in the LP programme suggested some students were more likely to engage in community activities in the future. Students also learned the value they can bring to their communities by giving back [7]. Further, Blotnicky and Mallette reported that the LP programme helped students better

understand their field of study (62%), improve GPA (60%), learn about job opportunities (58%), better understand business culture (52%), network with industry professionals (41%), and better integrate classroom learning with real world business or practices (36%). Overall, 96% of students would recommend participating in the LP programme to others [8].

2.2 The Jones Model of the Undergraduate Student Experience

Jones explicates a conceptual framework for the undergraduate student experience by focusing on what influences shape that experience and how they do so. Embedded in Bronfenbrenner's ecological model Jones asserts that experience is created by the interaction between an individual (the undergraduate student) and their environment, which leads to student learning (see Figure 1).

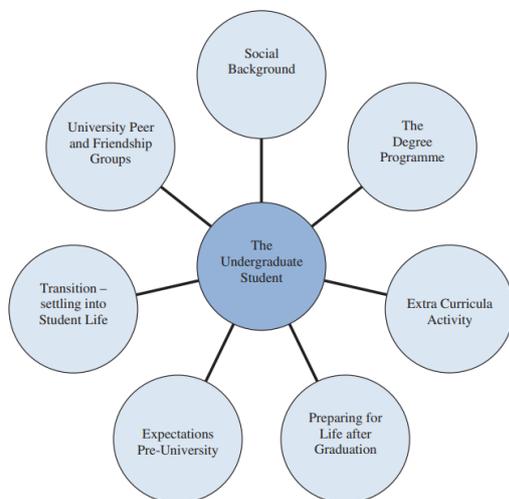


Figure 1. The undergraduate student experience as interaction with influential microsystems [1]

As interaction increases, learning takes place. Therefore, it is important to highlight the nature of the interactions between elements of the student environment and the student. The environment Jones refers to consists of a macrosystem, which includes seven microsystems. The student operates from the centre of the macrosystem. The macrosystem includes the overall cultural and subcultural contexts of the student's environment. Two other systems exist within the macrosystem: 1) the mesosystem and 2) the exosystem. The mesosystem is closer in proximity to the student's daily interactions and therefore has greater influence. The exosystem, however, has only an indirect influence [1]. Within each of the mesosystems and exosystems are microsystems that include the day-to-day activities and roles of the student in their interactions with others (family, peers, university, workplace, and relationships with others). The influence of each the student interacts with them. Jones describes seven such microsystems in the student's environment [1]:

i. Expectations Pre-University: Students hold certain opinions and understandings about their world before they arrive at university. These views are the result of socio-economic and social factors in their pre-university environment that shape student expectations of what they believe is possible, setting the stage for their student experience.

ii. Transition – Settling into Student Life: Students transition into student life from their pre-university experience. Transition involves social integration into the university lifestyle and emotional challenge as students strive to belong to a new group and as they develop a new identity as a university student. Students who do not feel like they belong and/or who lack social integration into the university environment, are at greater risk of dropping out.

iii. University Peer and Friendship Groups: Emotional wellbeing, social learning and ultimately academic achievement, are heavily influenced by relationships with peers and friends. Students' overall engagement in university activities is also influenced by peers and friends.

iv. Social Background: Socio-economic background and the values of family/parents continue to influence students as they attend university. However, new experiences within the university and freedom of choice can impact student beliefs. To some extent, family influence continues to play an important role in employment expectations and the extent to which students may remain dependent upon parents. Continued support of family and ongoing communication with parents are important.

v. The Degree Programme: Students must feel engaged in the programme and their learning. Faculty must focus on the academic component and work with various approaches to teaching that engage students. However, when they do so they run the risk of alienating students who do not engage with, or who do not learn effectively from, the methods used. The early impressions of teaching and learning have an important influence on students' views and overall engagement.

vi. Extracurricular Activity: Extracurricular activities contribute to personal growth and enhance academic learning. They can enhance critical thinking skills as well as employability skills. Some employers seek out graduates with certain kinds of extracurricular experiences.

vii. Preparing for Life after Graduation: Students face a gap as they need to market themselves to future employers. The skills/learnings of their degree programmes must be relevant to employers in the interview process. Preparing for employment (life after graduation) is an important part of the student experience. This may be heightened in some degree programmes, particularly those of a professional nature.

