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Work-Integrated Learning Design for Undergraduate Business Degrees: Stakeholders' Perspectives

Laura L. Rook

University of Wollongong, lrook@uow.edu.au

Lisa McManus

University of Tasmania, lisa.mcmanus@utas.edu.au

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Abstract

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Keywords

learning, business, work-integrated, degrees;, undergraduate, stakeholders', design, perspectives

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**Work-integrated Learning Design for Undergraduate Business Degrees:
Stakeholders' Perspectives**

Dr Laura Rook

Lecturer, School of Management, Operations and Marketing, University of
Wollongong.

lrook@uow.edu.au *corresponding author.

Northfields Ave, Wollongong, NSW, 2522, Australia

Phone: 02 4298 1155

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4945-9993>

Professor Lisa McManus

Head, School of Accounting, Economics & Finance, Tasmanian School of Business &
Economics, University of Tasmania.

Lisa.mcmanus@utas.edu.au

Private Bag 84 Hobart Tasmania 7001, Australia.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9610-520X>

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Work-integrated Learning Design for Undergraduate Business Degrees: Stakeholders' Perspectives

Work-integrated Learning (WIL), where the theory and practice of work are integrated through various activities in the curricula, provides several benefits to stakeholders if designed and implemented correctly. This study explored the views of undergraduate students and academics in relation to the potential implementation of a Work-integrated Learning program in the undergraduate degrees of a business school at a regional university through the lens of stakeholder theory. A total of 50 students and 24 academics participated in the study. The findings suggest students and academics hold different views to the effectiveness of on-campus and off-campus WIL activities, structure of a WIL program, importance of WIL components and the ideal number of hours of work placements to achieve work-ready knowledge and skills. These findings have implications for the development and implementation of WIL for business school educators and university policy makers.

Keywords: work-integrated learning, skills, business degrees, undergraduate, higher education.

Introduction

Competition for student numbers in the Australian higher education sector is increasing due to changes in federal government policy and funding, increased competition from private education providers, as well as the democratisation of knowledge access through IT development. In response Work-integrated Learning (WIL) programs, where theory and the practice of work are integrated, are being developed in many disciplines including business. WIL programs offer universities a differentiated product and opportunities to gain positive reputational benefits through closer linkages with industry. Research has found WIL programs to be beneficial to students through offering opportunities for students to increase their employability skills such as team work and self-management, thus having a positive effect on post-graduate employment (Business Council of Australia 2011; Cranmer 2006; Dressler & Keeling 2011; McLennan & Keating 2008; Smith et al. 2009; Yorke 2006). For employers WIL provides highly skilled short-term employees at a low cost, workplace diversity, fresh ideas, potential recruits and connections with higher education institutions and the opportunity to shape productivity outcomes for employers and the economy (Universities Australia, Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Australian Industry Group, Business Council of Australia and Australian Collaborative Education Network 2015)

Despite the many benefits of WIL, if not designed with stakeholder views incorporated in the development of the programs it will not deliver to its full potential. Patrick et al. (2008) supports this as one of the findings of the first Australian-wide WIL study were the difficulties in managing the expectations and competing demands of stakeholders. The authors found that an expectations gap arose when implementing WIL, as stakeholder interests differed in motivations and objectives, leading to a lack of

understanding of the procedures and commitment needed for WIL across stakeholder groups. More recent research supports this finding by suggesting that the role of each of the actors participating in WIL is not always clear and that managing expectations can be a significant challenge when managing students in WIL programs (Rook 2017; Rook & McManus 2016; Rowe, Mackaway & Winchester-Seeto 2012). Despite these challenges being reported, WIL programs are often designed without considering all stakeholders perspectives (Jackson 2013a). This could lead to further expectation gaps and an increase in communication problems. Recent research recommends a consultative approach when implementing WIL programs (Peach et al. 2015).

Previous research is not clear as to the structure of WIL programs or the elements that are unique to the regional higher education context. Prior research outlines individual models within their respective university setting or discipline (Baird, Gamble & Sidebotham 2016; Breakey, Robinson & Beesley 2009; Cord, Bowrey & Clements 2011; Dunn et al. 2016; Rook 2015) with limited research on clarifying the boundaries of WIL activities such as the design or implementation considerations that are most appropriate for regional universities facing regional economic constraints (Rowe, Winchester-Seeto, & Mackaway 2012). In urban settings WIL offers many opportunities to stakeholders including having a positive impact on the community (Jackson, Dinkar & DeFranco 2005), positively influencing students career, academic and personal lives through skill development and employability (Carter & Romero 2014; Dressler & Keeling 2011; Jackson 2016; Rhodes & Shiel 2007; Sleaf & Reed 2006; Smith et al. 2009) and providing universities the opportunity to give students a payoff from their educational investment and the development of work related skills (Zegward & Coll 2011). What limited research there is that clarifies WIL activity boundaries, has found that in rural or remote settings students are confronted with

barriers to effective participation including financial costs associated with undertaking WIL and a limited number of placement opportunities, suggesting that these issues require further investigation (Patrick et al. 2008). In addition to this, industry reports that recent business graduates are not meeting expectations with regards to their skills (Jackson 2014) including communication skills (Jackson & Chapman 2012; Freudenberg, Brimble & Cameron 2011; Weisz 2000; Jackson 2013b), a soft skill that is often viewed as an important outcome of WIL participation (Jackling & De Lange 2009; Harvey et al. 1997; Kavanagh & Drennan 2008; Neilsen 2000).

