Barriers to Work-integrated Learning Opportunities

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Executive Summary

This report is a followup to a previous Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) report in which the barriers to students participating in work-integrated learning (WIL) opportunities were identified. Those barriers fell into five categories:

1. Awareness and promotion of WIL
2. Student expectations and preparedness for WIL
3. Completing a WIL experience
4. Equity and access
5. Institutional-level strategies and policies

The purpose of the current study was to determine what strategies Ontario's postsecondary institutions are implementing to mitigate or remove those barriers.

The study employed an online survey of faculty and staff at postsecondary institutions who are involved in making WIL opportunities available to students. A total of 1,008 potential respondents were identified through a search of 44 Ontario postsecondary institutions' websites. An email invitation was sent from HEQCO to all 1,008. Respondents were not randomly selected. Participation was voluntary. A total of 176 respondents completed the survey, which was available from May 29 until June 16, 2017. The final data set includes surveys from 43 of the 44 institutions surveyed (i.e., all but one publicly funded Ontario postsecondary institution).

In-depth telephone interviews were then conducted with 45 key informants. The purpose of these interviews was to further clarify the efficacy of the identified strategies and discuss the challenges of implementing them for specific types of WIL.

Findings

Student demand for WIL as part of all postsecondary learning is increasing

Student demand for WIL as part of all postsecondary learning is increasing. Many WIL opportunities (both optional and mandatory) are often oversubscribed. Ontario postsecondary institutions are adapting to this demand through a wide variety of policies, strategies, tools and supports to promote WIL and enable their students to secure and complete WIL experiences. However, study findings also suggest that more could be done to ensure that WIL is promoted to specific demographic groups to increase the participation of first-generation, Indigenous and other racialized/minority students in WIL programs.

Ontario PSE institutions use multiple approaches to address challenges faced by students participating in WIL

In general, no one approach was found that can be relied upon to address any particular student challenge; rather postsecondary institutions employ a suite of supports and strategies to help ensure students are fully prepared to successfully secure and complete a WIL experience. The top strategies used and found to be very effective in preparing students for their WIL experience include: structured preparatory WIL courses (optional or mandatory); dedicated WIL advisers; having students/graduates speak about their WIL experiences; seminars and group presentations about WIL; in-class discussions and/or assignments related to WIL; one-on-one discussions with students; and pre-participation expectation and outcome guides.

WIL programs rely on institutional resources to help deliver programs and support students

While the majority of study respondents recognized the effectiveness of the various strategies, many are implementing the less resource intensive strategies mainly due to a lack of resources. As Peters (2012) found, "One of the primary challenges reported in the literature is that delivering WIL programs requires considerable faculty time and energy." At a given postsecondary institution, study results suggest that the supports available to students involved in WIL opportunities reflect the priority their program and department place on WIL. Many WIL programs work collaboratively with other departments in their institution to ensure students have access to the supports and services needed for a successful WIL experience. Rather than duplicating efforts, WIL programs are leveraging systems and processes already in place. For example, collaborations across departments such as career centres, equity offices and international centres help to make the best use of limited resources.

While fiscal necessity may have been the impetus for the use of multiple strategies, this approach also addresses the need to have strategies that reach a diverse student body that includes youth directly out of secondary school, mature and international students, and students requiring various accommodations. In addition, the use of strategies such as group advising (beyond WIL preparatory courses) not only addresses the issue of limited resources, but can also serve to create space for students to feel like they are being heard, and create peer-to-peer connections and support.

Consistent messaging is key to managing expectations

Key informants note that a large part of promoting WIL opportunities involves setting or managing student expectations of what is involved in a particular WIL experience. Having clear, consistent messaging presented to students early and often helps reduce misconceptions about what a specific WIL experience entails and helps students develop an understanding of their own role in and responsibilities for their WIL experiences. Findings suggest that faculty and employers also benefit from being kept informed about the various WIL options available; faculty are better able to advise students on appropriate WIL opportunities and employers are able to choose WIL programs that best fit their needs and objectives.

Faculty support of WIL is essential to student participation

Key informants interviewed agreed that having faculty support to promote WIL to their students was essential, particularly if it is optional as students may be less inclined to participate in WIL if their teachers are not supportive of it. Survey findings also suggest that the use of faculty champions is very effective when promoting WIL to students. However, it should be noted that this strategy may not be widely used among all Ontario postsecondary institutions. Many key informants noted a lack of WIL awareness within other departments at the same institution. The study also identified faculty reluctance to get involved with WIL, primarily because of the time commitment, and for some, a philosophical ideology that their role is to instill higher academic learning and not prepare students for the workforce.

Resources are available to help students manage time and financial pressures

Key informants acknowledge that while completing a placement or job search along with an academic load can be challenging, numerous tools and strategies are available such as limiting the number of work placement hours, allowing some flexibility for when the work placement can be completed and providing seminars, tutorials, guides and/or materials on time management. Study findings also suggest that effective strategies for helping students balance their WIL with other commitments include one-on-one support and/or mentoring and ensuring expectations and priorities for WIL are clearly defined. However, informants stress that for some students, the demands of work placement, academics and other commitments remains intense even with supports.

Students who must relocate for their WIL placement are provided with information, resources and in some cases financial assistance to help them find housing. Students concerned about being financially prepared for their WIL experience are offered advice, seminars or courses on money management and can often obtain financial support through resources such as scholarships, bursaries, awards, financial aid, special or dedicated funds and OSAP.

Barriers faced by disadvantaged students are being addressed through a combination of WIL-specific and institution-wide supports

Survey findings suggest that WIL programs are implementing effective strategies to assist international students and students facing physical, mental or social challenges so they can get involved in WIL. Effective strategies for international students include: having a dedicated WIL adviser; one-on-one career advising; encouraging and assisting international students to apply for work visas; and working with international students to prepare them for job interviews. Top strategies for assisting students facing physical, mental or social challenges are: having an accessibility adviser and/or a workplace transition consultant; and working one-on-one with students to ensure the WIL experience is successful.

Many WIL coordinators note that they rely on centralized supports within their PSE institutions for these and other students. There are offices dedicated to international students and students with disabilities at most PSE institutions. WIL coordinators note that they refer students to those resources when students self-identify that they require the support. While this appears to be an efficient use of resources, it relies on the premise that students will self-identify. Some key informants indicated that their PSE institutions are

currently looking at developing or revising policies to ensure that students in WIL are fully aware of the resources available to them, particularly as those resources apply to their WIL experience.

Postsecondary institutions have a number of formal and informal policies in place to support WIL implementation and delivery

There are a number of formal and informal policies in place, mainly at the program or department level at postsecondary institutions to support WIL. According to key informants, postsecondary institutions are supportive of WIL and some have committed to implementing it into all the programs they offer. There is evidence that some postsecondary institutions have also begun the process of developing institution-wide WIL policies. Many key informants were in support of having provincial or even global standardization of WIL definitions, including common practices and policy documentation that all institutions can refer to. Currently those involved in the delivery of WIL opportunities share effective practices. There are formal structures for the sharing of such information both within the province and at a national level; however, they are primarily focused on the co-op form of WIL. In addition, as demand for WIL continues to grow and as WIL offerings continue to evolve, there will be an increasing need for more frequent opportunities to share best practices.

The combination of institution-wide WIL processes and/or policies in partnership with academic or department level practices can serve to create consistency and strong expectations for the quality of WIL programs.

Many informants felt that it was important for their postsecondary institution to have an overarching WIL policy but also felt that flexibility within the policy to design what works best for them and their students was just as important. As postsecondary institutions move towards defining their approach to WIL within the context of the overall goals and mandates of their institution, they have an opportunity to leverage the best practices already in place across numerous departments while maintaining the uniqueness of WIL in each program. Informants suggested that there needs to be both a central source of knowledge and resource to support WIL administration as well as departmental-level resources to allow for direct engagement with hosts/employers and students to ensure the best possible WIL experiences.

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1   Introduction

Work integrated learning (WIL) is a pedagogical practice that integrates academic learning with workplace application. In 2015, the Ontario Premier's Highly Skilled Workforce Expert Panel recommended that 100% of postsecondary students should have the opportunity to complete at least one WIL or experiential education experience.

Previous reports (BHER, 2016; Sattler & Peters, 2013) clearly identified the barriers Ontario postsecondary students face when participating in WIL. The focus of the current study is identifying the strategies employed by postsecondary institutions to address those barriers. The study focused on strategies to help students who face barriers related to the following types of WIL:

- **Co-op:** Periods of study alternating with work placements, offering students a structured approach that integrates their studies with work experience in a related field
- **Internships:** Work experiences, typically lasting a year or more, at or near the end of a study program
- **Applied Research Projects:** Students taking on real-world projects, often with industry partners as clients and the students as service providers
- **Mandatory Professional Practice:** Work arrangements required for a professional licence or designation
- **Field Experience:** Placements and work-related experiences that prepare students for professional or occupational fields, but are not required for a professional licence
- **Service Learning:** A range of activities intended to provide equal benefit to the service provider (the student) and the recipient (the community) while maintaining a focus on learning.

The specific research questions for the study were:

- What does the literature indicate are the major **barriers** to students participating in WIL?
- What are the **institution-level strategies**? What have postsecondary institutions done to mitigate or remove these barriers to WIL? Specifically, what supports and/or policies are in place and have they been effective?
- What are the **best practices** for postsecondary institutions, employers and policy makers that would maximize WIL participation?

In addition to reviewing the most recent literature, this study solicited opinions from a wide range of stakeholders who are responsible for making WIL opportunities available to Ontario postsecondary students. It also conducted followup telephone interviews with select stakeholders in an effort to identify best practices for encouraging participation in WIL opportunities. The results of the study are presented in this report, which is organized into the following sections:

- Section 2 presents a brief review of the literature on barriers to students participating in WIL, as well as a limited scan of WIL policies in other jurisdictions.
- Section 3 describes the study's methodology, including the development of data collection instruments, survey administration, data analysis procedures and a profile of survey respondents.

- Section 4 presents the study's findings.
- Section 5 offers conclusions for strategies and policies that could be considered best practices with respect to maximizing the number of students who could participate in WIL.

2   Literature Review

The literature review focused on summarizing previous HEQCO reports that examined student barriers to WIL, supplemented by relevant studies published since 2016. The review also sought to identify institutions in other jurisdictions that have implemented strategies to address barriers to WIL participation and support increased WIL opportunities among students.

2.1   Barriers to Student Participation in WIL

A brief review of recent WIL-related literature identifies a number of barriers that can keep students from participating in WIL. The following section provides a summary of the barriers to WIL participation related to student awareness and perceptions of WIL, WIL preparedness, time management and financial considerations. The section will also examine barriers unique to international students and students with physical, mental or social challenges.

2.1.1   Student Awareness and Perceptions of WIL

In order for students to participate in WIL, they must first be aware that WIL opportunities are available to them as part of their chosen field of study. In a review of an experiential learning program at Middle Tennessee State University, program planners identified that one of the difficulties with implementation was ensuring students knew about the program. Reviewers found that one of the most effective marketing approaches was to have faculty support so that faculty can inform students about the program (Austin & Rust, 2015). However, obtaining faculty support for WIL can be challenging (Sattler, 2011). Australia's "National Strategy on Work Integrated Learning in University Education" (2015) recognizes the need to "build support — among students, universities, employers across all sectors and governments — to increase participation in WIL." The strategy also includes a national communication and engagement strategy along with tailored strategies in priority areas.

Even though students may be aware of WIL as a concept, they may be hesitant to engage due to uncertainty about what a WIL experience entails and what would be required in order for them to participate (Sattler & Peters, 2013). A study of graduating college and university students in Ontario found that the barrier cited by approximately one-third of students who had not participated in WIL was concern about delaying program completion. Other reasons cited for not participating included never intending to do WIL, concerns about additional costs, lack of payment for WIL (i.e., WIL was a voluntary position or requirements stipulate that students are not remunerated for work done through a WIL program), worries about finding a suitable placement and uncertainty about what WIL would require (Sattler & Peters, 2013). Similarly, a 2015 study that polled students who had attended a co-op information session but did not complete an application found that "interest in other extracurricular activities, often in conjunction with concerns regarding the time commitment involved with co-ops, are primary reasons that students decided not to continue with the application process" (p. 4). Students also said they decided not to participate due to uncertainty around major area of study and unclear employment goals, along with not meeting minimum co-op eligibility

requirements (Main, Ohland, Ramirez, Fletcher, & Davis, 2015). A study at James Cook University questioned students prior to participation in WIL courses and found that 88% of students said "not having clear goals and career aspirations" was one of the biggest limitations (Bandaranaike & Willison, 2011, p. 6). It should also be noted that participating in WIL programs can often clarify career goals. "Students also identified that WIL experiences provided them with career direction. That is, they can *find out whether they like it* (University student focus group, WA) or *find they are not suited to their chosen profession if not prepared for the reality of the workplace* (Symposium, SA)" (Patrick, Peach, & Pocknee, 2009, p. 21).

2.1.2   WIL Preparedness

Sattler and Peters (2013) identified that university WIL students were more likely than college students to experience challenges related to "institutional delivery of the WIL program, specifically insufficient preparation prior to WIL and difficulty relating classroom theories to the workplace" (p. 60). An Australian national scoping study of WIL also found several issues that could make it difficult to ensure students obtained worthwhile placement experiences; these included: "lack of shared understanding of purpose and role" and "student preparedness for placement" (Patrick, Peach, & Pocknee, 2009, p. 30). The authors note the importance of faculty, students and employers having a shared understanding of the goals and objectives of the WIL experience along with clear roles and responsibilities for all involved (Patrick, Peach, & Pocknee, 2009).

2.1.3   Financial Challenges

Financial costs related to WIL including registration fees, relocation or commuting costs, required work-related clothing or equipment, childcare and/or other family obligations can be a challenge for students. In the Ontario graduate study the top two challenges faced by college WIL respondents were: "lack of payment (mentioned by 53% of respondents), and unexpected financial costs (51%)" (BHER – Academica Group, 2016, p. 43). Among university WIL respondents, financial concerns were a part of the top three major challenges. "Not being paid at all was identified as a major challenge by 24% of university WIL students, followed by insufficient pay and unexpected financial costs (major challenges for 14% and 13% of respondents respectively)" (Sattler & Peters, 2013, p. 55).

2.1.4   Time Commitment Challenges

The survey of Ontario Graduates indicated that almost half of all WIL students reported time-management pressures, specifically "challenges related to balancing WIL with family commitments (47%) and handling additional time demands (45%)" (Sattler & Peters, 2013, p. 52). The Australian scoping study found that "workload and time constraints associated with WIL programs were identified as a pressing issue for university staff, employers and students" (Patrick, Peach, & Pocknee, 2009, p. 34). The authors found that students with jobs and/or family responsibilities had reduced levels of engagement in their WIL experiences. In addition, unpaid placement placed these students at a particular disadvantage especially if they were required to give up their job to complete their WIL placement (Patrick, Peach, & Pocknee, 2009).

2.1.5   *Equity and Access Challenges*

International students face a number of barriers specific to their circumstances including understanding of workplace culture, English language competency, concerns about employer attitudes and perceptions, and questions about visa status (BHER – Academica Group, 2016). Jackson and Greenwood (2015) found that securing placements was more difficult for international students due to "a lack of networks, unrealistic expectations, logistical barriers, and employers' concerns about cultural differences and inadequate communication skills" (Jackson & Greenwood, 2015, p. 4). Gribble (2014) suggests that programs and support services should be tailored for international students "in order to create a level playing field with local students" (p. 2). An Australian scoping study of WIL echoed the need for tailored supports for international students noting that many choose to remain in the country after graduation and that it is in the best interests of all that these future citizens have the ability to obtain jobs after graduation (Patrick, Peach, & Pocknee, 2009).