So how do these systems influence student experience? Jones focuses on alienation as it blocks interaction with various microsystems. A student can

choose which microsystems to interact with. This freedom of choice results in engagement with some microsystems and alienation from others. Continuous engagement with a microsystem is an enabling force that leads to even greater interaction and learning, drawing that microsystem closer (enhancing proximity). This is how student interaction with the microsystems shapes their undergraduate experience. Student experience can be life changing for those who choose to engage with the microsystems. While students hold pre-existing ideas and values from their pre-university phase, they can also change these views through their interaction with the other microsystems [1].

2.3 Extracurricular Activities (ECAs)

The Jones (2018) model is helpful for understanding the student experience. It also shows that focusing mainly on the academic aspects of student experience may limit student engagement, possibly increasing feelings of alienation. The study of student experience should not focus on academics alone, but also include community. Participating in ECAs can enhance student learning regarding cultural integration, leadership and teamwork [9]. Students who participate in ECAs do better academically than those who do not participate [10]. There is evidence that not all students choose to engage in ECAs, particularly if they are from marginalized groups, or are mature students who fear being left out of the mainstream [3]. The administration of ECAs is critical to student engagement. Poor planning, resulting in ECA offerings that are not congruent to students' needs regarding classes and/or employment, lack of communication about such events, and competing ECA offerings may result in a lack of engagement among some students [11].

3. Methods

A case study method was chosen focusing on the Fall 2018 term of the LP programme [12, 13]. Thirty-five ECAs were offered during the term (see Table 1). The underlying research question that guided this qualitative study was to explore the extent to which the MSVU LP programme met students' learning needs academically, professionally (including career development), and personally, based on the student experience as defined in the Jones model [1].

An interactive and iterative qualitative process was used to evaluate student experience for each LP ECA relative to the Jones model (see Figure 2) [1, 12, 13]. The iterative process focused on researcher discussion and ECA classification. Researchers reviewed LP ECA goals and student feedback. Relevant literature was revisited and researchers colour coded the seven microsystems in the Jones model (see Figure 3) [1]. The colour coded model was subsequently used to classify the 35 LP ECAs (Figure 1). When LP ECAs met student needs in more than

one microsystem, researchers reengaged in the qualitative process to

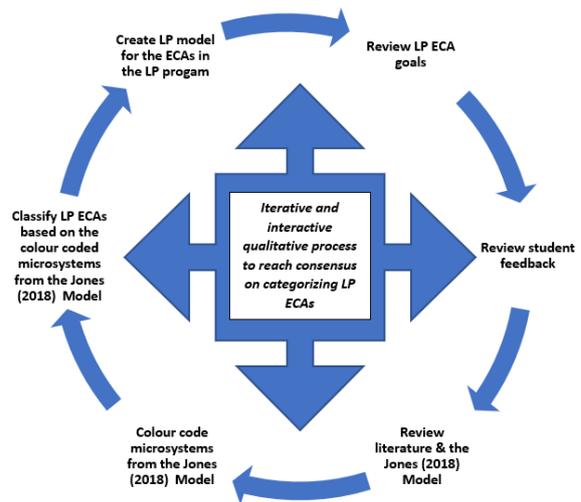


Figure 2. A qualitative, iterative, and interactive research process

come to a consensus regarding the degree to which the LP ECA fit within the descriptions of each microsystem on a proportional basis. After multiple iterations an LP model was created.

4. Results

Of the seven microsystems in the Jones model [1], in the LP programme, the ECA microsystem is all encompassing and central. Given that ECAs provide students with opportunities to form friendships and to be influenced by peers, the Jones model university peer and friendship groups microsystem is also overarching in the LP programme.



Figure 3. Colour coded legend, based on the seven microsystems in the Jones model

In Table 2, wherein the top two rows depict the Jones microsystems ECAs and university peer and

friendship groups. Table 2 illustrates how the LP ECAs relate to three of the seven microsystems in the Jones model [1]: The degree programme (Academic), Preparation for life after graduation (Career), and Transition – Settling into student life (Personal development). An additional microsystem, Volunteering and social advocacy (Community), in

Table 2 was included as a result of the analysis. The extent to which the 35 LP ECAs fit within the descriptions of each microsystem is also displayed in Table 2 [1]. If an ECA fit within one or more microsystems, researchers assigned a percent that represented the proportionate value.

