Preparing the Leaders of Tomorrow: A Model of Applied Research Training in a Community College

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A Model of Applied Research Training in a Community College

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Sheridan College, Oakville, Ontario

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Canadian Association on Gerontology
Halifax, Nova Scotia
Sheridan Elder Research Centre (SERC)

- College-based applied research facility in Oakville, Ontario

- Current areas of focus: technology, the arts, business of aging

- Mission: “Through applied research, the Sheridan Elder Research Centre will identify, develop, test and support the implementation of innovative strategies that improve the quality of life for older adults and their families”
A sample of factors that shape SERC’s applied research

All applied research is conducted with the goal of knowledge translation
Student Participation at SERC

- Volunteers
- Paid Research Assistants
- Co-ops/practicum students

*We have worked with over 400 student volunteers, practicum students and Research Assistants from more than 25 Sheridan programs!*
SERC’s Research Assistant Training & Orientation Model

An interactive, adaptable, skills-based set of presentations and workshops designed for students with a broad range of prior experience and education in the field of aging and applied research
SERC’s Applied Research Training Model

• Trends in the Field of Aging
• Applied Research 101
  • Lab to Life™ Board Game (*today’s focus*)
• Communication and Presentation Skills
• Report Writing/Critical Thinking
• TCPS2 Ethics Compliance/IP/Confidentiality
• Professionalism/Health and Safety
• Communicating with Older Adults
From Lab to Life™
The Adventure of Applied Research

An interactive training tool for individuals learning about the applied research process
The Board
Game Play & Customization

• Students form teams and are given ‘Scenario’ cards explaining their current research goals

  • *Scenarios are customizable for different fields of research*

• Groups proceed around the board meeting ‘Checkpoints’, testing their knowledge of each specific phase of an applied research project

• A facilitator reviews the team’s responses, and based on a rubric, determines if they move forward

• Phase-specific cards present unique challenges and opportunities as students move across the board
**Checkpoint #5**

Data analysis & interpretation

**FACILITATOR:** “What steps will you take to analyze your data? How will you draw meaning from your data?”

**Probing questions:**

- What kinds of skills will you employ to figure out what your data means?
- How will you organize the data?
- How will you identify and verify the themes in the data?
- How will you prevent bias in your analyses?
- Where/how will you share the results?
- Which stakeholders might be interested in learning about your findings?
- What would you do if your team members all viewed the findings differently?
- How would you set up a tracking spreadsheet to analyze the data?

**Checkpoints**

1. Research question & problem formulation
2. Background work & literature review
3. Planning your research
4. Data gathering & implementation
5. Data analysis & interpretation
6. Reporting

**Game-play highlights**

Interactive
Customizable
Problem-Based
Fun!
Students are given an opportunity to translate theoretical concepts into practice while working in interdisciplinary teams and exploring new ideas and approaches to applied research.
Examples of graduate success after working at SERC

Alexi M. Voelk
Faculty of Business, 2012
Account Manager, PUNCH
“I have learned a great deal that will to translate into my schooling as well as both personal and professional development.”

Shahryar Khalid
Software Development & Network Engineering 2013
Developer, Desire2Learn
“...the work I did was directly related to my education and career goals. I was able to get a taste of what being a programmer was all about.”

Marta Owsik
Social Service Worker
Gerontology 2012
Project Coordinator, SERC
“We were able to engage with our learning in a new way... Ultimately, we were left with a sense of achievement and new-found confidence.”
Summary and Recommendations

• Students from any discipline can benefit from an understanding of aging and how aging population affects our communities

• A flexible, interactive training protocol can bring together interdisciplinary student groups to support each other and the centre’s applied research goals

• Applied research experience can be a differentiating feature for students from a variety of programs, leading to greater graduate success

• Games are a great way to engage students in the learning process!
Acknowledgments & Contact Info

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