Students facing physical, mental health or social barriers "may also need additional assistance identifying and pursuing WIL opportunities that are a good fit for their abilities" (Stirling et al. 2016, p. 43). As in Ontario, Australia has enacted legislation that requires accommodation be provided to students who disclose they have a disability. All Australian universities employ disability advisers who assist the institutions in designing accommodations "taking into account the inherent requirements of the WIL placement" (Patrick, Peach, & Pocknee, 2009, p. 27).

3   Research Methodology

Research activities completed in support of this study include a brief literature review and jurisdictional scan, an online survey of WIL representatives from Ontario postsecondary institutions, interviews with select survey respondents and interviews with employers involved in WIL opportunities.

3.1   Online Survey

An online survey of respondents involved in six types of WIL experiences (co-op, internships, field experience, applied research projects, mandatory professional practice and service learning) offered at colleges and universities across Ontario was conducted between May 29 and June 16, 2017. The objective of the survey was to gather feedback on the strategies and policies used by Ontario postsecondary institutions to help students overcome barriers to participation in WIL. The survey design was informed by a review of recent studies identifying barriers to participation in WIL as well as by interviews with four director and/or managerial level respondents involved in WIL programs at their respective postsecondary institutions. A copy of the survey can be found in Appendix A.

3.1.1   *Sample design*

A sample frame of individuals involved with the development and delivery of WIL programs was developed in the hopes of obtaining representation from each of Ontario's 24 colleges and 20 universities. The researchers reviewed college and university websites to identify the types of WIL offered at each as well as the most appropriate representative for each type of WIL experience offered (excluding apprenticeships). The representative was then contacted by telephone and/or email to confirm their position and involvement

with WIL at their institution. They were also asked if they could provide contact information for other respondents such as WIL coordinators, program coordinators, department/faculty heads, administrators and others knowledgeable about the type of WIL offered in a given program at their postsecondary institution. This procedure was repeated several times depending on the size of the postsecondary institution and the number of different WIL programs offered. The final sample contained the name, position, institution, type(s) of WIL he/she is involved with and contact information for 1,008 individuals.

3.1.2   Procedure

Prior to full survey administration, the survey instrument was field tested with a small sample (n=5) of respondents to measure how well the survey instrument performed.

Full survey administration involved a bilingual email invitation, sent by HEQCO, to everyone in the survey sample. The invitation email described the purpose and voluntary nature of the survey. Recipients were also assured that they would not be identified in any reports. The invitation encouraged them to circulate the email to those colleagues they felt were knowledgeable about WIL programs at their institution. The email contained an embedded link to the online survey.

Reminder emails were sent at one week intervals, except to those who had already responded or asked that their name be removed from future correspondence.

Respondents were able to complete the survey in French or English. When accessing the survey, respondents were prompted to generate a unique identifier or passcode. Using their access code, respondents were able to exit the questionnaire and return at a later time during the data collection period to enter additional data until the survey was complete.

The survey received 296 responses. After cleaning and removal of incomplete surveys, there were 176 completed surveys. The survey obtained representation from all the colleges and all but one of the universities in Ontario.

3.2   Interviews

During the design phase, four in-depth interviews were conducted with directors/managers of WIL and/or academic departments at four postsecondary institutions (both colleges and universities) identified by HEQCO. These interviews were used to gather information to assist with the design of the survey instrument.

In the post-survey phase, two lists of interviewees were developed to discuss the survey results. The first list was generated from the survey itself; at the end of the survey respondents were asked to provide contact information if they would like to participate in a followup survey. A total of 76 of the 176 survey respondents provided their contact information and 40 were selected. There was representation from across the six WIL types in both colleges and universities, and from the four geographical regions in Ontario: northern, eastern, western and central.

The second list — a list of employers — was developed with the assistance of post-survey interviewees who agreed to pass along a pre-composed invitation to employers who had participated in their WIL programs. The invitation allowed interested employers to contact the researchers directly to schedule an interview. While it is unknown how many employers received the invitation, a total of 10 responded and agreed to participate in an interview.

Email invitations were sent to members of both lists. The email provided details on the purpose of the interview and available interview dates and times. It also gave assurances that individuals and institutions/companies would not be identified in any reports. A total of 45 individuals were interviewed for the study (Table 1). Interviews were conducted between August 21 and September 20, 2017.

Table 1: Key Informant Interviews

Stakeholder Group	Number of Interviews
University respondents (includes two survey-design interviews)	19
College respondents (includes two survey-design interviews)	21
Employers	5
Total	45

Semi-structured interview guides were developed to cover certain areas while allowing the interviewer flexibility to probe with questions as appropriate. The main topics explored in the interviews during each phase of the project included:

Phase 1: Survey design
- o   Background on informant's WIL program
- o   Major barriers to student participation in WIL
- o   Policies and strategies to address barriers
- o   Suggestions for survey length, types of questions and additional topics

Phase 2: Institutional survey
- o   Background on informant's WIL program
- o   Policies and strategies to address barriers to student participation in WIL

Phase 3: Employer survey
- o   Background on employer and type of WIL offered by employer
- o   Major barriers to student participation in WIL
- o   Strategies to address barriers to student participation in WIL

Copies of the interview guides can be found in Appendices B and C.

3.3   Analysis

Analysis of the survey data and key informant interviews were triangulated with data from other lines of evidence (i.e., literature review and jurisdictional scan) to ensure the findings were reliable. Quantitative survey data was analyzed using a combination of descriptive statistics (cross tabs and frequencies) by WIL type and postsecondary institution (college versus university). Survey analysis also included independent t-tests for means and independent z-tests for percentages (unspooled proportions). Qualitative data was analyzed thematically. Recordings from individual interviews were transcribed and organized into key themes, and then further analyzed in order to answer specific study questions. Data from the literature review and jurisdictional scan was analyzed in order to support or refute findings from the qualitative and quantitative lines of evidence. In some instances, the literature data serves as its own line of evidence for a given study question.

Open-ended comments from the survey were reviewed, coded and classified. An approved code list was developed. Due to the large number of open-ended questions (14 plus 7 "other" options), an inter-rater reliability test was conducted using Cohen's Kappa.[1] Using 14% of the total proportion of cases (Cohen's minimum proportion of cases is 5%), the tested codes received an average rating of 0.7 on a scale of 0 to 1, with 0 indicating no compatibility and 1 indicating perfect matches. Areas of disagreement (i.e., cases where the rating was below 0.7) were discussed and in some cases, further modifications were made to the codes. An updated code list was sent for approval.

Where appropriate, results were compared by type of WIL (i.e., co-op, internships, field experience, applied research projects, mandatory professional practice and service learning) and institution (i.e., colleges versus universities). Results were reported as percentages. Significant results at the 95% confidence interval were shown for bases of 30 or more. In addition, results were suppressed for base sizes of less than 10 and/or combined with another group(s) to protect respondent confidentiality.

3.4   Limitations

The following research limitations need to be taken into account when reviewing this report.

While the survey obtained input from all but one postsecondary institution in Ontario, the results may not be representative of the total population of stakeholders involved in providing WIL in the province. While an institution may have many WIL programs with many representatives, in some cases only one representative from a particular postsecondary institution responded to the survey invitation. The methodology utilized a sample of convenience; respondents self-selected themselves. The degree of any non-response bias is unknown.

Some respondents were involved with all six types of WIL. To minimize respondent burden, respondents who indicated they were involved in more than two types of WIL were asked to provide details for only two

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1 When more than one individual (rater) is responsible for measuring a variable on a categorical scale, it is important to determine the agreement among raters. Cohen's Kappa (Kappa) is a measure of agreement between individuals.

of their WIL types. The WIL types were randomly selected to reduce response bias and obtain as representative a sample as possible.

For many respondents, their awareness of WIL was limited to their specific program. They may be unaware of any differences in WIL policies and practices with other departments, or whether their institution has an overall WIL policy or not.

The extent to which the study found any particular strategy to be effective is limited to the perceptions of the study participants. Further research could determine the extent to which strategies to address student barriers to participation in WIL are effective across the broad spectrum of WIL programs and the postsecondary institutions that offer them.

Several barriers to WIL were not specifically addressed in this study; these include:

- **Underrepresentation of Indigenous students**: Very little literature related to Indigenous participation in WIL could be found, which suggests that this is an area for further research.
- **Availability of WIL positions**: This includes issues such as the existence (or non-existence) of paid positions, positions for students in programs/fields such as the humanities, and how much importance the academic department places on WIL.
- **Socioeconomic barriers that discourage/prevent student participation in WIL**: This includes issues such as parental influence on student choices to pursue WIL and family income level.

3.5   Respondent and WIL Profiles

As shown in Figures 1 and 2, the majority of survey respondents (71%) held positions directly related to WIL and have been involved with WIL for five years or more (65%). It is important to note that the respondents self-selected their position from the following options: Manager of WIL, WIL Coordinator, Academic Lead, Administrator or Other. Definitions for each category were not provided. Other responses were then coded into existing responses where appropriate or a new response category was created as noted in the chart below.

Figure 1: Respondent Position within PSE Institution
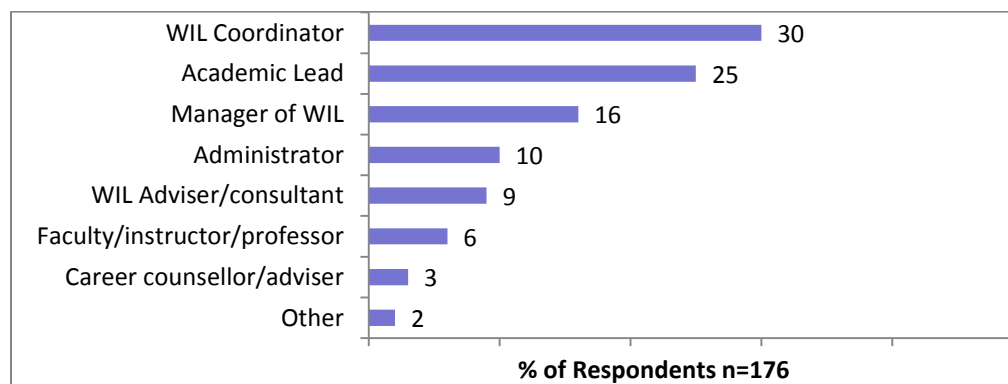
Survey Question: Please indicate your role with respect to WIL.

Figure 2: Length of Time Survey Respondents Have Been Involved in WIL
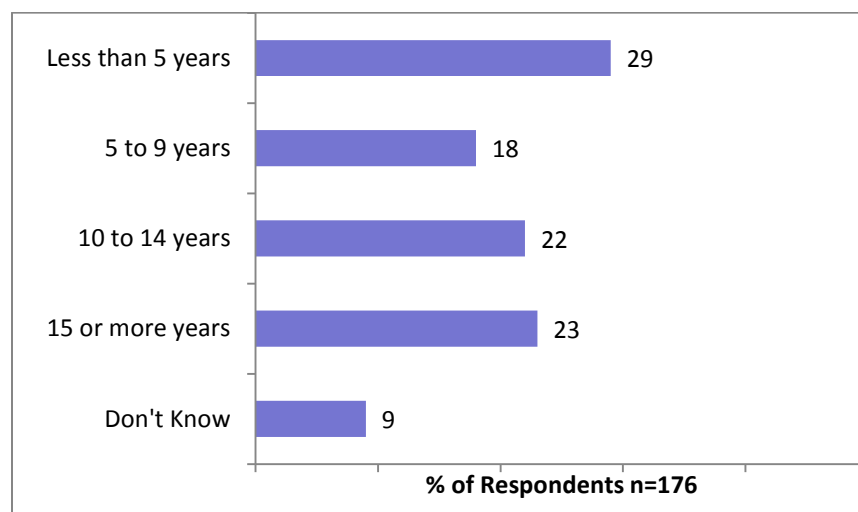
Survey Question: Approximately how many years have you been involved with WIL?

Over half (52%) of respondents indicated they were involved in programs offering field experience, while the proportion of respondents who indicated they were involved in co-op and internship programs were 40% and 38% respectively (Figure 3). Approximately one-fifth of respondents indicated they were involved in either applied research (20%) or mandatory professional practice (18%) or service learning (18%) programs (Figure 3). The proportion of respondents involved in multiple WIL types was slighter greater than those involved in only one type of WIL (51% versus 49% respectively) (Figure 4).

Figure 3: Type of WIL Programs Respondent Involved with (Multiple Response)
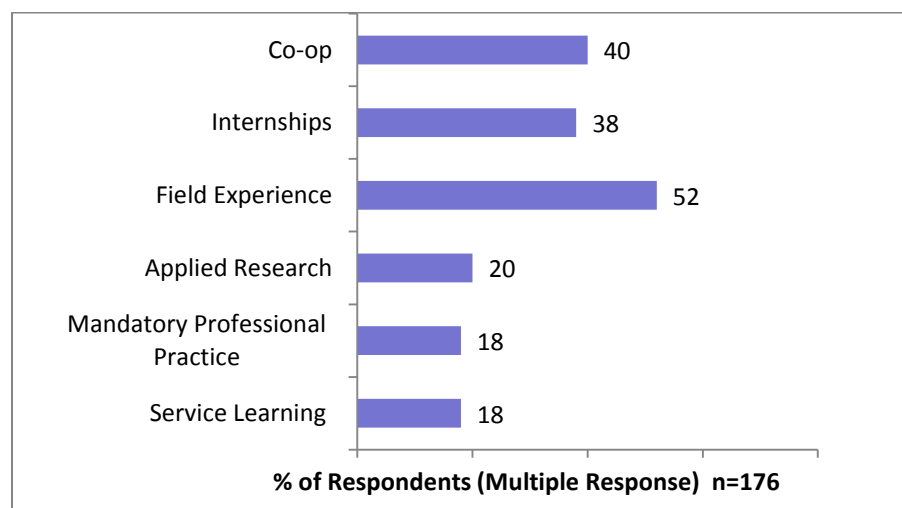
Survey Question: With which types of WIL programs are you involved?

Figure 4: Number of WIL Types per Respondent
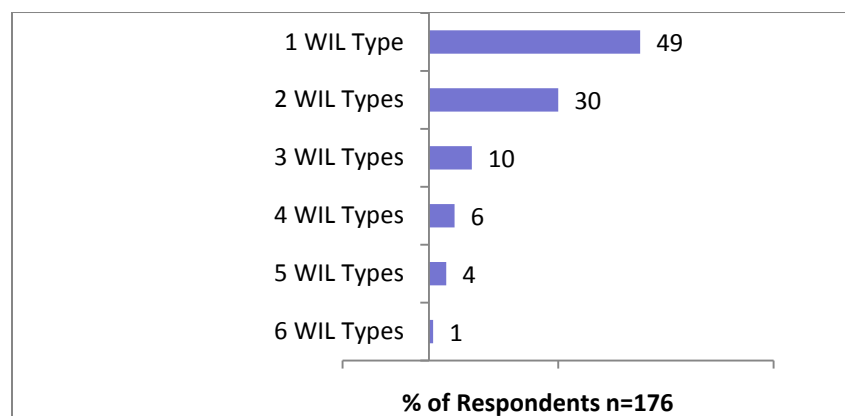
Survey Question: With which types of WIL programs are you involved?

As shown in Table 2, a combination of centralized, decentralized and mixed (i.e., both centralized and decentralized) management was observed across all WIL types. The majority (63%) of co-op programs have centralized management, while the majority (54%) of mandatory professional practice programs are decentralized. Internships and applied research programs have a somewhat even distribution among the management models, while field experience programs have a slightly greater proportion of decentralized WIL management (40% versus 23% centralized and 28% mixed) and service learning programs have a slightly greater proportion of centralized WIL management (44% versus 20% decentralized and 36% mixed).

Table 2: WIL Management

Type of Management	Co-op n=60	Internship n=50	Field experience n=80	Applied research n=24	Mandatory professional practice n=24	Service learning n=25
% of Respondents	%	%	%	%	%	%
Centralized management of WIL	63	36	23	33	25	44
Decentralized management of WIL	13	32	40	38	54	20
Mixed management of WIL	13	24	28	29	17	36

Survey Question: Which of the following best describes the management of the program at your institution?
Note: Respondents involved in more than two types of WIL were randomly presented with two WIL types to describe.

