**Professional Learning Experiences in a Field-based Course: Student Perceptions and Preferences** T. Yates\* and K. Hodgson\*\*

\*University of Saskatchewan, Department of Soil Science, Saskatoon, SK

\*\* Golder Associates Ltd, Saskatoon, SK

Email for the corresponding author: Tom Yates ([tom.yates@usask.ca](mailto:tom.yates@usask.ca))

Student competition? No; Preferred type of presentation: Oral

1st preference for a session: Session no.2 - Awareness and Competency in Soil Science Education

ABSTRACT

As instructors of soil science we have found ourselves teaching students that are enrolled in a wide range of programs other than soil science, such as for example, environmental science, renewable resource management, geography, and geology. Non-disciplinary students often go on to professional careers that require the use soils skills and knowledge, but do not have a depth of understanding equal to a soil science major. Thus it is important that they leave us competent in what they do learn. One strategy is to include professional learning experiences in field-based courses. This can be an opportunity for students to apply soil science skills and knowledge in the context of a profession relevant to their area of study. Such experiences require additional resources and participation of professionals, so it is important to assess the impact of these experiences. Via an on-line survey, data was collected over four years on student perceptions and preferences toward professional learning experiences in a field-based course. Students most preferred the professional-government (SEM) learning experience, followed by an academic experience (NF) and the professional-industry (NES) experience (55, 31 and 14%, respectively). Student comments indicated that they valued both SEM and NES experiences for their authenticity and overall, students perceived that the SEM experience was the learning experience most relevant to their future career plans, followed by the NES. However, year to year results indicated that the NES experience was least preferred and least relevant to career plans in years that coincided with the crash in crude oil prices and the associated economic downturn in Western Canada. It can be concluded that inclusion of professional learning experiences can add considerable value to student experience, but student preferences and perceptions of these professional experiences can be altered by relevant employment market and economic forces.