Therefore, this study investigates stakeholder's expectations for the design of a WIL program in an undergraduate business degree. To achieve this, stakeholder theory and previous research is utilised (Rowe, Winchester-Seeto & Mackaway 2012). Freeman (1984, p.46) defines a stakeholder as 'any group or individual who is affected by or can affect the achievement of the organizations objectives'. Stakeholder theory has been primarily adopted in business ethics and organisational management theory research but its application has now been extended to other fields including higher education (Jongbloed, Enders & Salerno 2008; Leisyte et al. 2014). It is argued that the application of stakeholder theory to higher education is a result of the change in view of universities in the face of the consumer driven market (Ernst & Young 2011) and the paradigm shift where universities are viewed as moving towards a more corporate approach to management (Leisyte et al. 2014; Westerheijden et al. 2013; Winter 2009). In this study, academics and students are actors who have a stake in the design of a WIL program, as their views may influence the university's approach and direction of WIL.

Through taking an integrated stakeholder approach, findings of this study have important implications for business school academic educators and university policy makers looking to implement WIL into their degrees and courses. The next section

draws on prior research on WIL including WIL implementation in Australian business schools. The research methods are outlined followed by the findings of the study. The paper concludes with a discussion of the research implications, limitations and recommendations for further research.

Literature Review

What is WIL?

There is no single agreed upon definition of WIL within the learning literature. Consequently, many studies describe WIL programs as a range of different activities that integrate theory with work. Kolb (1984), the original driver of experiential learning supports learning from building a relationship with the environment. Applying Kolb's model, WIL could be described as the transformation of work experience through constructive reflective processes (Rook, 2015). WIL has also been described as structured activities that are embedded in university courses that integrate practice with theory (Cooper, Orrell & Bowden 2010; McLennan & Keating 2008). The Australian Collaborative Education Network, the professional association for WIL practitioners and researchers in the tertiary sector, recently adopted an inclusive definition of WIL as: 'an umbrella term for a range of approaches and strategies that integrate theory with the practice of work within a purposefully designed curriculum' (Patrick et al. 2008, iv). This definition is provided and used in the national Australian study supported by the 2008 Australian Learning and Teaching Council titled 'The WIL report; Work Integrated Learning, a National Scoping Study'. This definition is inclusive as it is broad enough to include both placements, as well as other WIL activities such as industry engagement on campus.

WIL models and structures vary across disciplines and often tertiary institutions (Rowe, Winchester-Seeto & Mackaway 2012). These include but are not limited to: virtual simulations, project work, industry visits, practicums, professional mentoring, industry related internships, problem-based learning and service learning (Gibson et al. 2002; Mackaway et al. 2011; Patrick et al. 2008; Peach & Gamble 2011). Rowe, Winchester-Seeto & Mackaway (2012) undertook a review of 255 literature sources to build a typology of WIL in the context of understanding the benefits and drawbacks of placements versus other types of WIL activities. The review revealed WIL activities as either being undertaken off campus, on campus, or a combination of both. The authors developed a Venn diagram to present the different types of WIL activities identified in the literature (see Figure 1).

Insert Figure 1 Here

The activities presented in Figure 1 are categorised as predominantly off campus activities or predominantly on campus activities. Activities listed in the intersection of the two circles are examples used in the literature to describe activities which combine both on and off campus components. WIL activities were also cross-categorised in relation to their level of community engagement (Rowe, Winchester-Seeto & Mackaway 2012).

There are many different types of WIL models currently used across all disciplines in the Australian higher education sector. Research however reports WIL placements as providing the most benefit for students and have found them to be fundamental to economic growth (Wilson 2012). To examine this proposition Jackson (2015) undertook a survey of 131 undergraduate students and examined their perception of their employability skill development through participation in a WIL work placement

during their degree. Although the findings supported the importance of WIL to skill acquisition and refinement, Jackson (2015) argues that it is complementary rather than an alternative to on campus learning, further emphasising the importance of establishing the characteristics of a 'good placement' together with undergraduate courses that prepare students for their WIL experience (Jackson 2015).