The length of WIL experiences varies greatly both between and within types of WIL. Internships, applied research projects and co-ops have, on average, the longest duration among the six WIL types with an average duration of 144, 141 and 140 days respectively (Table 3). They are followed by mandatory professional practice (average of 102 days), field experience (average of 86 days), and service learning (average of 85 days) (Table 3).

Table 3: Length of WIL

Length of WIL	Co-op n=60	Internship n=50	Field experience n=80	Applied research n=24	Mandatory professional practice n=24	Service learning n=25
Typical length of WIL (mean days)	140	144	86	141	102	85
Range of weeks	2–70	2–70	<1–35	2–35	<1–35	<1–35

Survey Question: Thinking about the majority of WIL experiences at your institution, how long does the WIL typically last?
Note: Respondents involved in more than two types of WIL were randomly presented with two WIL types to describe.

The point at which students may first participate in a WIL experience varies within each type of experience as well as between the WIL types. As shown in Table 4 below, the majority of respondents involved in co-op, mandatory professional practice and service learning programs offer students their first WIL experience during their first or second year of study, whereas the proportion of first offerings of internships, field experiences and applied research projects are distributed among several study years (Table 4).

Table 4: Year of Study WIL First Offered

Point in program	Co-op n=60	Internship n=50	Field experience n=80	Applied research n=24	Mandatory professional practice n=24	Service learning n=25
% of respondents	%	%	%	%	%	%
First year	37	14	28	8	42	32
Second year	35	24	30	25	17	28
Third year	7	36	13	17	4	4
Fourth year	3	16	10	33	4	8
Grad level	3	2	0	0	8	0
Any/All years	2	0	5	4	8	20
Final year of study	0	4	5	4	0	0
Varies by program	15	2	10	4	17	4

Survey Question: In what year of study are WIL first offered to students?
Note: Respondents involved in more than two types of WIL were randomly presented with two WIL types to describe.

The frequency with which WIL programs are offered during a program of study varies both among and within WIL types. Table 5 displays the frequency with which WIL was offered. Co-op programs are generally understood to have alternating academic and work terms throughout the duration of the program. This is reflected in the proportion of respondents indicating that co-op work experiences occurred every semester (37%), every year (33%) or alternating semesters (18%), with just under one-fifth (18%) of respondents indicating that the co-op occurred only once. Similarly, respondents involved in internships indicated that

work experiences occurred every semester (26%) or every year (36%); however approximately one-third (32%) of these respondents noted that the internship was offered only once. This was the highest proportion among all WIL types. The proportion of respondents indicating frequency of field experiences is also concentrated around every semester or every year, with the distribution for the work experience occurring every semester being nearly twice that of every year (43% versus 24%). This trend is similar for mandatory professional practice and service learning programs with 46% and 44% of respondents, respectively, indicating the WIL is offered every semester, and 17% and 28% of respondents, respectively, indicating the WIL is offered every year. However, one-fifth of respondents involved in mandatory professional practice noted that the frequency of WIL experiences varies by program, student demand and/or available funding. More than half (54%) of respondents involved in applied research projects indicated the WIL occurs every year during a program with one-quarter indicating frequency every semester and 17% indicating frequency of WIL experiences varies by program, student demand and/or available funding (Table 5).

Table 5: Frequency of WIL During Program

Frequency	Co-op n=60	Internship n=50	Field experience n=80	Applied research n=24	Mandatory professional practice n=24	Service learning n=25
% of Respondents (multiple responses)	%	%	%	%	%	%
Once	18	32	19	8	8	12
Every semester	37	26	43	25	46	44
Every year	33	36	24	54	17	28
Alternating semesters	18	0	6	0	8	4
Every other year	2	0	0	0	0	0
Varies by program/demand/ funding	8	6	10	17	21	8
As often as students wish/desire	0	0	1	0	0	0
Twice	0	2	4	0	4	0
Multiple times a year	0	2	4	0	0	8
Three or more times over duration of program	2	0	3	0	13	4

Survey Question: How regularly is WIL offered?
Note: Respondents involved in more than two types of WIL were randomly presented with two WIL types to describe.

The extent to which survey respondents indicated that the WIL program(s) they were involved in were compulsory varied greatly. As expected, mandatory professional practice had the highest proportion of respondents (88%) who indicated that the WIL was compulsory. Respondents involved in applied research had the greatest proportion (46%) indicating their WIL experience was optional (Table 6).

Table 6: Compulsory WIL

	Co-op n=60	Internship n=50	Field experience n=80	Applied research n=24	Mandatory professional practice n=24	Service learning n=25
% of Respondents	%	%	%	%	%	%
Compulsory WIL	52	50	71	29	88	20
Optional WIL	18	36	16	46	0	36
Both compulsory and optional WIL	30	12	13	21	13	44

Survey Question: Is the WIL program compulsory or optional?
Note: % of respondents. Columns may not add to 100% due to rounding.

The majority of WIL programs that survey respondents are involved in offer course credit. The proportions range from 56% of respondents involved in service learning programs up to 92% for respondents involved in mandatory professional practice (Table 7). Over one-quarter of respondents (28%) involved in service learning programs indicated that course credit is sometimes offered for their programs compared to 17% of respondents involved in applied research projects, 10% in field experiences, 4% in mandatory professional practice, 2% in internships and none for co-ops. Depending on the program, 5–13% of respondents indicated the WIL programs(s) they were involved in did not offer a course credit, while 0–8% indicated that WIL was a part of a credited course (Table 7).

Table 7: Academic Credit for WIL

Type of credit	Co-op n=60	Internship n=50	Field experience n=80	Applied research n=24	Mandatory professional practice n=24	Service learning n=25
% of Respondents	%	%	%	%	%	%
Course credit for WIL	82	88	84	68	92	56
No course credit for WIL	13	10	5	13	4	12
Sometimes	0	2	10	17	4	28
Part of course/program	7	0	1	8	0	4

Survey Question: Do students obtain a course credit for the WIL program? Note: Columns may not add to 100% due to rounding.

4   Key Findings

This section explores the strategies and best practices used by Ontario postsecondary institutions to mitigate or remove barriers students encounter when attempting to participate in WIL opportunities.

4.1   Awareness and Promotion of WIL

In order for students to participate in WIL, they must first have an awareness that such opportunities are offered as part of their chosen field of study. When survey respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they felt students were aware of WIL opportunities, the majority felt students were either very aware or somewhat aware of the availability of WIL programs at their institution (Figure 5). However it should also be noted that respondents involved in applied research and/or service learning opportunities felt that most of the students were only somewhat aware.

Figure 5: Perceptions of Student Awareness of WIL (by WIL Type)
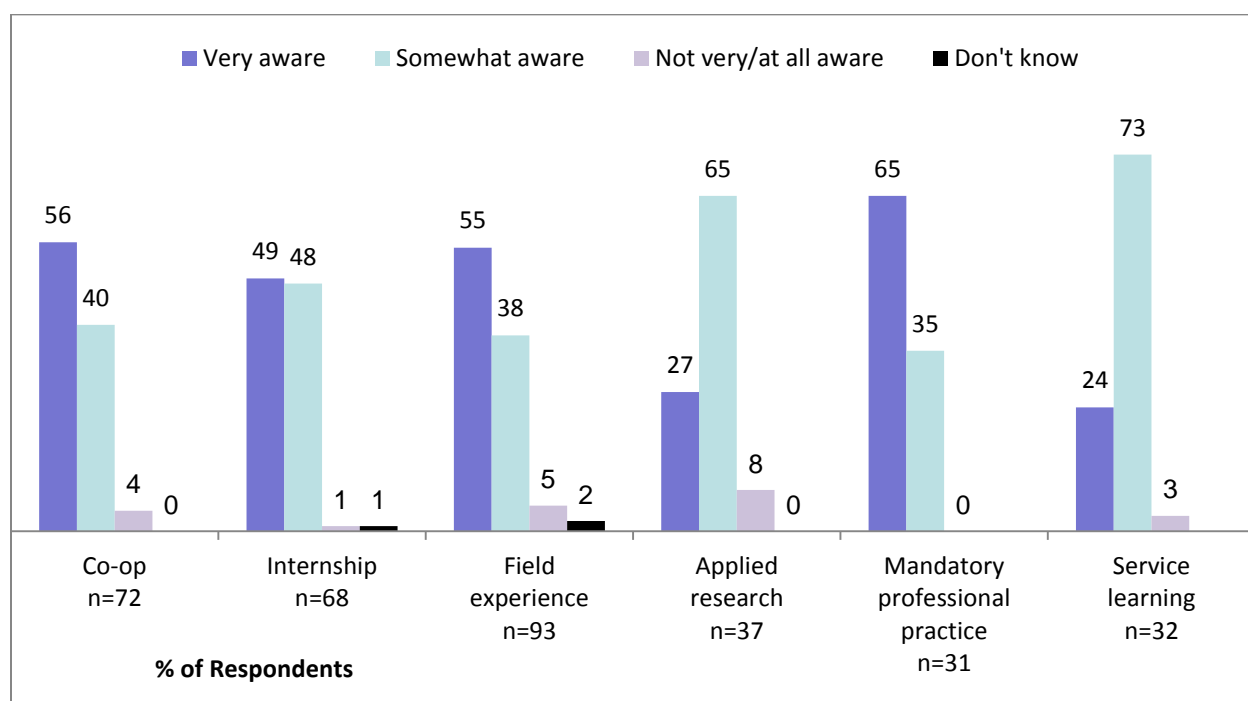
Survey Question: How aware do you think students are of the availability of WIL programs at your institution?
Note: Excludes "don't know" responses. Bars may not add to 100% due to rounding.

There also appears to be a pronounced difference between college and university respondents' views on the degree to which their students are aware of WIL opportunities. Awareness among college students is perceived as being much stronger (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Perceptions of Student Awareness of WIL (by Institution Type)
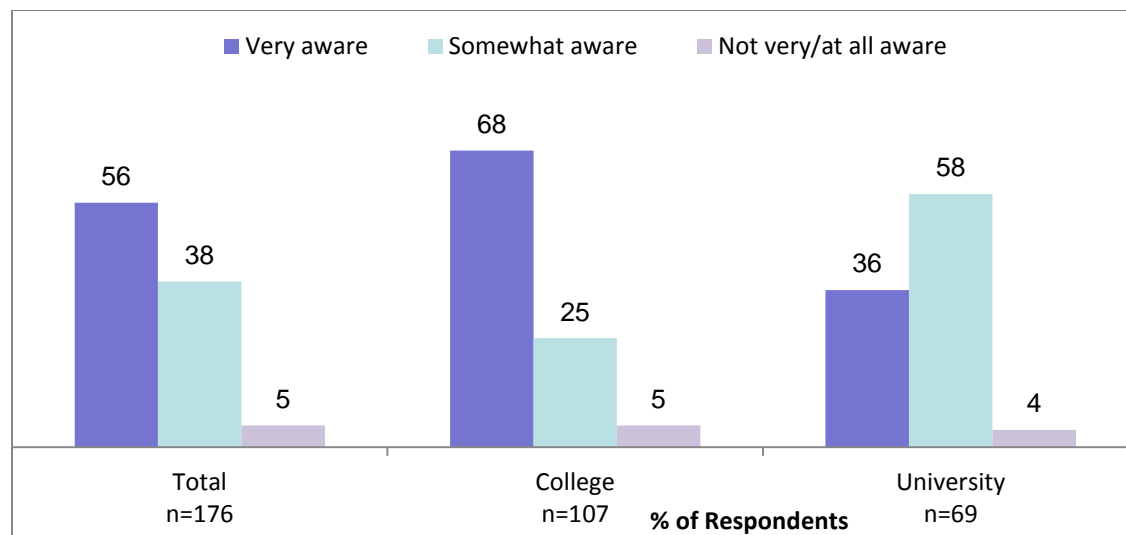
Survey Question: How aware do you think students are of the availability of WIL programs at your institution?
Note: Excludes "don't know" responses. Bars may not add to 100% due to rounding.

4.1.1 Strategies for Promoting WIL

Even though students may be aware that WIL opportunities exist, they may still be hesitant to engage due to a lack of understanding of what WIL entails and what would be required in order for them to participate. As shown in Figure 7, Ontario postsecondary institutions use a range of strategies to promote WIL. The top three strategies used are: public advertising including social media (50%); student testimonials/class visits/case studies (35%); and information about WIL provided as part of course materials (32%). It is interesting to note that these three strategies are not as demanding on institutional resources as the lesser-used strategies.

A closer look at the promotional strategies used among institution types suggests that while similar strategies are used by both colleges and universities, there are significant differences as to which strategy is more frequently used by each type of institution. For example, university respondents were significantly more likely to use the following strategies than their college counterparts:

- Events showcasing WIL programs (40% university versus 23% college)
- Public advertising of WIL programs (65% university versus 40% college)
- One-on-one student advising (29% university versus 14% college)
- High school outreach to promote WIL programs (9% university versus 1% college)

However, college respondents were significantly more likely to indicate that their institution used student onboarding/orientation as a way to promote WIL (25% college versus 7% university) and that WIL is a mandatory component/part of a program (31% college versus 18% university).

Figure 7: Strategies for Promotion of WIL
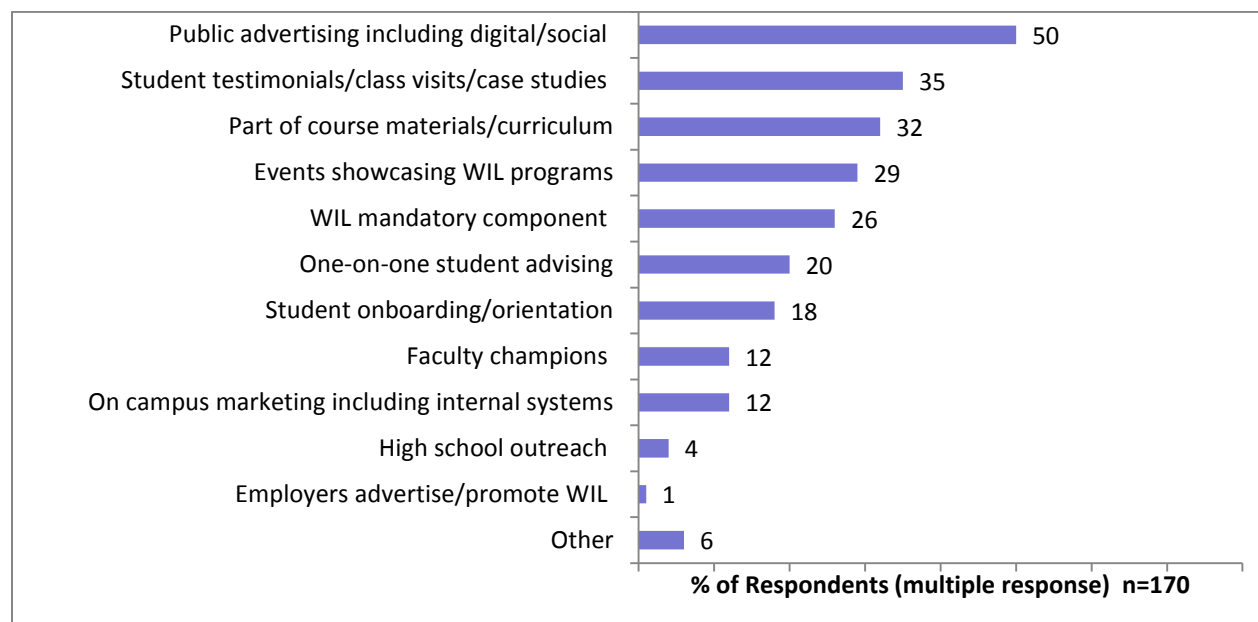
Survey Question: How are WIL programs promoted to students at your institution?
Note: Excludes "don't know" responses.

In ranking the strategies by usage in promoting WIL types, Table 8 shows a high degree of overlap, with all six WIL types using three of the strategies.

