

The UBC Learning Exchange is a university-community engagement initiative based in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. The Learning Exchange was established seven years ago, as part of UBC's commitment to contribute to social, economic, and cultural development in the city, the region, the province, and beyond. Over the past seven years, the Learning Exchange has grown and evolved in response to the creative possibilities that arose as we developed working relationships with people in the community—non-profit organizations, inner city schools, and individual residents of the Downtown Eastside—and with people from UBC—students from across campus, faculty and staff in various units, and alumni. In this first phase of our evolution, the Learning Exchange has put down roots in the community and acted as a catalyst for a variety of activities, from free educational programs for inner city residents to student-led community-building projects. This report briefly summarizes the past year's activities and outlines the plans for the next phase of our development.

### **Learning Exchange Trek Program/ Community Service-Learning**

- In 2005-2006, a total of 1,000 students took part in the Trek program, doing volunteer work in 20 non-profit organizations and 17 East Vancouver schools.
- 300 of these students completed 20 short-term projects during Reading Week; 19 of these projects contributed to the learning environment in Vancouver schools.
- About 200 students volunteered on a regular basis in East Vancouver schools, where they played roles as tutors in academic subjects, coaches for sports and recreation activities, leaders for innovative arts or science-related activities, and acted as role models for children and youth.
- 250 students integrated their community volunteer work into an academic course, an approach to experiential education called Community Service-Learning (CSL).
- A grant from UBC's Teaching and Learning Enhancement Fund enabled the Learning Exchange and several other campus units to develop a CSL at UBC website ([www.csl.ubc.ca](http://www.csl.ubc.ca)) and other resources to assist faculty interested in incorporating CSL into their courses.
- Seventeen students received Chapman service awards in recognition of their exemplary commitment to the community organization where they volunteered. Five student-led community projects were supported by the Chapman summer awards program.
- Thirty UBC staff also did volunteer projects in Vancouver schools.

### **Learning Exchange Storefront**

- The drop-in at the Main Street storefront continues to operate at capacity, with 30 to 35 local residents using the free Internet and other computer resources every afternoon.
- The Computer Skills Programs supported by HSBC Bank Canada continue to be very popular, with 144 Downtown Eastside (DTES) community members participating last year.
- The ESL Conversation Program supported by HSBC Bank Canada continues to be highly successful. Last year, 23 DTES community members facilitated weekly English conversation groups with 227 immigrants or refugees. UBC's English Language Institute continues to be a valued partner in this program, providing training and coaching to the group facilitators.

### **Special Events**

- ***Fear and Love in the City:*** DTES residents, students doing course-based CSL, student volunteers in the Trek Program, staff from our community partner organizations and schools, and Learning Exchange staff collaborated on an informative, interactive evening designed to explore experiences related to social inclusion/exclusion and community well-being. This event was part of UBC's *Living the Global City* series, setting the stage for the World Urban Forum. About 100 people attended the event.

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The ESL program has resulted in significant growth for its participants. One man, after acting as a facilitator for two terms, started his own ESL group at a social agency that serves immigrants. He credits his role as a teacher and leader in the ESL program with being an important part of his recovery from a long-term disability and his re-entry into community life. His experience and that of other participants clearly demonstrates that being needed is better than being needy.

Grandview-Uuqinak'uuh, an Eastside elementary school, had more than 150 UBC student volunteers working in the school last year. Liz Kloepper, the principal says, "The energy, enthusiasm, skills, and knowledge that UBC students bring to our school are a powerful boost for our students and staff. It is so important for our students to work with other positive adults, in addition to our teachers. This extra connection extends our students' range of experience outside of our school walls—the role modeling is powerful."

### **The Next Phase: Both Increased Focus and Broader Range**

The Learning Exchange is now entering a second phase, one that will be informed by the lessons we have learned and enlivened by the relationships we have built both on and off-campus. We intend to: enhance the quality of the learning experience for students who are doing CSL; increase the impact of the work that students do, so that civil society organizations and public schools are strengthened; develop new ways for inner city residents to contribute to their own communities; and conduct research to determine more systematically the outcomes of our activities and identify more clearly the key variables that contribute to these outcomes.

Several recent developments are a sign of the beginnings of this next phase:

- UBC has received a grant from the McConnell Family Foundation to implement and evaluate a new model for course-based Community Service-Learning. This new *UBC-Community Learning Initiative*, overseen jointly by the Vice-Presidents Academic, Students, and External will involve over 4,000 students in CSL projects in the non-profit sector in BC over the next five years.
- HSBC Bank Canada donated \$50,000 this year to support academic and literacy enhancement initiatives in East Vancouver schools. This gift, combined with TELUS' gift of \$50,000 and a \$5,000 gift from Business Objects, is enabling the Learning Exchange and the Vancouver School Board to focus the efforts of student volunteers in particular schools and program areas where assistance is most needed.
- James and Shirley-Anne Eccott, from Kelowna, donated \$250,000 to establish a Learning Exchange at UBC Okanagan. Inspired by their gift, Kelowna law firm Petraroia Langford Rush LLP donated \$5,000. The UBC Okanagan Learning Exchange will not necessarily take the same form as the Downtown Eastside Learning Exchange. The UBC Okanagan Learning Exchange will be developed to respond to the needs, interests, and opportunities in the Okanagan context.
- Margo Fryer, the Director of the Learning Exchange, has been appointed to a faculty position in the School of Community and Regional Planning. This alliance will stimulate new research and other scholarly activity related to UBC's engagement with the community.
- The Learning Exchange storefront has expanded into adjoining premises on Main Street. This increases our capacity to develop innovative ways to link the university with the Downtown Eastside and other communities.

All of these developments will enhance the ability of the Learning Exchange to contribute to the achievement of UBC's Trek 2010 vision. In particular, we see our activities as helping to promote the values of a civil and sustainable society and cultivating the qualities of global citizenship, not only among UBC students, but also among all who participate in Learning Exchange activities.