Designing WIL

Stakeholder Theory

The role of higher education institutions is changing whereby there is an increasing need for universities to engage more with external stakeholders and develop partnerships and trust with communities through strengthening their commitment to provide employable graduates (Leisyte et al. 2014). This changing role has resulted in a deeper focus on considering multiple stakeholder perspectives when designing and developing educational courses. While there is no universally agreed upon definition of stakeholder theory or its application to education, it has been acknowledged that identifying stakeholders that influence or impact on partnerships can provide important strategic insights (Levin, Bok & Evans 2010). Freeman (1984) defines a stakeholder as any group or individual who is affected by or can affect the achievement of the organisation. Freeman's description of stakeholder theory has been described as a pragmatic approach that encourages organisations to be cognisant of all stakeholders and provides the foundation for stakeholder-based arguments that organisations should be managed with concern for all relevant stakeholders (Freeman 1984; Laplume, Sonpar

& Litz 2008). There are a number of stakeholders who affect or are affected by WIL including universities, students, academics, government, industry, careers advisors, professional and community associations, each with their own motivations and agendas (Patrick et al. 2008; Pilgram 2012). When one considers WIL and the development of WIL programs from a stakeholder theory lens, the focus becomes one of recognising different stakeholder perspectives and needs when designing and implementing WIL programs in order to facilitate effective learning outcomes for students (Patrick et al. 2008). This study takes a stakeholder theory perspective by considering the views of students and academics on the development of a WIL program in the context of an Australian university business school.

Learning structures

WIL programs can take the form of different learning structures such as capstones, core subjects, integrative holistic approaches, modules and/or electives. A capstone is ‘a crowning course (subject) or experience coming at the end of a sequence of courses (subjects) with a specific objective of integrating a body of relatively fragmented knowledge into a unified whole’ (Durel 1993, p. 223). An example of a capstone structure for WIL within a Bachelor of Business degree is the University of Canberra. At other universities in Australia WIL programs are becoming part of the core curriculum (Macquarie University, Griffith University and Charles Sturt University). As of 24th July 2017, Macquarie University noted on its website WIL is embedded into each bachelor’s degree in the form of different real-world learning activities. On the other hand, universities are providing WIL opportunities as an elective unit where students may choose to enrol in and include it as part of their credit points for their

undergraduate degrees. Another structure found in Australian universities is a WIL module: a series of subjects that sequentially occur over the course of a student's degree. For example, one unit might be embedded into each year of the degree and developed as whole WIL framework. Leong and Kavanagh (2013) describe such an approach within the accounting discipline at the University of Southern Queensland where WIL is organised into three separate accounting subjects (Leong & Kavanagh 2013). Another structure of WIL takes a holistic or integrative approach by embedding WIL principles across a degree. As of the 24th of July 2017, the University of Newcastle website noted that students enrolled in the business school can gain local and international workplace experience through a range of activities such as work integrated learning projects, industry placements and guest lectures from business professionals. As WIL is understood to be resource intensive having both financial and workplace implications the most appropriate WIL learning structure for a degree will depend upon several factors such as the specific cohort, location, professional context, available resources, institutional commitment and financial support (Clark et al. 2016; Orrell 2011; Hoskyn & Martin 2011; Rowe, Clark & Bilgin 2016).

Elements of a WIL program

Cooper, Orrell and Bowden (2010) describe seven interrelated elements characteristic of work integrated learning models which when designed appropriately blend academic education with practical knowledge and skills of industries and workplaces. The seven elements are: purpose, context, integration, curriculum issues, learning and partnerships and support (Cooper, Orrell and Bowden 2010). Defining the purpose of a WIL program provides direction of which model to use by clarifying the goals, expectations and intended outcomes for all stakeholders (Cooper, Orrell and Bowden 2010). Cooper,

Orrell & Bowden's (2010) view of WIL as encompassing learning within the workplace is both broad in that it includes any workplace structure, but it is also limiting in that on campus activities such as live simulations would not be considered WIL. The authors provide nine activities they consider WIL: practicum, internships, fieldwork, cooperative education, field education, sandwich course, service learning and international service learning (Cooper, Orrell & Bowden 2010, 38-39).

Integration is the process of bringing together 'formal learning and productive work, or theory and practice to give students a complete, integrated learning experience' (Cooper, Orrell, & Bowden 2010, 40). As such, reflection activities are recognised as being useful for students to transform knowledge into action (Bates 2004). Biggs and Tangs (2011) constructive alignment approach to teaching and learning may be applied so that activities and assessments are aligned with the structure of reflection activities (Dean et al. 2012). Reflection is included in many WIL models, approaches and assessments, university graduate capabilities and skills (Doel 2009; Leigh 2016; Martin, Rees & Edwards 2011; Patrick et al. 2008; Ryan 2011, 2012; Sykes & Clements 2011; Wharton 2017). It is argued that in educating future managers, the use of reflection in the classroom creates a greater practical impact in the workplace (Marchioro, Ryan & Cripps 2011).

According to Cooper, Orrell and Bowden (2010) work integrated learning requires a strong partnership between the university and industry. Partnerships can be built at both the macro (institution) and micro (individual) level and serve to make the most out of WIL through improvement in education and experiences in the workplace. It is important for universities and workplaces to work together in developing strategies to suit the diverse needs of their students (Mackaway, Winchester-Seeto & Carter 2014). Support for students and workplaces participating in WIL before, during and

after are essential for students to be able to place their experience in its broader context (Jackson and Wilton 2016). This assists students in understanding the graduate labour market by increasing their preparedness for the selection process (Jackson & Wilton 2016).