Table 8: Top Five Ranked Strategies for Promotion of WIL

Strategy to Promote WIL	Co-op n=71	Internship n=66	Field experience n=89	Applied research n=36	Mandatory professional practice n=31	Service learning n=32
	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank
Public advertising including digital/social	1	1	1	2	2	1
Student testimonials/class visits/case studies	3	2	3	3	4.5	4
Part of course materials/curriculum		3.5	2	1	1	2
Events showcasing WIL programs	2	3.5	4	4.5	4.5	4
WIL mandatory component	4		5		3	
One-on-one student advising	5	5				4
Faculty champions				4.5		

Survey Question: How are WIL programs promoted to students at your institution?
Note: Multiple response, excludes "don't know" responses.

The use of multiple marketing approaches to increase student awareness of WIL can be found in the literature. In a review of an experiential learning program at Middle Tennessee State University, program planners identified that one of the difficulties with implementation was ensuring students knew about the program. In their pilot phase they developed several marketing approaches in attempt to reach a wide range of students. Their strategy included social media, however the university also used events marketing and profiled WIL in the student newspaper. Planners found that the number of student spots filled in the program increased from 1,727 to 5,194 during the first five years of program implementation (Austin & Rust, 2015).

While the majority of key informants confirmed that they used a variety of strategies to promote their WIL programs, some indicated that they did not need to promote WIL as it was either a mandatory part of the program or that the type of WIL offered was usually oversubscribed with student demand far exceeding the supply of available opportunities. In such circumstances, several informants noted that they emphasized the competitive nature of the WIL program and advised students that not all who applied would secure a placement. In addition to the oversubscribed WIL program, alternative WIL programs were also promoted where appropriate. Still other informants commented that where they used to have to sell the WIL component of their program to students, students now have an expectation that WIL opportunities are included in their program and will search out programs specifically for the WIL component.

With respect to promoting alternative WIL opportunities, several unique strategies were mentioned. One informant noted that in addition to the traditional forms of WIL offered (i.e., co-op and internships) their program also offers an interdisciplinary WIL program involving students from different course areas working together on community projects. Students from different disciplines participate in a workshop in their second year of study that provides information on the WIL program and serves as preparation for the opportunity in students' third or fourth year. During the workshop, students learn about previous interdisciplinary WIL projects and are encouraged to start planning for their upcoming experience. Students from several programs work with community and/or industry partners to design, plan and execute a project that culminates in a final-year work term.

While many programs have mandatory WIL components, others offer optional WIL experiences. In order to entice students to participate in optional WIL programs, one informant provides students with the option to take a course that will allow them to have immediate acceptance into the WIL program. Students who do not take this course have to go through an application process and are not guaranteed a place in the WIL opportunity. Another WIL coordinator interviewed spoke of a talk show format where WIL advisers present information on optional co-op opportunities associated with various academic programs moderated by a host. The host converses with the WIL adviser about the details of the co-op and then takes questions from the "audience" of students. The informant noted that this was a fun way to present information on a number of optional WIL co-ops to a large group of students.

4.1.2   Effectiveness of Strategies for Promoting WIL

Respondents were asked about the effectiveness of various promotional strategies. While there was no single strategy that all respondents felt was very effective, the use of faculty champions to promote WIL was perceived by a majority (58%) of the strategy's users to be very effective. No other strategy was perceived as very effective by a majority of its users (Figure 8). The perceived effectiveness of the strategies across WIL

types differed only somewhat and reflected program differences. For example, co-op respondents felt that high school outreach was more effective in promoting WIL to students than respondents involved in internships, field experience, applied research or service learning. It is important to note that all figures regarding the effectiveness of the strategies in this report are based on the respondents' opinions that the strategies are very effective; many more respondents indicated the strategies are somewhat effective.

Figure 8: Perceived Effectiveness of Promotional Strategies
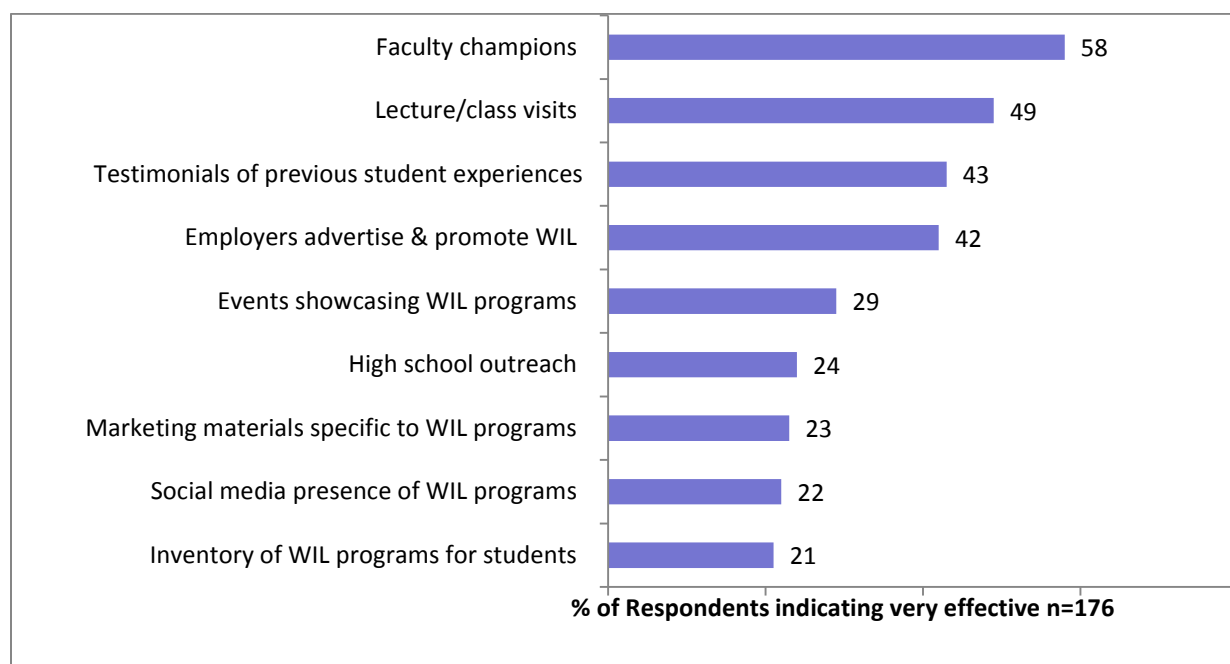
Survey Question: In your opinion, how effective are the following strategies at helping students consider WIL programs?

When usage of the promotional strategies is compared with their perceived effectiveness (Table 9), it appears that several strategies that are perceived to be effective are not highly used. The use of faculty champions (12%) and employer promotional activities (1%) are used by only a small minority of institutions. What is common between these strategies is that they are more demanding on institutional resources than other strategies. For example, promoting WIL through social media was rated effective by only 22% of respondents, but is the most widely used strategy. In interviews, many key informants noted that with limited resources, they are not able to employ all of the most effective strategies and are forced to choose a mix of strategies that their resources can effectively deploy. Convenience and reach also factor into the selection of strategies.

Table 9 Comparison of Strategy Usage and Effectiveness (Promoting WIL)

Strategy	Respondents rated strategy very effective (n=176)	Respondents used the strategy (n=Variable)
% of Respondents	%	%
Faculty champions	58	12
Class visits/testimonials	49	35
Employers advertise & promote WIL	42	1
Events showcasing WIL programs	29	29
High school outreach	24	4
Social media	22	50

Survey Question: In your opinion, how effective are the following strategies at helping students consider WIL programs?
Note: Descending order by rating of strategy.

The finding that faculty champions are an effective method of promoting WIL aligns with studies conducted in other jurisdictions. For example, program planners at Middle Tennessee State University found that the most effective marketing approach was to have faculty support for WIL and have faculty inform students about the WIL program (Austin & Rust, 2015). As a result of increased faculty support, the number of participating departments grew from 10 to 21 during the first five years of experiential learning program implementation at the university and after 10 years of operation the program has now become institutionalized on the campus (Austin & Rust, 2015).

Key informants interviewed agreed that having faculty support to promote WIL to their students was essential. Informants felt that without the support of faculty, students do not see the benefit of WIL and may not take it seriously, particularly if WIL is optional. However, informants also reported that getting such faculty support can be challenging, particularly in university settings. Several reasons were cited for why some faculty are hesitant to promote WIL including faculty workload, lack of awareness of types of WIL opportunities available and conflicting attitudes as to whether the purpose of higher education is to prepare students for the workforce or promote critical thinking.

Informants noted that it is important to educate faculty about the WIL opportunities available and to dispel any myths. Some faculty may not be aware of all the different types of WIL available, which limits the extent to which faculty can provide advice to students on the type of WIL that would work best for them. One manager of WIL programs noted that they regularly send email blasts to faculty informing them of the various WIL programs available for their students. Other WIL coordinators indicated they meet with faculty to disseminate information about WIL opportunities and encourage faculty support of WIL.

In order to change the philosophical ideology that some faculty may have that their role is to instill higher academic learning and not prepare students for the workforce, some WIL coordinators say they promote WIL to faculty as a pillar of learning and thus an essential part of all programs. Informants also noted that while faculty are experts in their field some may be very removed from the labour market and therefore

may not have the connections to employers or industry. As a result, informants suggest that some faculty may be resistant to promote WIL and/or assist students in finding possible placements.

Informants noted that they have seen a change in the attitudes of faculty toward championing WIL, especially in areas more closely aligned with the labour market (e.g., business and technology program), but admit that it is a slow process in academic areas further removed.

The challenge of faculty support for WIL has been highlighted in the literature. Peters (2012) noted, "One of the primary challenges reported in the literature is that delivering WIL programs requires considerable faculty time and energy."

Another strategy found to be very effective for promoting WIL is having previous WIL students and employers speak about their WIL experiences to prospective WIL students. According to informants, this strategy provides students with an opportunity to better understand what is involved in a WIL experience and learn from the perspectives of previous participants. Informants noted that when students can interact with employers, industry representatives and students who have completed a WIL experience, they become more engaged in the process.

All five employers interviewed for the study indicated that they were very involved in promoting their WIL opportunity to students. Promotional efforts include: posting positions on their company or organization's website; posting on job board websites at multiple postsecondary institutions; attending on-campus events such as job fairs; class visits and presentations; and targeted promotion to specific PSE programs. While all employers offered paid positions, one employer also offered non-paid positions. However, all employers indicated that they had no difficulty filling positions as they regularly receive many more applications than the number of available positions.

The promotion of WIL early in a student's academic career was also found to be effective. Several informants indicated that a lot of WIL marketing is geared toward high school students with a few indicating they work with high school guidance counsellors to get students thinking about WIL as they are deciding about their postsecondary area of study. One informant felt that if more students had exposure to WIL and/or experiential learning in high school this would promote more awareness and demand for WIL in PSE programs.

Some of the advantages of participating in WIL promoted by key informants to their students were the potential for offers of employment upon graduation. Several informants commented that it was quite common for their grads to receive job offers as a direct result of having completed WIL as part of their studies. Informants noted they often used the testimonials of grads to inform current or potential WIL students of the advantages of participating in WIL. All employers interviewed for this study indicated that they looked for evidence of WIL on an applicant's résumé and kept track of students they hired for a WIL work term so they could be considered for future employment positions.

Figure 9 : Promoting Advantages of Relevant Work Experience to Encourage Participation
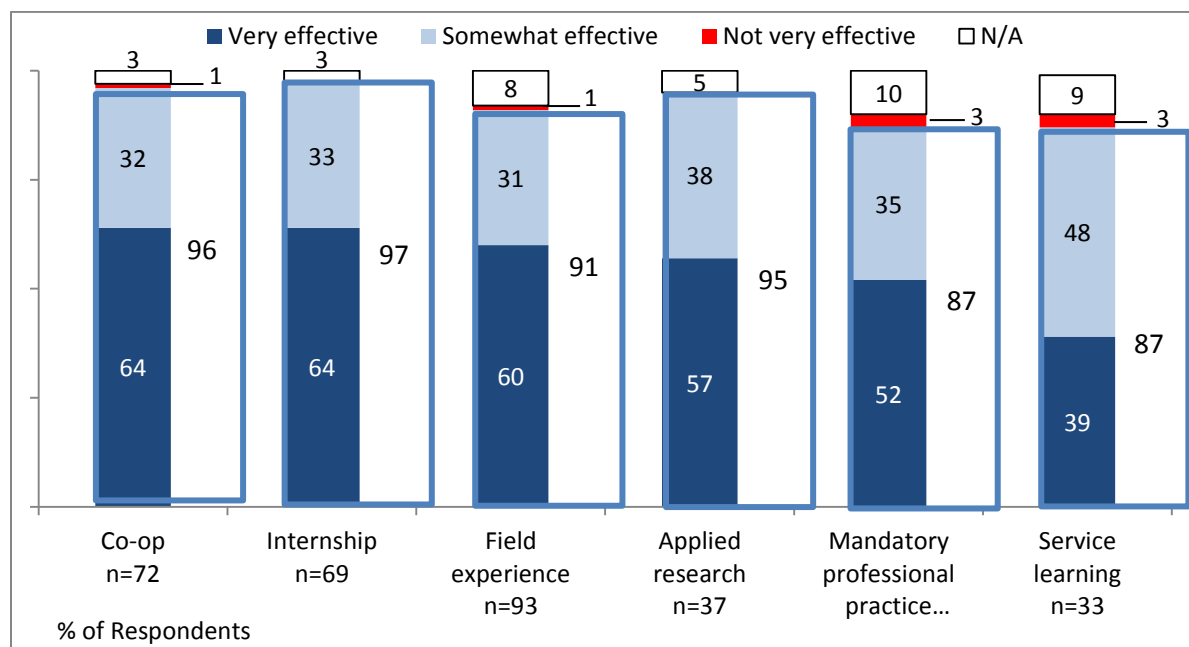
Survey Question: How effective is promoting the advantages of relevant work experience in encouraging students to participate in WIL?
Note: Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

4.2   Student Expectations and Preparedness for WIL

Student expectations and preparedness can have a great impact on their WIL experience. This section of the report looks at the strategies used by postsecondary institutions both to ensure students have realistic expectations for their WIL opportunity, and to prepare them to successfully secure their WIL experience. Some students are concerned that the WIL component of their program will delay their graduation and prefer not to interrupt their program to participate in a WIL opportunity. For example, mature students may already have many of the job-ready skills required for the work placement and may prefer to complete their studies as soon as possible. As previously noted, Sattler and Peters (2013) found that student perceptions of WIL are relatively accurate, with the possible exception that their concern about WIL delaying program completion was unfounded.

When survey respondents were asked whether they felt student perceptions that the WIL component of their program will delay their graduation are accurate, the most common answer across all WIL types was that the students' perceptions are inaccurate (Figure 10). Students' misperceptions of the delay due to WIL were most pronounced in applied research and field experience.

