

## Learning and Professional Development

Staff and faculty contributions are fundamental to the University of Guelph's (U of G) success. Your continuous learning and development enhances our community's capacity to grow and change in response to the challenges and opportunities we encounter.

The focus of learning and professional development, in order of priority, should be to support your ability to:

- Perform the current job at the optimal level – focus is on development to reach required competence
- Perform new requirements in the current job that are planned or anticipated in the future – focus is on developing new skills or enhancing competence
- Move into new positions of interest – focus is on career planning

One way HR supports learning at U of G is through relevant, experiential and leading edge programs throughout the year by Learning & Development that respond to the priority needs of our working community.

Our goal for individual learning programs is to better integrate learning into your work day, making it convenient and enhancing its impact. Thus, the programs are offered in a variety of formats, build in time for you to reflect, and ask you to make a direct connection between what you are learning and how you work. Browse through the full listing of current programs and their descriptions in our [Event Calendar](#) [1].

## Types of Development Experiences

Some types of developmental activity are better than others for fostering individual growth.

The following developmental activity types are listed roughly in order of their effectiveness. The activities at the top of the list are the most potent ways to develop and those at the bottom of the list, the least powerful.

1. **Challenging Assignments:** Take on a first-time assignment in which you lead a project, conduct research, or work on a deadline project. (E.g. Lead the transition to a new records system. Develop a new process to handle client requests.)
2. **Other People:** Identify people to work with that you can learn from and a strategy for working with them. This could be people you work with, or shadow, an expert, an influential mentor, working for a difficult boss, dealing with difficult co-workers, or supervising an especially talented employee. (E.g. Work with a long-serving employee to learn the system they use. Develop a mentoring relationship with a senior leader. Develop a strategy for professionally responding to and working with difficult colleagues.)
3. **Action Learning:** Tackle important departmental issues or problems and learn from the attempt to change things. Action on the problem or issue prompts learning. The focus is on addressing real situations and applying solutions back on the job. (E.g. Decrease client wait times. Improve efficiency of systems.)
4. **Off-the-job Experiences:** These experiences may not be directly related to your work, but can help build new skills and enhance your influence and effectiveness at work. (E.g. Lead your department's United Way campaign efforts. Volunteer for Leave for Change, Project Serve, or similar initiatives. Join the board of a civic or charitable organization.)
5. **Coursework:** Attending training seminars, taking formal courses, completing e-learning programs can be a good way to learn and to network with others, but on-the-job application does not automatically follow. Managers can play a critical role here by following up with the employee after the learning opportunity to inquire about their learning and determine how best the Manager and team can support the employee to apply that learning in the workplace. (E.g. Learning & Development programs. Technical courses.)
6. **Books:** Books, articles and web-based white papers on a topic related to your development need can be good sources of information, but are not always reliable or consistent with the department's approach, and on-the-job application does not automatically follow.

The secret ingredient of the developmental activities that produce results for the ones at the top of the above list is

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challenge. These activities push, provoke, prod, stretch and drag you out of your comfort zone and into new territory. One or more of the following elements of challenge are usually embedded in the most effective development activities:

- There is risk of failure
- Take-charge leadership is required
- You must work with new (or many) people
- You experience increased personal pressure
- You must influence people without using authority
- You are dealing with the unfamiliar
- The assignment involves organizational change
- There is a strategic component to your assignment
- You have to interact with a very good or very challenging supervisor

Managers can help their employees construct effective development plans by incorporating some of the above elements in their development activities.

Note that special assignments are not always available, or possible, but employees may be able to design their own in-place development activities with minimal support from their supervisors that incorporate one or more of these elements.

## Additional Resources

You may also want to check out the following resources:

- [Environmental Health & Safety](#) [2]
- [Open Learning and Educational Support](#) [3]
- Related HR Policies
  - [108 Professional Development Reimbursement \(Professional Staff\)](#) [4]
  - 109 Self-Funded Leave, see [Policy 501- Leave of Absence \(Professional Staff\)](#) [5]
  - [401 Educational Opportunities Program](#) [6] [rev. March 2006]
  - [402 Training](#) [7] [rev. Feb 2004]
  - [403 Scholarship Plan](#) [8] [rev. Dec 2009]

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### Links

[1] <https://www.uoguelph.ca/learningmatters/eventreg/>

[2] <https://www.uoguelph.ca/hr/hr-services/welcome-environmental-health-safety>

[3] <https://opened.uoguelph.ca/>

[4] <https://www.uoguelph.ca/hr/node/4106/>

[5] <https://www.uoguelph.ca/hr/staff-faculty-hr-policies-all-employees/501-leaves-absence-all-staff>

[6] <https://www.uoguelph.ca/hr/node/4129/>

[7] <https://www.uoguelph.ca/hr/node/4130/>

[8] <https://www.uoguelph.ca/hr/node/4131/>