The following sections present the research methods adopted, followed by the findings and conclusion.

Research methods

Sample

An electronic survey was administered to academics and students enrolled in undergraduate programs in the business school at a regional university.¹ The regional university is a small dual-sector university. The business school delivers both undergraduate and postgraduate programs in the accounting, economics, management and marketing, both face-to-face and online. The survey was designed to gather student and academic views on the inclusion and effectiveness of on-campus and off-campus WIL activities for undergraduate students, as well as their opinions on how WIL should be structured in the undergraduate business school programs. The two surveys were pilot tested prior to their administration. The student survey was pilot tested by six business school undergraduate students and the academic survey was pilot tested by five academics. No issues of ambiguity or intelligibility of the survey questions were identified.

The two initial samples consisted of students enrolled in the business school undergraduate programs (888) and a random sample of academics employed at the regional university (250). An email was sent to members of each stakeholder group detailing the study, providing a link to the survey together with a letter describing the

study's ethics approval. A second email was sent three weeks following the initial contact. A total of 50 students and 24 academic surveys were completed. The response rate for each stakeholder group was therefore, students 5.6% and academics 9.6%.

While these response rates are considered low and thereby could introduce bias (such as non-response bias), as well as potentially not being representative of the population and therefore not generalisable, previous research has found that low response rates do not necessarily lead to biased results (e.g., Rindfuss et al. 2015). The response rates of this study are reflective of declining participation rates across all countries and in most disciplines (e.g., Atrostic et al. 2001; Brick & Williams 2013; Groves 2011 & Singer 2006). To investigate for potential response bias and also the representativeness of the sample, a two-stage approach was adopted. Firstly, responses by participants to the first and second email contact were examined to test for differences across all survey questions. Secondly, as the population parameters are unknown, the demographics of the sample were considered to be consistent with the authors' knowledge of both the School's undergraduate business students as well as academics across the university. Kolmogorov Smirnov tests of differences revealed no differences in the distribution of responses between first and second student responses to all items except for the effectiveness of *on-campus group projects with internal clients* ($D = 1.414$; $p < 0.05$). In comparison, Kolmogorov Smirnov tests of differences for academic first and second responses, identified no differences in the distributions of responses across all items.

Data Collection

The survey questionnaire collected data in relation to student and academic views on the inclusion of WIL in undergraduate business degrees. Specifically, both stakeholder groups were asked their opinion, on a five-point scale ranging from "1" = not

effective/not important/do not agree to “5” = most effective/very important/agree, to:

- The effectiveness of on and off campus activities in achieving work-ready knowledge and skills (Rowe, Winchester-Seeto & Mackaway 2012);
- The effectiveness of five WIL structures in undergraduate degrees (Durel 1993);
- The importance of twelve components for inclusion in WIL programs (Choy & Delahaye 2011; Freudenberg, Brimble & Cameron 2011; Patrick et al. 2008);
- The importance of seven reasons for alternative to work placements in WIL programs;
- The ideal number of hours of work-placement; and,
- The agreement with a range of statements in relation to WIL in undergraduate programs (Rowe, Winchester-Seeto and Mackaway 2012; Cooper, Orrell and Bowden 2010; Edwards et al. 2015; Hodges 2011; Smith et al. 2014).²

Prior to the initial analysis, the data was screened for accuracy, missing data, multicollinearity, outliers, linearity and homoscedacity following Hair et al. (2010). No problems were identified with any of these potential issues except for missing data. Assessment of the two data sets identified seven students and three academic respondents with missing data. Inspection of the missing data suggested that it was missing ‘randomly’. As no item had greater than 5% of missing values and no significant correlations existed between the missing data, it was decided that the data was missing completely at random and therefore, the missing values were replaced with the mean value on each item, to not alter the underlying distribution (Hair et al. 2010).

Sample Characteristics

Table 1, Panels (a) and (b) below, present the main demographic characteristics of the student and academic respondents. The average age of the student group is 30.5 years

and 49.6 years for academics. The gender of the student group is approximately equal with 24 male respondents and 26 female respondents. Most students are enrolled at the Darwin campus (62%). 87.5% (n = 21) of the academic respondents are employed in the higher education sector of the regional university, 13 (54.2%) possess a Masters' level postgraduate degree and 11 academics (45.8%) hold a Doctoral qualification. Most academics are employed full-time (n = 15 or 62.5%) with 33.3% (n = 8) and 4.2% (n = 1) being sessionally and part-time employed, respectively.

Insert Table 1 Here

Findings

Both the student and academic groups responded that WIL should be included in an undergraduate business degree, with 96% (n = 48) of students and 87.5% (n = 21) of academics supporting WIL's inclusion. In relation to whether WIL activities should be undertaken off-campus, on-campus or a combination of both, most the student and academic respondents identified that a combination of off-campus and on-campus activities should be included in an undergraduate business degree program (86% of students; 75% of academics).