Figure 10: Perceptions on Accuracy of Concerns WIL Component Will Delay Graduation
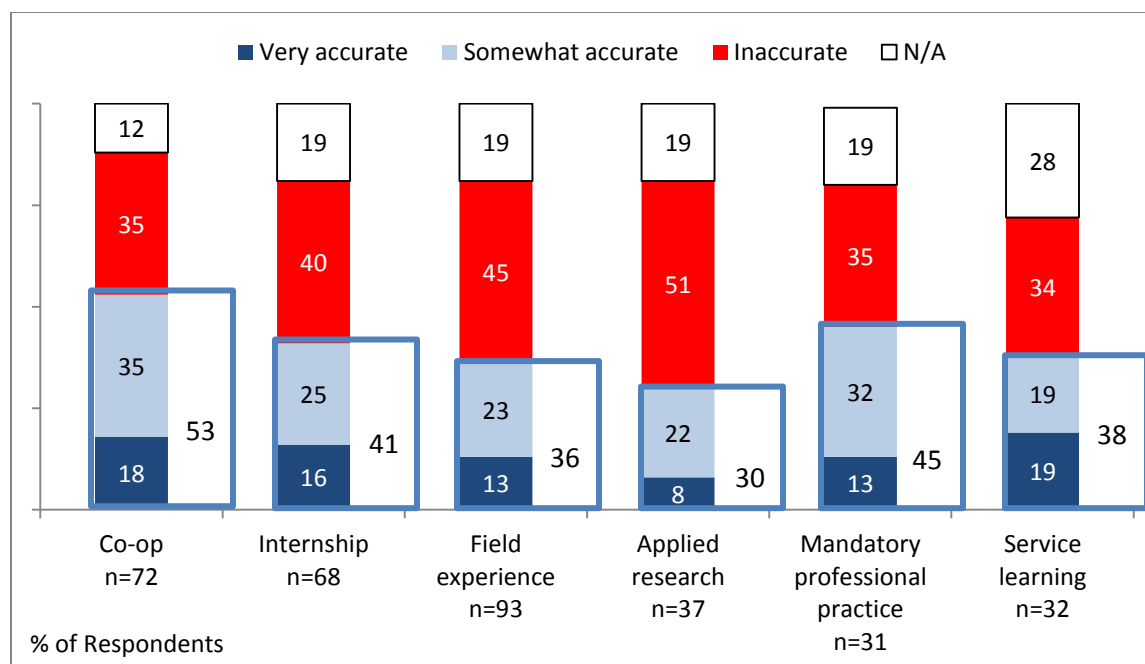
Survey Question: Some students are concerned that the WIL component of their program will delay their graduation. In the case of the WIL opportunities you're involved with, is that an accurate perception

Note: Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

The issue of students being concerned that WIL will delay graduation was discussed with key informants. A few informants pointed out that this was more of an issue for students when the WIL is optional as compared to programs with a mandatory WIL component. They explained that students participating in mandatory WIL have chosen to take a program that includes WIL as a requirement for graduation; they know going into the program how long it will take them to complete it. Informants involved in optional WIL programs acknowledged that the potential for a WIL opportunity to delay graduation was a deterrent for some students. One informant noted that some of their top students decide not to participate in WIL because they think that the practical experience they will get may interfere with the time they need for academic work. Still other informants noted that the prospect of WIL delaying a student's graduation was only an issue when the student had failed to successfully complete a preparatory WIL course or some other requirement needed prior to participation in their WIL experience. In such cases, a few informants noted that students would have to wait until the following semester or academic year in order to retake the course.

With the exception of those involved in service learning, the majority of respondents felt that promoting the advantages of relevant work experience was very effective in encouraging students to participate in WIL (Figure 9). Although only 39% of respondents involved in service learning felt the strategy was very effective, an additional 48% felt the strategy was at least somewhat effective in encouraging students to participate.

4.2.1 Strategies for Setting Realistic Expectations

Key informants noted that a large part of promoting WIL opportunities involves setting or managing student expectations of what is involved in a particular type of WIL experience. Many informants felt that consistent messaging presented early and often helped to reduce misconceptions about what a specific WIL experience entails and helps students develop an understanding of their own role in, and responsibilities for, their WIL experiences. Key informants felt that making students aware upfront of all the WIL requirements helped students understand that they need to take responsibility for or ownership of their participation.

Much like the strategies to promote WIL, survey respondents indicated they used a variety of tools and strategies to help students set realistic expectations for their WIL experience. The most frequently mentioned strategies, by one-fifth or more of survey respondents, included: having a structured (optional or pre-requisite) preparatory WIL course (33%); seminars and group presentations by students, employers and industry respondents (31%); in-class discussions of WIL and WIL-related assignments (31%); and one-on-one discussions about WIL (21%) (Figure 11).

Figure 11: Strategies for Helping Students Set Realistic Expectations
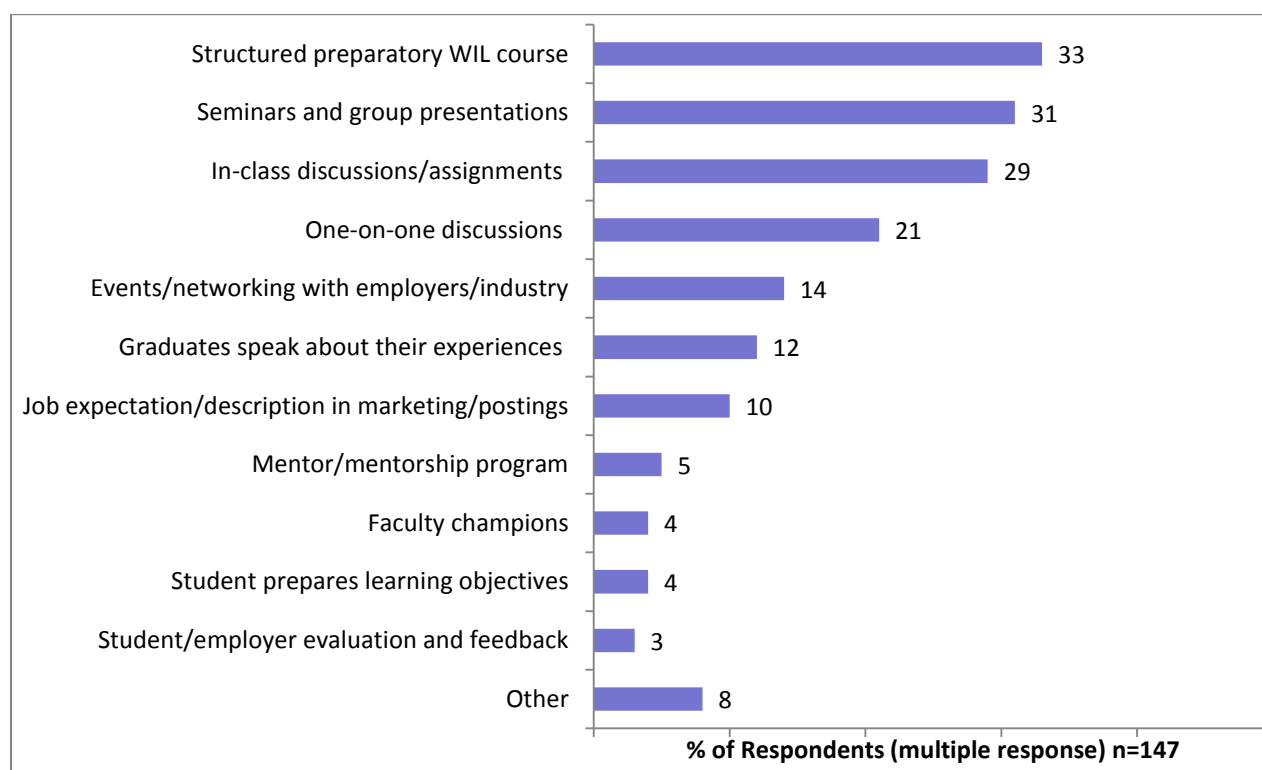
Strategy	%
Structured preparatory WIL course	33
Seminars and group presentations	31
In-class discussions/assignments	29
One-on-one discussions	21
Events/networking with employers/industry	14
Graduates speak about their experiences	12
Job expectation/description in marketing/postings	10
Mentor/mentorship program	5
Faculty champions	4
Student prepares learning objectives	4
Student/employer evaluation and feedback	3
Other	8

% of Respondents (multiple response) n=147

Survey Question: What strategies has your institution used to ensure students' job expectations are realistic?
Note: Excludes "don't know" and "none" responses.

While only a small proportion of survey respondents specifically indicated having the student prepare learning outcomes (4%) as a strategy for setting realistic expectations, key informants noted that discussions with students, whether in-class, as part of a formal WIL preparatory course or one-on-one, often included the importance of the student identifying their learning outcomes. Similarly the use of student/employer evaluation and feedback — while specifically mentioned as a strategy by only 3% of respondents — is discussed extensively in WIL preparatory classes and by students when speaking about their experiences, according to comments from many key informants. The use of student learning outcomes and reflection is widely documented as a best practice in the literature reviewed for this study.

Respondents involved in co-op programs were more likely to use a structured preparatory course for WIL. Seminars and group presentations were the primary strategy among respondents involved in service learning, applied research, internships and field experience WIL. In-class discussion was the strategy most employed by respondents involved in mandatory professional practice (Table 10).

Table 10: Strategies for Helping Students Set Realistic Expectations by WIL Type

Strategies to help students set realistic expectations	Co-op n=61	Internship n=60	Field experience n=77	Applied research n=27	Mandatory professional practice n=28	Service learning n=28
% of Respondents (multiple response)	%	%	%	%	%	%
Structured preparatory WIL course	46	30	29	30	36	18
Seminars and group presentations	23	38	32	41	36	46
In-class discussions/assignments	26	27	29	22	39	25
One-on-one discussions	25	22	18	22	-	21
Graduates speak about their experiences	18	8	4	7	11	7
Events/networking with employers, industry	8	15	12	4	18	25
Job descriptions part of marketing material	8	8	12	15	11	7
Mentor/mentorship programs	5	7	5	11	4	11
Faculty champions	5	3	4	4	7	-
Student prepares learning objectives outcomes	5	5	3	-	4	4
Student/employer evaluation and feedback	-	5	3	-	4	7

Survey Question: What strategies has your institution used to ensure students' job expectations are realistic?
Note: Excludes "don't know" and "none: responses.

4.2.2 Effectiveness of Strategies for Setting Student Expectations of WIL

Among the strategies used to set student expectations of WIL, the majority of survey respondents (69%) considered one-on-one discussions and having graduates speak in class about their WIL experience (60%) to be very effective (Figure 12). Differences between WIL types were minimal.

Figure 12: Effectiveness of Strategies for Helping Students Set Realistic Expectations
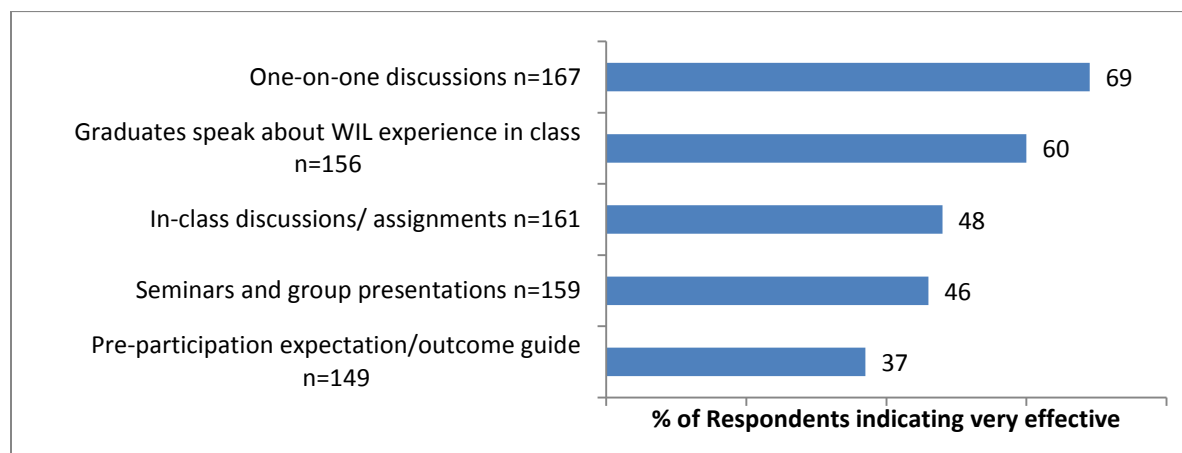
Survey Question: How effective are the following strategies and tools at helping students set realistic WIL expectations?

Table 11 compares the usage and perceived effectiveness of strategies to help students set realistic WIL expectations. It illustrates the fact that two strategies perceived to be very effective are underutilized.

Table 11: Comparison of Strategy Usage and Effectiveness (Realistic Expectations)

Strategy	Respondents rated strategy very effective (n=variable)	Respondents used the strategy (n=147)
% of respondents	%	%
One-on-one discussions	69	21
Graduates speak about their experiences in class	60	12
In-class discussions/assignments	48	29
Seminars and group presentations	46	31

Survey Question: How effective are the following strategies and tools at helping students set realistic WIL expectations?
Note: Descending order by Rate Strategy Very Effective.

Key informants noted that with respect to setting realistic expectations for WIL the most effective strategies involved face-to-face discussions with students whether they were one-on-one, in-class discussions, seminars or having previous WIL students and/or employers/hosts speak about their WIL opportunity. Such strategies allowed students the opportunity to become more engaged, interact and ask questions relevant to their WIL interests. In this way, informants observed that students were better able to establish realistic expectations for their WIL experience.

Some key informants noted that a pre-participation expectation and outcome guide was an important reference that should be easily accessible for students. One informant noted that students are bombarded with lots of information and may not pay particular attention to some details around the requirements or expectations associated with their WIL experience when first presented to them. The guide helps students understand the processes involved in securing and completing a WIL experience and often provides useful tips and a list of resources or supports available to the student to assist with their WIL.

4.2.3   Strategies to Promote Preparedness

In addition to the use of the strategies mentioned above, survey results suggest that Ontario postsecondary institutions also take an active role in preparing students for their WIL experience. As indicated in Figure 13, the top five strategies used for preparing students for their WIL experience are: structured preparatory WIL course (56%); one-on-one career advising (34%); on-demand workshops on résumé writing, networking, interviews, and related topics (24%); in-class applied experiences, tests and lab simulations (18%); and events and networking opportunities with employers/hosts (17%).

Many of the postsecondary key informants noted that there were many departments and units involved in engaging and preparing students for WIL. While some postsecondary institutions have entire departments dedicated to specific types of WIL (e.g., centralized co-op units, experiential education offices), they also have decentralized WIL models in which each academic department is responsible for designing and implementing its own WIL programs. Many informants noted that regardless of whether the WIL is centralized or not, they worked collaboratively with a number of institutional resources to ensure students had access to the full spectrum of supports needed to prepare for and complete their WIL opportunities. These include career centres, administration, accessibility offices and international student centres. Many informants stated that their WIL opportunities lacked the economies of scale to offer these supports to students with a WIL focus.

Figure 13: Strategies for Helping Students Prepare for WIL Experience

Strategy	%
Structured preparatory WIL course	56
One-on-one career advising	34
On-demand workshops	24
Applied experience/test/simulations	18
Events/networking with employers/hosts	17
Expectation/outcome guide	17
Online support materials/tutorials	14
Graduates speak about experiences	12
Dedicated WIL adviser	8
Continued/ongoing support	7
Ensuring student meets preparatory requirements	3
Résumé-building software	2
Mentor	2
In-class time to look for jobs	1
Online application process	1
Other	4

% of Respondents (multiple response) n=161

Survey Question: What strategies and tools has your institution used to prepare students for their WIL experience?
Note: Excludes "don't know" and "none" responses.

Nearly three-quarters (72%) of survey respondents involved in co-ops offer students a structured preparatory WIL course. This compares with approximately half of respondents involved in other WIL types (Table 12). The use of a preparatory WIL course was also mentioned by the key informants interviewed, the majority of whom said the course was mandatory regardless of whether or not the WIL was a mandatory component of the academic program. Even informants who offered optional preparatory WIL courses or seminars felt they should be mandatory. One key informant responsible for a high-demand optional WIL program gave their students the option to take a preparatory course that allowed them to have immediate acceptance into the WIL course. Students who do not take this course have to go through an application process; the majority of students opt for the preparatory course.

Several informants noted that due to resource constraints and the high number of students participating in WIL, they have had to change the delivery of their WIL preparatory course from in-class to a combination of online and in-class, or online only to ensure that students receive the information prior to their WIL placement. Many of these informants felt that while not ideal, having students complete an online preparatory WIL course was preferable to not having one at all. One informant noted that having a preparatory WIL course was vital to helping students prepare for many aspects of their WIL experience including how to behave professionally. Another informant said they will often have former students make appearances during the orientation sessions and preparatory classes so that current WIL students can ask them questions.