Extra-curricular activities				
University peer and friendship groups				
Name of activity	The degree programme (Academic)	Preparation for life after graduation (Career)	Transition – Settling into student life (Personal development)	Volunteering & Social advocacy (Community)
Effective Career Networking		100%		
Halifax Career Fair		100%		
Skills for Today's Job Market		100%		
Get Hired		100%		
Finding a Summer Job		100%		
Interview Preparation		100%		
Maximize LinkedIn Profile		100%		
Professionalism on the Job		100%		
Winning Resumes		100%		
Exploring Entrepreneurship		100%		
Meet with a business leader		100%		
Learners & Leaders Conference	20%	80%		
Tourism Management Panel	20%	80%		
Accounting & Finance Panel	20%	80%		
Entrepreneurship Panel	20%	80%		
Human Resource Panel	20%	80%		
Management Panel	20%	80%		
Marketing Panel	20%	80%		
Non-Profit Panel	20%	80%		
Sustainable Tour	100%			
Using RefWorks	100%			
Local Tourism Tour	100%			
Business & Market Research	100%			
Database searching	100%			
Articles, Books, & eBooks	100%			
Reading & Comprehension	100%			
RTK Access (Right to Know)	100%			
Studying & Optimism	80%		20%	
Growth Mindset	50%		50%	
Test-Taking & Self-Compassion	50%		50%	
Toastmasters	33%	33%	33%	
Volunteer Activities			50%	50%
Managing your Digital Self		50%	50%	
Strong Interest Inventory		20%	80%	
Get Motivated for Career		20%	80%	

Table 2. Classification of LP ECAs based on the Jones Model [1]

Of the 35 LP ECAs, 19 fit under one microsystem and were assigned 100%. The remaining 16 ECAs fit under two or more microsystems and were assigned a proportionate value ranging from 20% to 80%.

4.1. The Degree Programme (Academic)

Of the 35 LP ECAs, 57% (20 ECAs) were coded as the degree programme (Academic). The allocations of the Academic microsystem across ECAs were as follows: Sustainable Tour (100%), Using RefWorks (100%), Local Tourism Tour (100%), Business and Market Research (100%), Database Searching (100%), Articles, Books and eBooks (100%), Reading and Comprehension (100%), RTK Access (Right to Know) (100%), Studying and Optimism (80%), Growth Mindset (50%), Test-Taking and Self-Compassion (50%), Toastmasters (33%), Learners

and Leaders Conference (20%), Tourism Management Panel (20%), Accounting and Finance Panel (20%), Entrepreneurship Panel (20%), Human Resource Panel (20%), Management Panel (20%), Marketing Panel (20%), and Non-Profit Panel (20%).

4.2. Preparation for Life after Graduation (Career)

Out of the 35 LP ECAs, a total of 66% (23 ECAs) were coded as Preparation for life after graduation (Career). The allocations of the Career microsystem across ECAs were as follows: Effective Career Networking (100%), Halifax Career Fair (100%), Skills for Today's Job Market (100%), Get Hired (100%), Finding a Summer Job (100%), Interview Preparation (100%), Maximize LinkedIn Profile (100%), Professionalism on the Job (100%), Winning

Resumes (100%), Exploring Entrepreneurship (100%), Meet with a Business Leader (100%), Learners and Leaders Conference (80%), Tourism Management Panel (80%), Accounting and Finance Panel (80%), Entrepreneurship Panel (80%), Human Resource Panel (80%), Management Panel (80%), Marketing Panel (80%), Non-Profit Panel (80%), Managing your Digital Self (50%), Toastmasters (33%), Strong Interest Inventory (20%), and Get Motivated for Career (20%).

4.3. Transition – Settling into Student Life (Personal Development)

From the 35 LP ECAs, a total of 23% (8 ECAs) were coded as Transition – Settling into student life (Personal development). It should be noted that no ECAs were assigned as 100% Personal development. The allocations of the Personal development microsystem across ECAs were as follows: Strong Interest Inventory (80%), Get Motivated for Career (80%), Growth Mindset (50%), Test-Taking and Self-Compassion (50%), Volunteer Activities (50%), Managing your Digital Self (50%), Toastmasters (33%), and Studying and Optimism (20%).

4.4. Volunteering and Social Advocacy (Community)

Of the 35 LP ECAs, only one was categorized under Volunteering and Social advocacy (Community). The nine students who participated in this ECA chose their own LP pre-approved volunteer activity within the community, resulting in a number of diverse community volunteer and social advocacy opportunities. The allocation of the Community microsystem across ECAs was as follows: Volunteer Activities (50%).