Table 2 below presents the mean scores and rankings of the views of both students and academics to the effectiveness of 13 on-campus WIL activities in helping students to achieve work-ready knowledge and skills.³ The average score for each activity for both the student and academic cohorts is presented with each activity listed in rank order from highest to lowest according to the student group. There were several differences between students' and academics' views of the effectiveness of the range of on-campus WIL activities. Students rated interactive industry visits (academic cohort ranking = 3rd) as the most effective in assisting students to achieve work-ready

knowledge and skills. In comparison, the academic group viewed both mock interviews (student cohort ranking = 3rd) and simulations with live data (student cohort ranking = 6th) as being the most effective activities. Interestingly, students viewed industry panel sessions as the second most effective activity, while academics rated it as seventh of the 13 activities. Both groups rated moot court as the least effective for assisting students to gain work-ready knowledge and skills. The distributions of the effectiveness scores of simulations of live data was found to be significantly different between the two groups, with academics rating each significantly higher (i.e., more effective) ($U = 747.5$, $p = 0.72$, $r = 0.21$).

Insert Table 2 Here

In comparison to the rankings of on-campus WIL activities, there were more similarities in ranking order of students and academics on the effectiveness of off-campus WIL activities to assist students to achieve work-ready knowledge and skills. The mean effectiveness and rankings of each off-campus activity is presented in Table 3 below. Students viewed paid employment, placement off-campus and vacation work as the top three off-campus activities, whereas academics rated field work, placement off-campus and projects with external clients as the most effective off-campus activities to deliver work-ready knowledge and skills to students. The distributions of vacation work and field work were both significantly different with students rating vacation work significantly higher than academics ($U = 447.5$, $p = 0.065$, $r = 0.21$) whereas academics rated field work significantly higher than students ($U = 738$, $p = 0.089$, $r = 0.20$).

Insert Table 3 Here

Both stakeholder groups were asked to rate the effectiveness of several different WIL learning structures for inclusion in undergraduate degrees (presented in Table 4 below). The student group rated core unit as the most effective learning structure whereas academics rated capstone unit as the most effective (interestingly, students rated this learning structure as the most ineffective). The distributions were found to be significantly different for the effectiveness of a capstone unit ($U = 831.5, p = 0.004, r = 0.33$) between the student and academic groups.

Insert Table 4 Here

Table 5 presents the means and rankings of the student and academic groups on the importance of twelve components of a WIL program in undergraduate business degrees. Both students and academics rated communication skills as being the most important component, with academics rating it significantly higher than students ($U = 747.5, p = 0.048, r = 0.23$). Academics also rated literacy as significantly more important than students ($U = 760.0, p = 0.043, r = 0.24$). Both stakeholder groups rated reflective writing as the least important WIL component.

Insert Table 5 Here

The student group identified a lack of resources and a lack of employers as the equal most important reason why an alternative to a traditional work placement was offered in undergraduate business degrees (see Table 6 below). In comparison, the academic stakeholder group viewed that catering for working students and mature age students as the two most important reasons. There was a significant difference in rankings between the two stakeholder groups with students ranking the lack of

resources for placements significantly more important than the academic group ($U = 834.5, p = 0.005, r = 0.32$).

Insert Table 6 Here

A frequency distribution of the responses in relation to the ideal number of hours of work placement are presented in Table 7 below. The highest frequency hours for the student group was 200 hours per semester (28%) in comparison to the academic group's highest frequency hours which was 100 hours per semester (45.8%).

Insert Table 7 Here

Students more strongly agreed with all questions in relation to WIL, presented in Table 8, in comparison to academics, except for the question reflection should be integral part of WIL. The distribution of the two groups for this question was also significantly different ($U = 803, p = 0.014, r = 0.29$) with academics providing a higher rating.

Insert Table 8 Here

Discussion

This study sought to gather data on the views of undergraduate students and academics to the implementation of a WIL program in undergraduate degrees in an Australian regional university business school. Overall the findings have identified several key differences between undergraduate students and academics' opinions in relation to on-campus and off-campus WIL activities, potential structures of WIL programs, the importance of WIL components and the ideal number of hours of a WIL work placement.

Understandably, with the current focus of Australian universities on the inclusion of WIL programs in their degrees, due to identified benefits such as increased employability, professionalism, improved graduate skills etc., both students and academics were very supportive of the inclusion of a WIL program in undergraduate degrees in the business school (Cooper, Orrell & Bowden 2010; Dressler & Keeling 2011; Freudenberg, Brimble & Cameron 2011; Jackson 2016; Rhodes & Shiel 2007; Sleaf & Reed 2006; Smith et al. 2009; Tynjala, Valimaa & Sarja 2003; Zegward & Coll 2011). With the support of both undergraduate students and academics, the implementation of a WIL program in the undergraduate degree of the business school may not only deliver benefits to undergraduate students but may also increase their satisfaction, as reported by Carter and Romero (2014) who found a positive relationship between WIL and student satisfaction. Despite the significant investment required to implement a WIL program, it can deliver not only benefits to students, but also benefits to the business school and the regional university.