Survey respondents involved in internships employed one-on-one advising to a greater degree (51%) than those involved in other WIL types. In most other respects, differences in strategies between WIL types was minimal. All WIL types had the same top five strategies.

Table 12: Top 10 Strategies for Helping Students Prepare for WIL Experience by WIL Type

Strategy to help students prepare for WIL	Co-op n=61	Internship n=60	Field experience n=77	Applied research n=27	Mandatory professional practice n=28	Service learning n=28
% of respondents (multiple response)	%	%	%	%	%	%
Structured preparatory WIL course	72	49	55	55	54	52
One-on-one advising	35	51	30	45	29	38
On-demand workshops	25	27	14	23	29	34
Applied experience, tests or simulations	21	22	15	29	18	17
Events/networking with employers/host	16	14	14	3	7	14
Expectation/outcome guide	12	13	20	23	25	24
Graduates speak about their experiences	12	14	11	16	14	10
Dedicated WIL adviser	12	11	12	3	7	3
Online support materials/tutorials	9	19	11	13	25	17
Ongoing support throughout program	4	14	7	6	4	10

Survey Question: What strategies and tools has your institution used to prepare students for their WIL experience?
Note: Excludes "don't know" and "none" responses.

4.2.4   *Effectiveness of strategies to promote preparedness*

As shown in Table 13, there are a range of strategies that a large percentage of survey respondents across all WIL types found to be very effective. The strategy found to be very effective by the greatest proportion of respondents was having a dedicated WIL adviser. This was true across all WIL types.

Table 13: Effectiveness of Strategies for Helping Students Prepare for and Secure WIL Experience

Strategy to secure WIL	Co-op n=23–67	Internship n=29–62	Field experience n=45–86	Applied research n=17–34	Mandatory professional practice n=11–30	Service learning n=13–31
% of respondents indicating very effective	%	%	%	%	%	%
Dedicated WIL adviser	74	84	81	78	85	79
One-on-one career advising	68	71	59	73	58	69
Structured preparatory WIL course	60	69	69	66	64	63
Ensuring student meets preparatory requirements for the placement	48	55	62	59	77	65
Graduates speak about their experiences	57	52	55	48	56	59
Online application process	59	49	47	43	55	57
Mentor to aid with the job searching	54	62	46	60	58	67
On-demand workshops	33	39	30	27	33	41
Offer alternate form of interviewing	36	35	26	26	38	46
Online support materials/tutorials	20	34	30	18	27	37
ePortfolio options	20	29	27	27	28	41
Résumé-building software	16	26	22	27	33	37
Offer students class time to look for jobs	26	31	27	29	27	38

Survey Question: How effective are the following strategies and tools to ensure students are prepared to secure a WIL experience?

Although many informants indicated they used a number of strategies to prepare students for WIL, the majority felt that, where possible, one-on-one time with students was one of the most effective strategies. Many informants felt that it was important that they be accessible to answer students' questions about WIL and better help students address any potential issues they may have. Several informants indicated they made a point of meeting one-on-one with their students to provide advice and guidance. One informant explained that not only does each student have unique challenges and experiences, but also that each employer has their own expectations and those expectations may be different from the experience the student is seeking. The informant found that through this personal approach they could offer students advice tailored to their needs and assist them in finding a placement that met the expectations of both the student and employer.

One informant indicated that once students have identified the goals they wish to achieve during their work placement and selected several agencies (from a vetted list) they are interested in being placed with, they sit down with the student to discuss these goals and interests, and determine with the student which placement would be the best fit. Although they caution the students that the agency has the final say and may request to interview the students themselves, the informant noted that most of the placement agencies accept the student who has been recommended to them.

Informants also noted that WIL coordinators and advisers cannot meet one-on-one with all students due to high demand in some programs, larger class sizes and/or budget/resource limits. One informant noted that their adviser-to-student ratio is 1:200. These informants indicated that the onus is on the student to seek out information and book one-on-one appointments with WIL advisers.

When usage of strategies is compared with their perceived effectiveness, it is clear that there are several strategies that are widely perceived to be very effective, but that are employed by only a few postsecondary institutions (Table 14). These include having a dedicated WIL adviser, offering one-on-one career advising, and providing a mentor. However, there are very effective strategies being employed. As previously noted — and as confirmed by key informants — institutions are implementing a mix of strategies (with the resources they have available) that are collectively viable.

Table 14: Comparison of Strategy Usage and Effectiveness (Preparation to Secure WIL)

Strategy	Respondents rated strategy very effective (n=Variable)	Respondents used the strategy (n=161)
% of respondents	%	%
Dedicated WIL adviser	79	8
One-on-one career advising	66	34
Structured preparatory WIL course	63	56
Ensuring student meets preparatory requirements	55	3
Graduates speak about experiences	54	12
Mentor	52	5
On-demand workshops	33	24
Online support materials/tutorials	27	2

Survey Question: How effective are the following strategies and tools to ensure students are prepared to complete a WIL experience?
Note: Descending order by Rate Strategy Very Effective.

Informants noted that there are a number of preparatory requirements students need to meet to qualify for their WIL placement. Some placements require students to be up-to-date on their immunizations and/or have completed police record checks and/or vulnerable populations screening. Others need to have proof of training for industry standards such as Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS) training. Many students are required to find their own work placement and must show proof they have secured their placement prior to the start of their work term.

The majority of WIL coordinators interviewed confirmed that job listings are posted online and students can view and apply to the jobs online. Some informants indicated they pair students with a mentor or have a mentorship program that helps them not only with their career path, but with their job search as well. Other

informants stated that job search strategies were taught and practised in the class. Informants also felt that a visit by employers, senior students or graduates to share their perspective was an effective strategy.

Although there are numerous resources available to help students secure their placement, informants stressed that students must take responsibility for preparing and securing their WIL experience. That includes conducting a job search, actively looking for placements, attending WIL-related workshops/seminars (many are mandatory to ensure student attendance), accessing online resources, accessing other resources available at their institution and asking about where information/resources can be found. As one informant stated: "We can make a tool or resource available but it does not mean that it will be used by student." One WIL coordinator noted:

> In the co-op stream a good chunk of them are heavily if not exclusively relying on our job development efforts ... The majority utilize the job board for almost all of their co-op job search. When you are looking at the system, while we ask and promote and tell students that they need to be active participants in developing their own leads, probably closer to the 90% range is still driven through our efforts within the institution to find appropriate positions for students to go into WIL.

Several informants felt that the job search process itself was a valuable learning experience. By securing a placement on their own, students learn about their own skills and requirements for jobs, how to market themselves and how to develop professional relationships. Some of the reasons given by informants for why students may not be successful in securing a placement include: a lack of confidence, a prohibitive academic workload, not understanding the degree of effort required to find and secure a placement, not engaging in the job search process and not seeking assistance (or seeking assistance too late).

4.3   Completing a WIL Experience

The strategies available to postsecondary institutions to help students complete their WIL are largely the same as those used to help them find and secure it. One difference is the inclusion of an expectation and outcome guide, which 54% of respondents indicated was very effective. Differences in the perceived effectiveness of these strategies between WIL types were minimal.

Figure 14: Effective Strategies for Helping Students Complete a WIL Experience
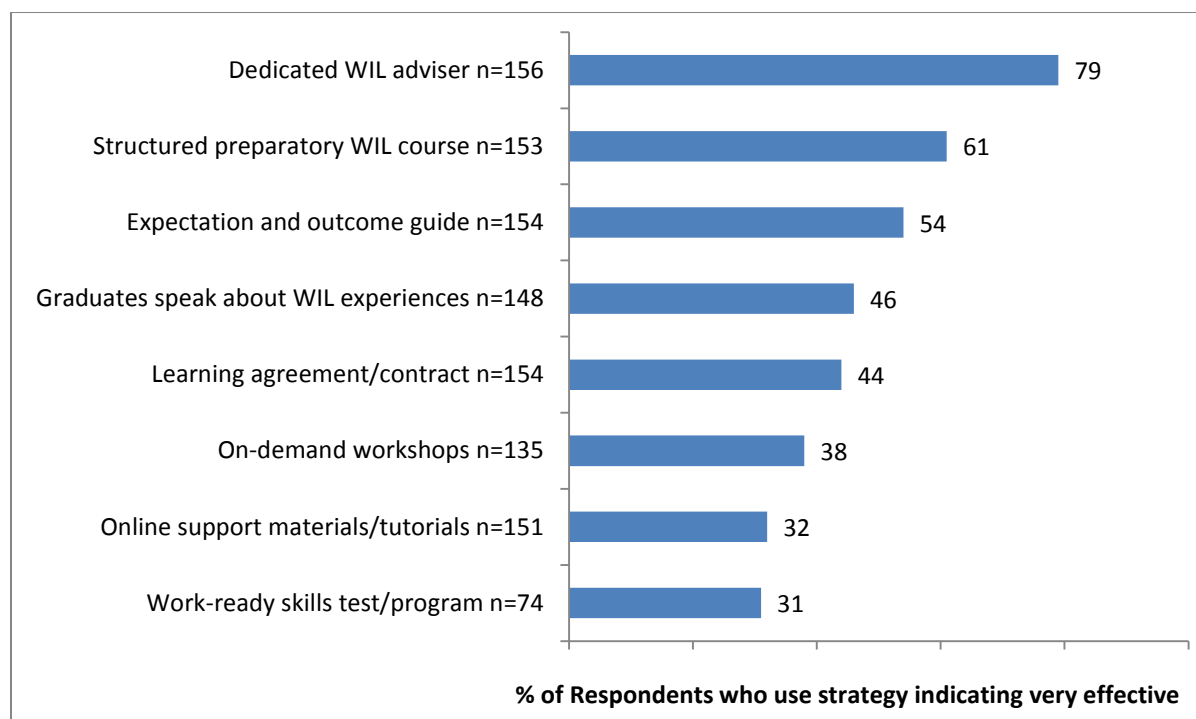
% of Respondents who use strategy indicating very effective

Survey Question: How effective are the following strategies and tools to ensure students are prepared to complete a WIL experience?
Note: Bases range from n=74 to n=176.

All of the figures regarding the effectiveness of the strategies in this report are based on respondents' denoting a strategy as very effective; many more respondents indicated the strategies are somewhat effective. This implies that even some of the lower-rated strategies, such as learning agreements (44%), have a profound impact when employed as part of a mix of strategies.

The fact that 44% found learning agreements to be very effective is in line with a previously noted recommendation by the Making Practice Based Learning Work project in England. The recommendation suggested that these agreements be included as part of the placement process in order to reduce confusion during the placement (University of Central Lancashire, n.d.). Informants observed that when students were required to sign a learning agreement or contract they were more inclined to take the experience seriously and be committed to seeing it through.

During their interviews, WIL coordinators reported that many of the strategies they used to prepare students for their WIL experiences were also effective in helping students to complete their placement or work term. Several informants made use of simulations either in class or as part of preparatory courses to help ensure students would successfully complete their WIL experience. One noted:

> They have a pretty good idea what to expect. What we do with the program is essentially run it as a simulation. We put them into teams and they work on projects. They are expected to not only learn the technical aspect of what is involved, but also the social aspect, so how to

work with other people, how to work with people with varying abilities, how to read and understand and execute requirements documents. We work them very hard. We do that on purpose ... If you work hard in training when you start working everything is a lot easier. They are able to start working effectively sooner because that is what they have been doing all along.

WIL advisers indicated that they remain available for students throughout their placements and students could also access online resources and support materials such as their expectation and outcome guide throughout the duration of their WIL experience. Many WIL coordinators noted that they followed up with students during their placement to ensure the coordinators were aware of any issues or concerns. Some met in-person with students, with or without their employer present, while other WIL coordinators used emails, phone conversations or video chats to check in with their students.

Employers interviewed confirmed that they would meet with students at the beginning of their work term to discuss each other's expectations of the placement. Employers also indicated that they followed up with students at least once — if not more frequently — to discuss progress and make any adjustments to ensure goals were being met or needed to be realigned. All five employers interviewed indicated that they use the assessment forms provided by the student's postsecondary institution; however, some also had their own forms or processes to assess student achievement and provide feedback. Most WIL coordinators indicated they conduct exit interviews with students and employers to help inform future placements.

Many informants require students to complete some type of activity that allows them to reflect on their WIL experience. Several informants indicated that they schedule sessions with the students to allow them to provide feedback on their experience. While some informants indicated the feedback they collected was transmitted to their program advisory committee to influence modifications to the WIL, others simply used the information to guide their own practices. Still other informants asked their students to discuss their WIL experience with future WIL students in classroom presentations.

4.3.1   Balancing Commitments

Students can find it challenging to keep up with both their academic work and their work placement. This balance may be especially challenging for students with part-time jobs and/or family commitments. Key informants concurred that some students find it challenging to balance their work placement with academic and/or other commitments. One informant noted that approximately 40% of their undergrads had a dependent at home. While the ideal placement for students could not be guaranteed, the informant tried to respect and acknowledge the student's other commitments by working with the student to develop a strategy to help them cope with these considerations. Other informants commented that many of their students come right from high school and need time to mature and learn how to manage their time. Informants indicated that students who participated in their WIL experience later in their academic course (e.g., second, third or fourth year) were often better able to handle additional commitments required for the WIL component of their program as they had learned to handle their academic workload.

Survey respondents were asked the extent to which they felt that students were aware of the challenges of balancing their WIL requirements with other commitments. Overall, a majority of respondents (73%) indicated that students were either very or somewhat aware of the need to balance their commitments.

However, when broken down into college respondents (67%) and university respondents (84%) there was a significant difference between the two.

Figure 15: Perception of Students' Time-management Awareness

Total n=173	Colleges n=106	Universities n=67

% of Respondents believing students very/somewhat aware of time-management challenges
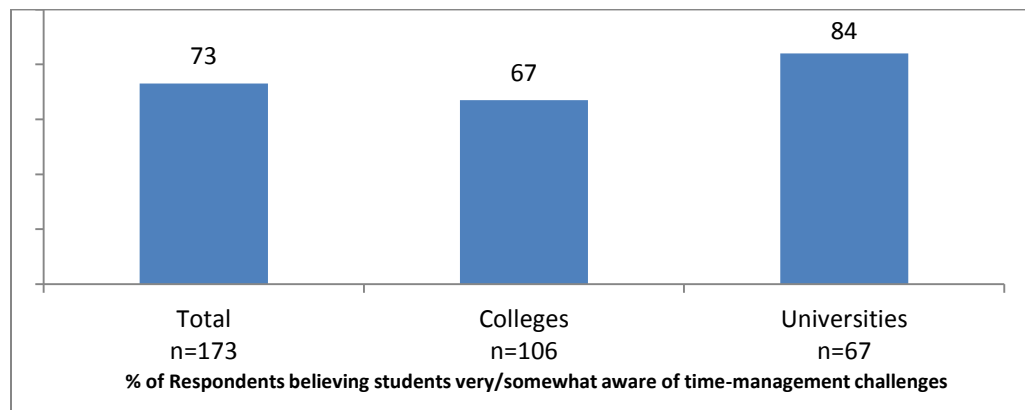
Survey Question: How aware do you think students are of the challenges of balancing their WIL requirements with other commitments?

Key informants were quick to point out that the expectations and priorities of WIL, including the time commitments for each component, are talked about early and often and are clearly defined in WIL manuals and guides. As such, many informants felt that their students are well aware of the need to manage their time accordingly.

Figure 16 shows that the two main strategies used by survey respondents to help students balance their time commitments were providing time management seminars as well as materials and guides (57%) and providing one-on-one support/mentoring (46%). There were minimal differences across WIL types; however, because of the nature of co-ops, "work term does not include class work" (10%) was most commonly mentioned by respondents involved in co-ops.

Many informants observed that students whose work term did not include academic classes faced time challenges when job searching during the semester before their WIL experience. One informant indicated that having to search for a placement while attending classes was a deterrent for some students when considering optional WIL programs. Informants commented that they, along with faculty, encourage students to begin their job search early so as to avoid the added pressure of having to do so during exams or while completing end-of-term assignments.

