

***Optional Specialization in Zone Education – Executive Summary  
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## Executive Summary

Experiential learning is an integral part of Ryerson's ability to deliver on its commitment to career relevant education. Experiential learning is more important than ever for university education because the world of work is rapidly changing. It has become very team oriented, collaborative and highly fluid. People will play a variety of roles in collaborative work environments and this will become more rather than less important. Students, therefore, need to have experience of this reality as part of a well-rounded education. As an educational institution, Ryerson has an obligation to respond to this changing landscape and to the challenge of how best to take advantage of these changes and to support our students in appropriate new ways of learning. The proposed *Optional Specialization in Zone Education* presented here is a response to this challenge.

Zone Education is student driven and motivated. It is multi-disciplinary and collaborative, facilitating the cross-pollination of ideas from students across a variety of academic backgrounds. Students are provided with active mentorship, coaching and support from Ryerson faculty and sector professionals, and evaluation to enable success.

Zone participants gain real world experience, make strategic decisions and have access to broader community networks of entrepreneurs, investors and funders, potential customers/clients and leaders to advance the company – be it a private or social enterprise, technology, product or service they develop.

The *Optional Specialization in Zone Education* creates a link between Ryerson's successful model of student-driven innovation, as demonstrated by Ryerson's Digital Media Zone, and our curriculum. But it goes well beyond digital media. The *Optional Specialization* provides a framework within which students from all of our six Faculties can enjoy experiential learning opportunities in one or more of Ryerson University's Entrepreneurship Zones – Zones devoted to health, energy, design, fashion, digital media, social innovation and beyond.

The *Optional Specialization* is a 6-credit curriculum consisting of a single "umbrella course". Within the structure of the course there is scope for preparation, development and application activities for student teams working on innovative ideas with an entrepreneurial approach. The umbrella course also allows participation of all Faculties and cross-fertilization and partnerships amongst them.

A performance evaluation paradigm has been developed to assign a Pass/Fail grade for each student in a team setting. The performance evaluation relies on assessments by a "management team" of experts (Ryerson faculty as well as sector experts) and by peers (peer-to-peer). This model mirrors the approach currently used in the Digital Media Zone and it tries to capture the kinds of real-world assessments that an entrepreneur would face when trying to create a viable product or service.

Students will register in the *Optional Specialization* for at least 2 and up to 4 semesters. The registration is analogous to registration in a graduate thesis; students remain "In Progress" until they have completed a work that meets the criteria for success. In the case of the *Optional*

*Specialization*, an expert panel of Ryerson faculty and sector professionals will adjudicate students' success or failure based on a pitch and submitted written work. Again, this is somewhat analogous to the oral examination and thesis submission for a graduate thesis course.

Successful completion of the umbrella course leads to the awarding of the *Optional Specialization in Zone Education*. The *Optional Specialization* is external to degree programming.

The *Optional Specialization in Zone Education* is an attempt to meet the needs of today's learners and those of the future; a need not fully met by current conventional programming. The *Optional Specialization* will provide our students with both practical skills and a creative approach to work and to life.