Students and academics were also in agreement with the most appropriate delivery of WIL activities being a combination of both off-campus and on-campus. This contrasts with the comments made by Rowe, Winchester-Seeto & Mackaway (2012) who state that the off-campus placement type activities are the most widely reported and accepted form of WIL. In developing a typology of WIL, the authors identify five WIL activities that provide a combination of on- and off-campus activities: community projects, research projects, group projects for internal/external clients, mentoring and fieldwork. It is important that the business school examine the potential of these activities in any design of a WIL program in their undergraduate degrees to meet the expectations of students as well as academics who manage and supervise WIL programs.

Findings from the comparison of student and academic survey responses indicate that the two groups hold different views in relation to WIL activities that help students achieve work-ready knowledge and skills. This mirrors Patrick et al.'s (2008) identification of differences in stakeholder expectations when implementing WIL that led to a lack of understanding of the procedures and commitment needed across stakeholder groups. The importance of managing expectations and taking a consultative approach to the implementation of WIL programs is paramount to the successful implementation and student achievement of the skills and knowledge that WIL is purported to provide (Patrick et al. 2008; Peach et al. 2015). As Jackson (2013a) points out, despite previous research findings, WIL programs are often designed without considering all stakeholder perspectives. The two most effective on-campus WIL activities identified by students focused on interactions with industry, with interactive industry visits and industry panel sessions being ranked highest. In comparison, academics viewed activities related to obtaining a job and job-related tasks as being the most useful on-campus activities (mock interviews and simulations of live data). The potential therefore exists, for an expectations gap to arise, if a WIL program is developed and implemented without considering student views.

Of the off-campus experience-based learning WIL activities, students viewed paid employment, placement off-campus and vacation work as the three most effective activities while academics ranked field work, placement off-campus and projects with external clients as the most effective. Not surprisingly students viewed paid employment highest as this activity provides not only workplace skills and experience but also financial remuneration. Paid off-campus WIL activities may in-time become the 'norm' as students juggle the rising cost of higher education and living expenses with time-pressures of full-time study if universities take students views into

consideration. Paid work as a WIL activity is one that the business school could consider utilising university career services to deliver and provide paid internship/vacation work that has direct relevance to the student's undergraduate degree that is also monitored and directed by an academic.

Differences in the views held by students and academics is also recognised in their opinions in relation to the effectiveness of different WIL learning structures. Students view of the most effective learning structure for WIL's inclusion in the undergraduate degree is for a core unit firstly, and secondly, integration into every unit across the degree. Academics, on the other hand, identified a capstone unit as being the most effective structure. Interestingly, students ranked capstone as the least effective structure of the five appraised. Along with definitions of all terms used in the survey, Durel's (1993) definition of a capstone was provided to both students and academics. As Hoskyn & Martin (2011) note, the most appropriate WIL learning structure depends upon the cohort, location, professional context, available resources, institutional commitment, and financial support. WIL implementation and management is considered a resource intensive activity that has financial and workload implications (Clark et al. 2016; Rowe, Clark & Bilgin 2016). This aligns with academics' views of a capstone and core unit as being the two-highest ranked WIL learning structures. A capstone or core unit is potentially less resource hungry than integration of WIL into every unit of an undergraduate degree. Also, reflective of the academics view of WIL implementation being a resource intensive activity, is the difference in opinions of the ideal number of hours of work placement. Approximately half of the student group suggested 200 – 400 hours of work placement as being ideal, in comparison to the academic group that recommended 200 or less hours. It is therefore important that a business school considers the most appropriate WIL structure considering stakeholder

views as well as the context of the school, available resources and workload implications.

An interesting finding of the study is the lack of importance placed upon reflective writing, innovation and leadership as components of a WIL program. Both groups ranked reflective writing as the least important component. This is even more interesting when juxtaposed against the responses to the statement ‘reflection should be an integral part of WIL’ where academics responded between ‘moderately’ and ‘strongly’ agree. While there is a lack of consensus on not only the components included in the design of WIL (Patrick et al. 2008), reflection-based activities are widely recognised as important components that can transform implicit knowledge into explicit learning (Bates 2004; Doel 2009; Howard 2009). Arguably, one of the most important aspects of reflective activities is how it is implemented and assessed (Dean et al. 2012; Doel 2009). Both groups ranked communication skills as the most important WIL component. Communication skills is a ‘soft skill’ widely viewed as an important learning outcome of WIL programs (Jackson 2013b; Jackson & Chapman 2012; Freudenberg, Brimble & Cameron 2011; Weisz 2000), and one that is often viewed as lacking by both employers and even students themselves (Jackling & De Lange 2009; Harvey et al. 1997; Neilsen 2000; Kavanagh & Drennan 2008).

Concluding comments

This study has highlighted that both students and academics strongly support the inclusion of WIL in undergraduate business degrees. Differences in opinions on the most effective on- and off-campus WIL activities that deliver work-ready knowledge and skills, the most effective structure of a WIL program and the ideal number of hours of a work-placement were found between the two groups. Further research should be

undertaken to investigate these differences and also considering industry partners' perspectives. In doing so, additional insights would be provided to assist universities in managing any expectations gaps that may arise. Additionally, future research should also examine the views and perspectives of careers consultants who are often involved in organising and managing WIL industry placements. Whilst this study focused on all business students, irrespective of discipline of study, further research could be undertaken to examine how different discipline specific WIL programs are structured and address all stakeholders' perspectives and needs. Of particular importance, research should be conducted into how WIL programs embed "soft skills" learning so that graduates enter the workforce with industry relevant work-ready skills.