Informants involved in non-co-op programs noted that limits on the amount of time spent on the WIL component are often imposed. This is to ensure that students have time for their academic studies. Many informants noted that while supports are available to assist students, they may not necessarily ease the students' time commitments.

Figure 16: Strategies for Helping Students Balance Commitments
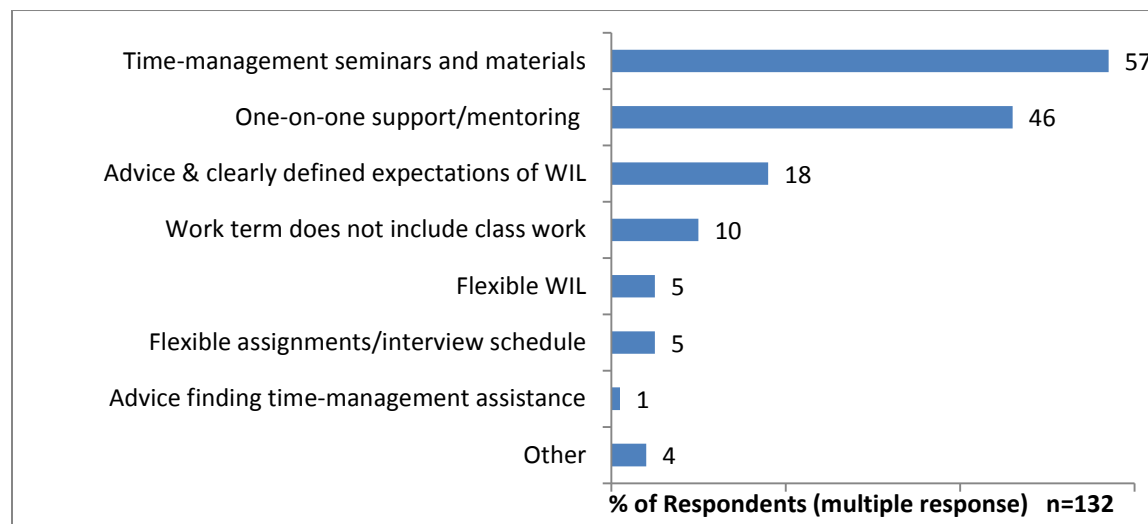
Survey Question: What strategies and tools does your institution use to help WIL students with time-management issues?
Note: Excludes "don't know," "none" and out of scope responses.

When comparing the usage of strategies against their effectiveness (Table 15), it appears that approximately half of all survey respondents are implementing the most effective strategies.

Table 15: Comparison of Strategy Usage and Effectiveness (Help in Time Management)

Strategy	Respondents rated strategy very effective (n=Variable)	Respondents used the strategy (n=132)
% of respondents	%	%
One-on-one support/mentoring	46	46
Time-management seminars, guides and materials	25	57
Advise and clearly defined expectations of WIL	24	18
Flexible WIL	13	5

Survey Question: Which of the following strategies and tools has your institution found effective in helping students to manage their time with respect to participating in WIL?
Note: Descending order by Rate Strategy Very Effective.

Key informants agreed that providing one-on-one advice, support or mentorship to help students manage their time was very effective. Some informants advise their students to treat their WIL experience and job search as a course so they can budget the time required. Other informants maintain an open-door policy and encourage students to come to them early in the process so issues can be mitigated. Many informants feel it is important to be frank about the intensity of their program and inform students of their time commitment in advance. One WIL coordinator noted:

> In this type of course we have outstanding students and I will tell them if you are applying to a competitive program in clinical psychology they are not going to care if you graduated in four years or five years, but they will want to see the grades, you have to give yourself the time. I will very much discourage them from taking a full load of courses while they are taking my [experiential-learning] course.

As previously noted, time management is more of an issue for a field placement, practicum and other programs that require the WIL and coursework to be completed concurrently. Some informants indicated they are flexible; they may allow the WIL to be completed at different times throughout the year, spreading out a WIL experience over a longer period, working with the employer to allow for variation in the number of hours or days per week, or times during the day for students to complete their WIL work commitment. A few informants are flexible on when assignments are due. These decisions are made on a case-by-case basis.

Many informants offered individual counselling to students to explore time management issues and develop strategies to help them cope with their academics and workload. One field placement coordinator indicated that if a student is struggling to complete a field placement along with classes, they can opt out of the placement (before a set deadline) and revert back to their major area of study with no WIL component. In applied research projects, a student may be allowed to participate in a different research project offered during another semester depending on the research project and how it may affect others involved.

However, there were also a number of informants who indicated that time management with respect to balancing WIL and academic courses was not an issue for their students. This was because either the timetable was built to allow for academic and WIL components to happen or that the maximum hours for WIL experiences, such as internships, capstone and industry-led project, are set by the postsecondary institution (typically around 100–120 hours per semester) so as not to overburden students with work and academics.

4.3.2   Location of WIL

When asked whether the WIL types they were involved in were located on or off campus, the majority of survey respondents involved in co-ops (62%), internships (72%), field experiences (71%) and mandatory professional practice (54%) indicated that their WIL opportunities were located off campus (Table 16). The majority of survey respondents involved in service learning (68%) indicated that WIL opportunities occurred both on and off campus. As might be expected, a significant proportion (29%) of respondents involved with applied research indicated that the WIL took place on campus.

Table 16: WIL Location

|	Co-op n=60	Internship n=50	Field experience n=80	Applied research n=24	Mandatory professional practice n=24	Service learning n=25
% of respondents	%	%	%	%	%	%
WIL located on campus	0	0	1	29	4	4
WIL located off campus	62	72	71	21	54	28
WIL located on and off campus	38	28	28	50	42	68

Survey Question: Which of the following best describes the location of the WIL experience?

Note: Respondents involved in more than two types of WIL were randomly presented with two WIL types to describe.

The location of some WIL placements can have an impact on a student's decision to participate. Workplace location can be a challenge for students, particularly if they have to relocate due to commuting distance and/or availability of public transit. In some cases, generally in more rural areas of the province, the availability and affordability of accommodation can also be an issue.

Survey respondents were asked what strategies they used to assist students who needed to relocate for their WIL placement. Figure 17 shows that the most frequently mentioned strategy is to provide students with information and/or resources that help students find housing (42%).

Figure 17: Strategies for Relocation Assistance
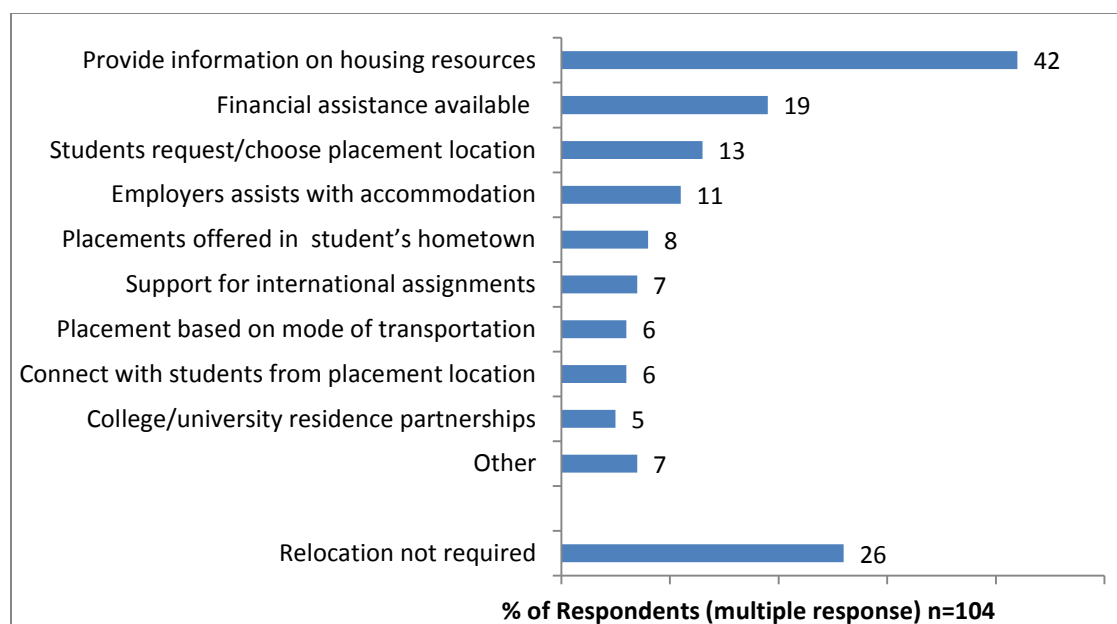
Survey Question: What supports and/or strategies does your institution provide to assist students who have to relocate for their work placement? Note: Excludes "don't know," "none" and out of scope responses.

Among respondents indicating they used a strategy to assist students with their relocation for their WIL experience, approximately one-quarter (26%) indicated that relocation was not required for the WIL placements in which they were involved. Typically, programs that do not require students to relocate for their WIL experience are unpaid and/or offer WIL and academic courses at the same time. In these instances the WIL opportunity is usually located within close geographical proximity to the postsecondary institution. Informants associated with these types of WIL try, when possible, to match placements based on the form of transportation the student can access. For example, if a student has a car, they will try to place them within a reasonable distance of where they are living. If a student relies solely on public transit, they make an effort to get a placement close to transit routes. In some cases, a student's cultural background may be a consideration for location of their WIL experience; for example, in some cultures women do not drive. One informant noted that their WIL typically offers twice as many placements as there are students, and because students have so much choice, location is generally not an issue.

Key informants involved in types of WIL that can require students to relocate (e.g., co-op and internships) indicated that many of their preparatory WIL materials include information on how to sublet and/or find accommodation close to their work location. Information is also presented in preparatory courses and pre-departure workshops. Some informants said they connect students to alumni or other students located close to their work placement so they can ask for assistance finding accommodation. One WIL informant involved in co-op noted that many of their students connected with other students via Co-op Connection to find information on accommodation near their work location. According to its website, Co-op Connection's mission is to "connect students on co-op work terms in the same cities by providing social programming, peer support and information from the Federation of Students in order to enhance communication and advocate for the needs of co-op students" (Co-op Connection, 2017).

Several informants suggested that students can make use of residence partnership programs, which allow students access to a college or university campus residence located in the area of the work placement, providing space is available. Postsecondary institutions run fewer programs in the summer months and therefore their residences have fewer occupied units during this time. Many Ontario postsecondary institutions open up their student residences during the summer to co-op students from other institutions.[2]

A few informants confirmed that their postsecondary institutions offer financial assistance for students who need to relocate for their work term. One informant noted that co-op students can apply for a grant for relocation. However, in most cases informants said the financial assistance is limited and usually does not cover all relocation costs. For example, students with international or out-of-province placements may receive financial assistance to cover flights or visas, and some unpaid WIL opportunities may reimburse students for local transportation expenses.

In a number of Ontario cities, local transit systems participate in Universal Transit Pass (U-Pass) programs with postsecondary institutions. The programs offer unlimited access to local transit for students who are enrolled in participating postsecondary institutions. However, mandatory fees are charged to students as part of their tuition or student activity fees and exemptions may only be considered under limited specified circumstances such as students with mobility restrictions or students who live outside of the range of the transit system.[3] Cities participating in U-Pass include Barrie,[4] Guelph, Hamilton, Kingston, London, Mississauga, Oshawa and Waterloo.

Some key informants noted that many students relocate for their WIL experience by choice. For example, students who are responsible for securing their own placements may choose to return to their hometown for their work placement providing the opportunity meets the requirements for that particular WIL. Other students may have a specific employer or WIL experience in mind that is located in a different region of the province or even outside of the province or country. Other students may choose to complete their WIL within reasonable commuting distance of their postsecondary institution because they either do not want to relocate or cannot afford to. Several informants indicated they inform their students early in the process

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2 The Residence and Conference Centre offers on-campus accommodations to co-op students during summer months at 18 postsecondary institutions (mostly colleges) in Ontario and one in British Columbia (http://stayrcc.com/coop/). Researchers for this study also found several Ontario university websites offering summer residences to out of town co-op students, including universities in Toronto, Guelph, Ottawa and Kingston.
3 For more information, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Universal_transit_pass.
4 Barrie is currently running a pilot program with Georgian College.

that the ramifications of relocation need to be considered. For example, if choosing to relocate for a WIL experience, a student will need to secure accommodation. Conversely, by choosing to remain close to campus, a student may be restricted by what is geographically available.

4.3.3   Work-related Expenses

One of the biggest challenges WIL students encounter is work-related expenses and unexpected financial costs. Students are concerned that they will incur additional debt related to WIL due to costs associated with relocating, commuting, work-related clothing or equipment, childcare or other family obligations. While some, if not all, work-related expenses can be recouped if the WIL experience is paid, students may find work-related expenses especially challenging financially.

Survey respondents were asked to indicate whether the selected type of WIL that they were involved in offered students remuneration. As might be expected, there was wide variation across WIL types (Table 17).

Table 17: WIL Remuneration

Type of remuneration	Co-op n=60	Internship n=50	Field experience n=80	Applied research n=24	Mandatory professional practice n=24	Service learning n=25
% of respondents	%	%	%	%	%	%
Paid WIL	82	30	3	4	0	0
Unpaid WIL	8	44	73	67	100	92
Both paid and unpaid WIL	8	26	24	29	0	8

Survey Question: Which of the following best describes the students' remuneration for the WIL experience?
Note: Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding. Respondents involved in more than two types of WIL were randomly presented with two WIL types to describe.

In cases where WIL is a requirement (e.g., field experience, mandatory professional practice and service learning), many key informants noted that they do not allow the WIL opportunity to be compensated. While some informants indicated that their postsecondary institution provided some form of compensation such as reimbursement for travel and expenses to students involved in unpaid WIL experiences, it was not considered a standard practice and could be discontinued at any time. One informant stated that their postsecondary institution had a financial support policy for their WIL students. As the majority of their WIL programs are optional, the informant felt that while the financial support did not fund all work-related expenses, without the support significantly fewer students would participate in WIL.

Many informants involved in unpaid mandatory WIL programs felt that there should be policies in place that offered some form of compensation for their students. In addition to reimbursement for travel and expenses, another suggestion for compensation was offering a reduction in student tuition.
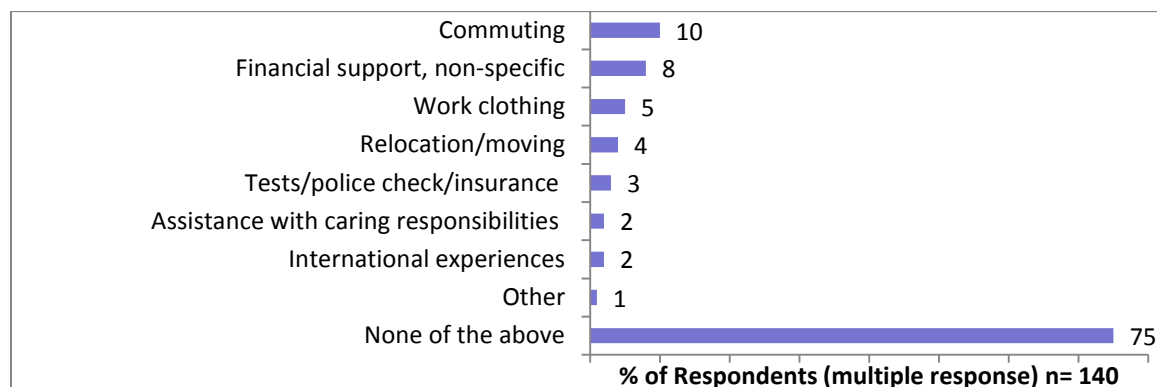
There was some degree of confusion among informants regarding the implications of unpaid work under the Occupational Health and Safety Act and who is responsible, the employer or the institution. The act was amended in 2014 to include the following definition of worker: "A person who performs work or supplies

services for no monetary compensation under a program approved by a college of applied arts and technology, university or other postsecondary institution" (Canada, 2017).