4.5. Social Background and Expectations Pre-University

Researchers acknowledge that students’ selections of ECAs in the Fall 2018 LP programme may have been impacted by the social background and expectations pre-university microsystems in the Jones model. However, because the LP programme does not collect data related to students’ lives before university, or interaction with their families prior to engaging with the LP programme, it was outside the scope of this research study to explore the influence of these microsystems. Therefore, the social background and expectations pre-university microsystems in the Jones model are not included in Table 2 [1].

4.6. Development of LP Model

Our results led to the development of the LP Model (see Figure 4). As outlined in Table 2, the two microsystems, ECA and university peer and friendship groups, are overarching and central to the

LP programme. In Figure 4, both microsystems (ECA and university peer and friendship groups) are at the core of the LP Model. Students have the choice to engage in the LP programme and this is why the LP Model sets the undergraduate student outside the LP programme microsystems. Students who choose to engage with the LP programme interact with the microsystems but are separate from the microsystems in the model. Through ECAs students are able to engage with all the microsystems which help them to transition into student life, develop university friends

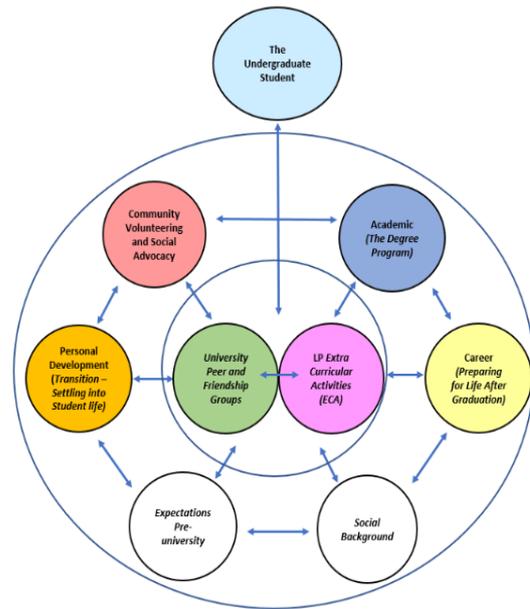


Figure 4. LP model

and peer groups, enhance their academic experience, prepare for life after graduation, and contribute to community through volunteering and social advocacy. While social background and peer and friendship groups may influence student’s participation in the LP programme, the programme does not have control over social background of the students or their expectations pre-university. Additional findings suggested that student social responsibility can be enhanced through ECAs that focus on community. The Jones model emphasizes professional and personal factors over social responsibility. Moreover, community development (i.e. volunteering and social advocacy) is a microsystem in the LP programme and this microsystem is not reflected in the Jones model [1].

5. Conclusion

Along with engaging students in volunteer experiences, the MSVU Business and Tourism LP programme ECAs offered opportunities related to academic, career, and personal development learning needs of students. Researchers found interaction between the LP ECAs and other microsystems in the Jones model [1]. However, they also determined the LP programme should explore ways to better capture community volunteering and social advocacy as well

as personal development. Examples could be offering ECAs on wellness, self-efficacy, motivation, equity, diversity, inclusion, accessibility, and mindfulness. Another way to meet these undergraduate student learning needs would be through integration of a mentorship programme. Current LP ECAs could be enhanced to holistically fit across multiple microsystems. The Department of Business and Tourism has limited resources, which would require reallocating existing resources and seeking out new partners. It could also explore how to better integrate the LP programme into university-wide departments and opportunities. This case study focused on the Fall 2018 LP programme. The LP programme hosts different activities in the fall and winter terms. In the winter term there are at least two additional ECAs which would fit within the community volunteering and social advocacy microsystem. The LP programme is broad, and study results may vary. However, core ECAs are offered across both fall and winter terms including opportunities hosted by the Department of Business and Tourism, Learning Strategist, Library, and Career Services. ECAs and/or topics that are offered across both terms include career panels, how to do research, test taking, time management, study skills, resume writing, volunteering, career fairs, and conferences.

6. Implications and Future Research

The Jones model can be used to evaluate student learning experiences through ECAs. This research applied the Jones model to the MSVU Business and Tourism LP Programme. Findings revealed the model can be used to determine the extent to which such a programme meets the learning experiences of undergraduate students. Future research is needed to explore how students' social background and expectations pre-university may influence ECA selection and whether ECAs affect undergraduate student experiences and life after graduation. This could involve doing retroactive research to investigate students' social backgrounds as well as expectations before entering their academic programme. While it was outside the scope of this research study, research is needed to determine how students who choose to participate in the LP programme, differ from those who choose not to do so. Research is also needed to explore why students choose some ECAs over others.

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8. Acknowledgements

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