While the normal caveats of survey questionnaire research apply, and additionally the findings of this study should be interpreted with caution due to the low response rate, business schools and universities need to implement strategies to manage the expectations gap between the stakeholder groups and importantly include student views in any development of a WIL program. Additionally, with the high resource implications of developing, implementing and managing a WIL program, the consequences for academic workloads, without proper recognition, should not be ignored.

Disclosure statement

There is no potential conflict of interest.

Notes

1. Industry stakeholders were initially included in the survey questionnaire distribution. Unfortunately, even after repeated mailings, only one response from industry was received. A random sample of organisations that were included in

the sample frame were contacted and the main reasons given for no response were a lack of time and also a lack of interest. This lack of response reflects Couper (1997) who found that participants that are not interested in a research topic are more likely to refuse to participate.

2. The complete list of survey questions is available upon request.
3. While non-parametric Mann Whitney U Tests of Independent Samples have been undertaken to test differences in the distributions of responses of the two stakeholder groups, due to the sample size of the Academic group ($n = 24$, which is less than the threshold value of 30 for the use of parametric tests), the mean scores have been reported herein to enable a more meaningful interpretation of the results.

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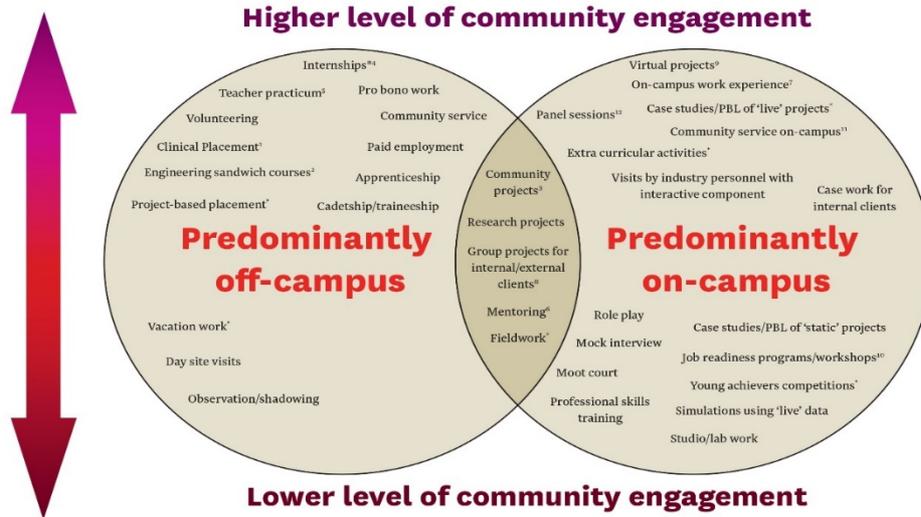


Figure 1. Categorisation of WIL Activities. Permission granted from authors (Rowe, Winchester-Seeto, & Mackaway 2012).

Table 1. Panel 1(a) and 1(b): Background Characteristics of Stakeholder Groups.

Panel 1a: Student background characteristics			
Demographic characteristics		Total Sample (<i>n</i> = 50)	
Age	Mean	30.5 years	
	Minimum	18 years	
	Maximum	58 years	
Gender	Female	24	48%
	Male	26	52%
Campus	Alice Springs	1	2%
	Darwin	31	62%
	External	9	18%
	Melbourne	7	14%
	Sydney	2	4%
Panel 1b: Academic background characteristics			
Demographic characteristics		Total Sample (<i>n</i> = 24)	
Age	Mean	49.6 years	
	Minimum	32 years	
	Maximum	66 years	
Education sector	Vocational Education	3	12.5%
	Higher Education	21	87.5%
Education level	Masters	13	54.2%
	PhD	11	45.8%
Employment status	Sessional	8	33.3%
	Part-time	1	4.2%
	Full-time	15	62.5%

Table 2. Effectiveness of On-Campus WIL Activities.

On-Campus WIL Activity	Students (<i>n</i> = 50)		Academics (<i>n</i> = 24)	
	\bar{x}	Rank	\bar{x}	Rank
Interactive industry visits	3.52	1	3.46	3
Industry panel sessions	3.37	2	3.25	7
Mock interviews	3.36	3	3.75	1
Role play	3.36	3	3.38	5
On-campus mentoring	3.36	3	3.33	6
Case studies	3.32	4	3.50	2
On-campus experience	3.28	5	3.04	9
Simulations of live data	3.24*	6	3.75*	1
On-campus community projects	3.22	7	3.08	8
Virtual projects	3.20	8	2.79	10
Group projects with internal client	3.08	9	3.33	6
On-campus research projects	2.98	10	3.42	4
Moot court	2.92	11	2.38	11

Responses were on a five-point scale from: 1 = not at all effective; 2 = slightly effective; 3 = moderately effective; 4 = very effective; and 5 = extremely effective.

* Mann Whitney U Test of Independent Samples where $p < 0.10$ (two-tailed test)

Table 3. Effectiveness of Off-Campus WIL Activities.

Off-Campus WIL Activity	Students (<i>n</i> = 50)		Academics (<i>n</i> = 24)	
	\bar{x}	Rank	\bar{x}	Rank
Paid employment	4.02	1	3.79	4
Placement off-campus	3.80	2	4.08	2
Vacation work	3.66*	3	3.33*	9
Field work	3.64*	4	4.13*	1
Project based placement	3.62	5	3.75	5
Projects with external clients	3.56	6	3.92	3
Mentoring	3.46	7	3.58	7
Industry visit	3.44	8	3.46	8
International placement	3.42	9	3.71	= 6
Community projects	3.40	10	3.71	= 6
Observation	3.20	11	3.13	= 10
Off-campus research	3.18	12	3.13	= 10

Responses were on a five-point scale from: 1 = not at all effective; 2 = slightly effective; 3 = moderately effective; 4 = very effective; and 5 = extremely effective.

* Mann Whitney *U* Test of Independent Samples where $p < 0.10$ (two-tailed test).

Table 4. Effectiveness of Learning Structures for Undergraduate Degrees.

Learning Structure	Students ($n = 50$)		Academics ($n = 24$)	
	\bar{x}	Rank	\bar{x}	Rank
Core Unit	3.80	1	3.83	2
Integrate into every unit	3.60	2	3.57	4
Module	3.50	3	3.65	3
Elective	3.40	4	3.01	5
Capstone	3.36 ^{***}	5	3.96 ^{***}	1

Responses were on a five-point scale from: 1 = not at all effective; 2 = slightly effective; 3 = moderately effective; 4 = very effective; and 5 = extremely effective.

^{***} Mann Whitney U Test of Independent Samples where $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed test).

Table 5. Importance of Components in WIL Program.

Component	Students (<i>n</i> = 50)		Academics (<i>n</i> = 24)	
	\bar{x}	Rank	\bar{x}	Rank
Communication skills	4.42**	1	4.78**	1
Work ethics	4.46	2	4.35	= 5
Work etiquette	4.28	3	4.35	= 5
Numeracy	4.28	3	4.48	3
Language	4.26	4	4.44	4
Literacy	4.22**	5	4.59**	2
Critical thinking	4.14	6	4.48	3
Managing diversity	4.12	7	4.22	7
Innovation	4.10	8	4.05	9
Leadership	4.08	9	4.13	8
Theory appreciation	3.92	10	4.26	6
Reflective writing	3.72	11	3.95	10

Responses were on a five-point scale from: 1 = not important; 2 = slightly important; 3 = moderately important; 4 = very important; and 5 = extremely important.

** Mann Whitney *U* Test of Independent Samples where $p < 0.05$ (two-tailed test).

Table 6. Importance of Reasons for Alternatives to Placement in WIL.

Reason	Students (<i>n</i> = 50)		Academics (<i>n</i> = 24)	
	\bar{x}	Rank	\bar{x}	Rank
Lack of resources for placements	4.07**	= 1	3.52**	6
Lack of employers for placements	4.07	= 1	3.90	3
Cater for working students	4.01	2	4.31	1
Cater for mature age students	3.96	3	4.16	2
Cater for international students	3.95	4	3.60	4
Cultural issues	3.90	5	3.57	5
Avoid high risk (low performing students)	3.48	6	3.00	7

Responses were on a five-point scale from: 1 = not important; 2 = slightly important; 3 = moderately important; 4 = very important; and 5 = extremely important.

** Mann Whitney *U* Test of Independent Samples where $p < 0.05$ (two-tailed test).

Table 7. Ideal Number of Hours of Work Placement in WIL.

Hours	Students (<i>n</i> = 50)		Academics (<i>n</i> = 24)	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
50	12	24	6	25
100	12	24	11	45.8
120	1	2	-	-
200	14	28	7	29.2
300	10	20	-	-
400	1	2	-	-
Total	50	100	24	100

Table 8. Range of Questions in Relation to WIL.

Question	Students	Academics	Mean
	(<i>n</i> = 50)	(<i>n</i> = 24)	Difference
	\bar{x}_S	\bar{x}_A	$\bar{x}_S - \bar{x}_A$
WIL programs should be core component	5.24	5.21	0.03
WIL should provide work placements	5.10	4.75	0.35
Assessment of student by employer important	4.98	4.50	0.48
Reflection should be integral part of WIL	4.70**	5.17**	-0.47
Assessments are most important part of WIL	4.14	3.92	0.22

Responses were on a six-point scale from: 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = moderately disagree; 3 = slightly disagree; 4 = slightly agree; 5 = moderately agree; and 6 = strongly agree.

** Mann Whitney U Test of Independent Samples where $p < 0.05$ (two-tailed test)