Several informants expressed concern over how unpaid WIL students may be treated by their placement host noting that in some instances students have been asked to do work that is not related to their WIL goals or objectives. In other instances students may be expected to put in more time than is the norm for that type of WIL experience. In order to help avoid such situations, one informant makes a point of meeting with all employers offering unpaid WIL opportunities to ensure that they understand the purpose of the WIL component in context to learning goals or objectives the students are looking to achieve during their placement. The expected number of work hours is discussed along with a description of the duties and responsibilities students will be required to complete.

One informant stated that because of instances such as those described above, they only allow paid internships with signed contracts. Another informant considers allowing unpaid co-ops or internships in some circumstances but will communicate with the employer and student first to ensure it is appropriate. Still other informants indicated that although the WIL experience is unpaid, some employers will compensate in some way to show their appreciation for what the student has done. However, some informants noted that while their WIL opportunities are paid positions, they occasionally have employers who take exception to having to pay students as part of their academic training.

Survey respondents were asked what types of support are provided to students to assist them with their work-related expenses. As shown in Figure 18, the majority of survey respondents (75%) indicated that their postsecondary institution does not provide students with financial support for work-related expenses associated with their WIL opportunity.

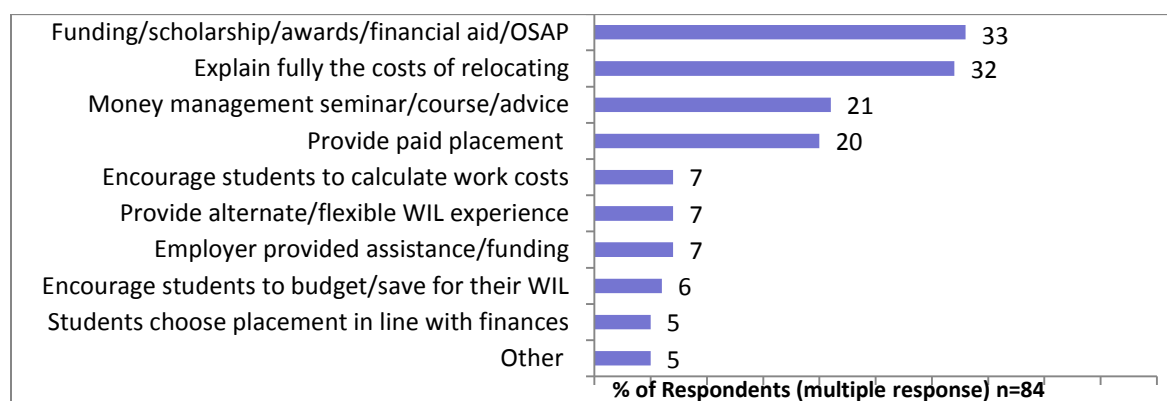**Figure 18: Types of Work-related Expenses for Which Students Receive Support**

Category	%
Commuting	10
Financial support, non-specific	8
Work clothing	5
Relocation/moving	4
Tests/police check/insurance	3
Assistance with caring responsibilities	2
International experiences	2
Other	1
None of the above	75

% of Respondents (multiple response) n= 140

Survey Question: Does your institution provide students with any financial support for the following:
Note: Excludes "don't know" and N/A responses.

4.3.4   Strategies for Helping Students Prepare Financially for Their WIL Experience

When asked what strategies and tools are used to help students financially prepare for their work placement, 31% of survey respondents indicated that they do not use any strategies or that the use of such strategies is not an issue for their students. When explored further, several noted that their students are usually paid sufficiently well by their employers and that expenses they incurred to participate in the work term were covered. Informants involved in co-op placements felt this was particularly true.

As shown in Figure 19, the strategies most frequently mentioned by survey respondents for helping students prepare financially for their WIL experience were: the availability of funds through resources such as scholarships, bursaries, awards, financial aid, special or dedicated funds and Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) either through funding or requesting a continuation of interest-free status while on an extended work term (33%); and fully explaining to students all the costs they must consider when relocating for their work term (32%).

Figure 19: Strategies for Helping Students Prepare Financially

Strategy	%
Funding/scholarship/awards/financial aid/OSAP	33
Explain fully the costs of relocating	32
Money management seminar/course/advice	21
Provide paid placement	20
Encourage students to calculate work costs	7
Provide alternate/flexible WIL experience	7
Employer provided assistance/funding	7
Encourage students to budget/save for their WIL	6
Students choose placement in line with finances	5
Other	5

% of Respondents (multiple response) n=84

Survey Question: What strategies and tools does your institution use to prepare students financially for their work placement?
Note: Excludes "don't know," "none" and "not an issue" responses

4.3.5 Effectiveness of Strategies for Helping Students Prepare Financially for Their WIL Experience

The base of respondents who had used strategies to help students prepare financially for their WIL was too small to allow for analysis by WIL type. A comparison of strategies used and their effectiveness is provided in Table 18. It shows that two of the strategies considered to be very effective are employed by only a small proportion of postsecondary institutions in Ontario.

Table 18: Comparison of Strategy Usage and Effectiveness (Help in Financial Preparation)

| Strategy % of respondents	Respondents rated strategy very effective (n=Variable) %	Respondents used the strategy (n=84) %
Encourage calculation of work-related costs	38	7
Explain fully the costs of relocating	33	32
Money management seminar/course/advice	28	21
Encourage students to budget for their WIL	26	6

Survey Question: Which of the following strategies has your institution found effective in ensuring students are not financially surprised by their work experience?
Note: Descending order by Rate Strategy Very Effective

Most key informants indicated that their students were provided with information and advice on how to prepare financially for their WIL experience, usually as part of a pre-WIL workshop, seminar or course. Some informants noted that responsibility for work-related expenses was clearly defined either in WIL student manuals or guides or as part of a WIL contract between the student and employer. A few informants mentioned that some costs associated with WIL such as registration fees and transit passes were included in the upfront fees paid by students at the start of their program and/or semester. One informant noted that they have students draw up a budget as part of a proposal they submit to the department. In this way, students are more aware of their costs and can take steps to financially prepare for their WIL experience.

4.3.6 Assistance with Registration Fees

Some students may find registration fees put a WIL opportunity out of their reach and as such may chose not to participate in a WIL experience. Survey respondents were asked what forms of assistance are available to help students with WIL registration fees. Among respondents who indicated assistance was available, 62% mentioned bursaries and 60% mentioned scholarships (Figure 20). Approximately half (51%) of respondents indicated that their WIL programs do not require registration fees.

Figure 20: Assistance with Registration Fees
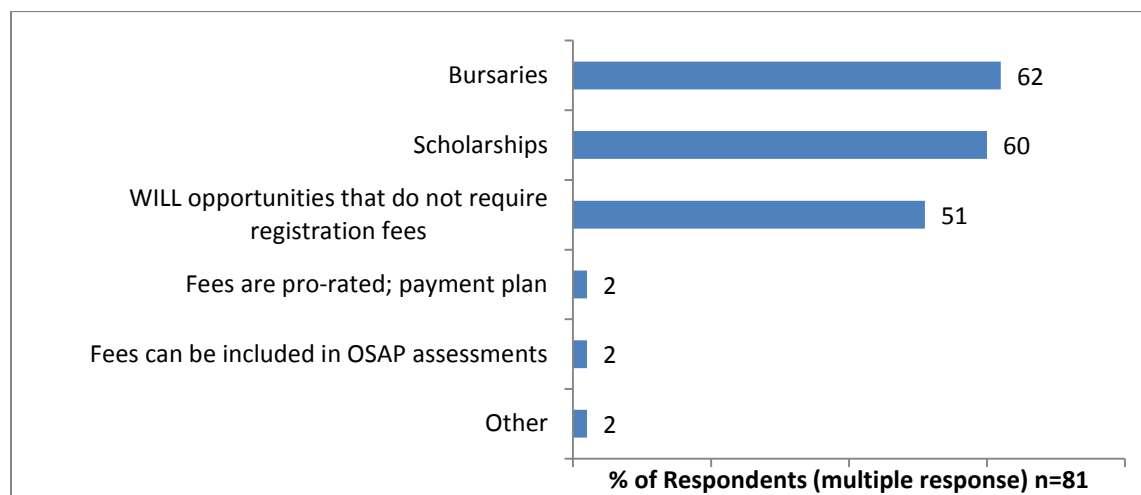
Survey Question: Does your institution provide any of the following to assist students with WIL registration fees?
Note: Excludes "don't know," "none" and N/A responses. The base of respondents to this question was too small to allow for analysis by WIL type.

4.3.7   Providing Information on Changes to OSAP's Continuation of Interest-free Status

Some internship programs can last up to 16 months, which until recently would trigger OSAP payments. Students can now complete the "Continuation of Interest Free Status" form indicating they are still in school and that WIL is part of their program. Survey respondents were asked if their institution had informed faculty and students involved in WIL programs of the change in OSAP and/or whether marketing materials had been updated. The majority of respondents (63%) indicated they did not know whether their institution had taken these steps (Figure 21). Of the remaining respondents, 20% indicated that WIL students at their institution had been informed and 10% were aware that faculty had been informed of the OSAP change while only 7% said their marketing materials had been updated and 16% indicated that none of these actions had been taken.

Figure 21: Information on OSAP Changes Provided by Institutions
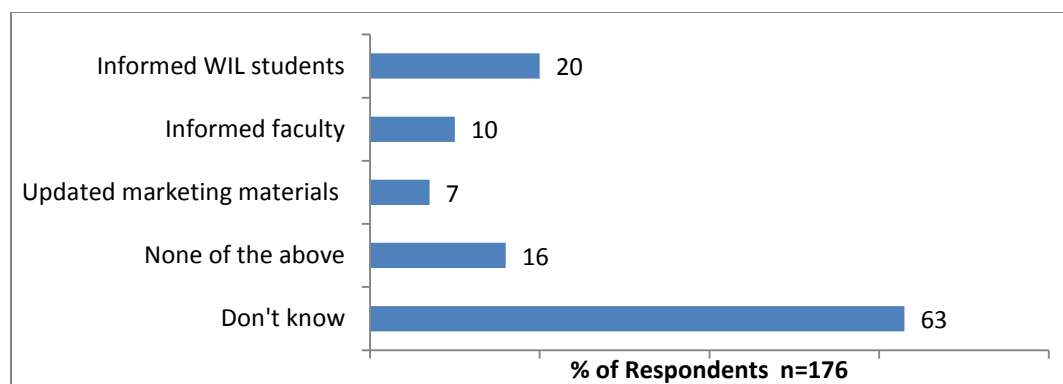
Survey Question: Has your institution done any of the following?

When compared across WIL types (Table 19), a large proportion of respondents involved in co-ops (31%) were more likely to have informed their students of the changes to OSAP than respondents involved in all other types of WIL.

Table 19: Providing Information on OSAP Changes by WIL Type and Institution

Strategy for preparing financially	Co-op n=72	Internship n=69	Field experience n=9*	Applied research n=37	Mandatory professional practice n=31	Service learning n=33
% of Respondents	%	%	%	%	%	%
Informed WIL students	31	19	15	16	10	21
Informed faculty	13	12	13	16	10	15
Updated marketing materials	11	10	5	8	3	9
Don't know	49	55	65	70	74	64
None of the above	21	25	19	14	16	15

Survey Question: Has your institution done any of the following? (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY).
* Caution: small base.

4.3.8   Giving up Current Job

Some students are reluctant to give up an existing job to enter a WIL program. They are concerned they will not be able to return to the job when the WIL experience has ended. While some WIL opportunities are paid placements, many are non-paying or offer small stipends that reinforce a student's reluctance to give up an existing job.

When survey respondents were asked what strategies they used to address student concerns with respect to giving up their current job, 32% said they did not know if any such strategies were used and 21% indicated they did not use any strategies to address student concerns.

As shown in Figure 22, among respondents who address student concerns with respect to giving up their current job (n=69), there were no widely adopted strategies. Offering only paid positions, predominantly done by co-ops, was the most frequently mentioned strategy along with allowing flexible placements to avoid conflicts with a student's other job or commitments.

Figure 22: Strategies for Addressing Student Concern with Giving up Job
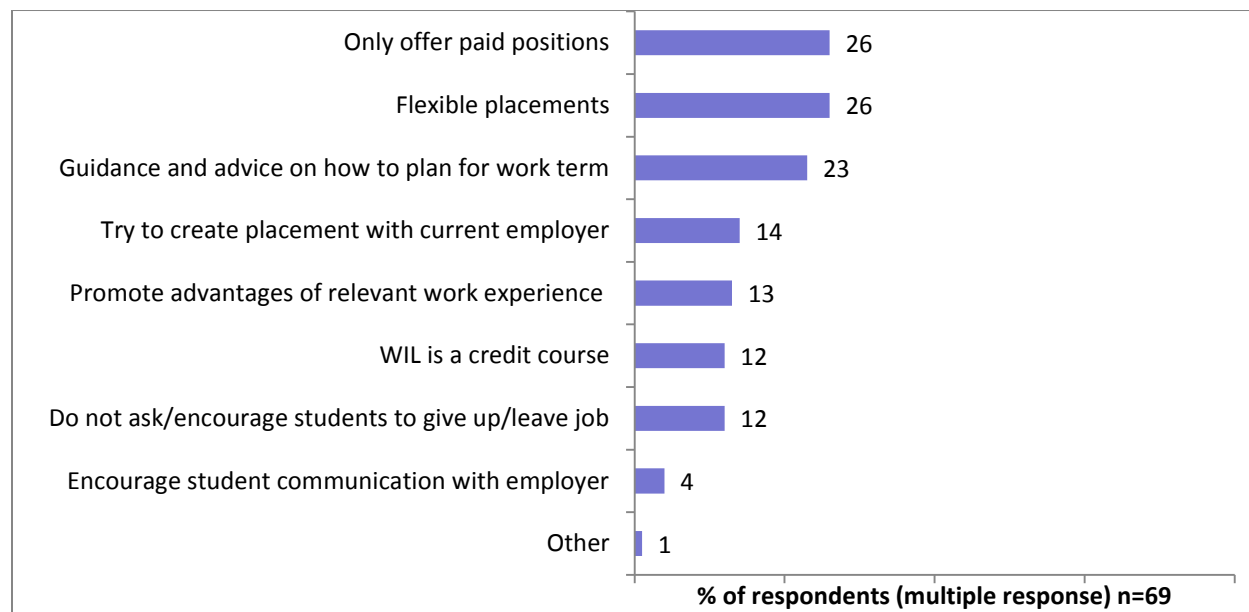
Survey Question: What strategies does your institution use to address student concerns with respect to giving up their current job?
Note: Excludes "don't know," "none" and N/A responses. The base of respondents to this question was too small to allow for analysis by WIL type.

A comparison of strategies used and their effectiveness is provided in Table 20. It shows that of the three strategies considered to be very effective, one is offering only paid positions, which is not a feasible option for many types of WIL. The other two are employed by only a small proportion of postsecondary institutions in Ontario.

Table 20: Comparison of Strategy Usage and Effectiveness (Concern over Giving Up Job)

Strategy	Respondents rated strategy very effective (n=Variable) %	Respondents used the strategy (n=69) %
Only offer paid positions	54	26
Promote the advantages of relevant work experience in a competitive job market	51	13
Encourage students to maintain open lines of communication with their current employer	42	4

Survey Question: How effective are the following strategies at addressing their concerns?
Note: Descending order by Rate Strategy Very Effective.

Many key informants indicated that they encouraged their students to prioritize their academic studies and WIL experiences over other activities students may be involved in including part-time jobs. Informants noted that if it became an issue for students, the student usually worked out something with their employer and/or placement to allow them to do both. A few informants noted that in some cases students were able to turn their job into a WIL experience provided the work was relevant to their program and met the WIL objectives. In cases where the WIL coordinator was responsible for placing a student, a few coordinators indicated that they would try to work with the placement host and student to adjust the scheduling of hours and where possible, keep hours to a minimum.
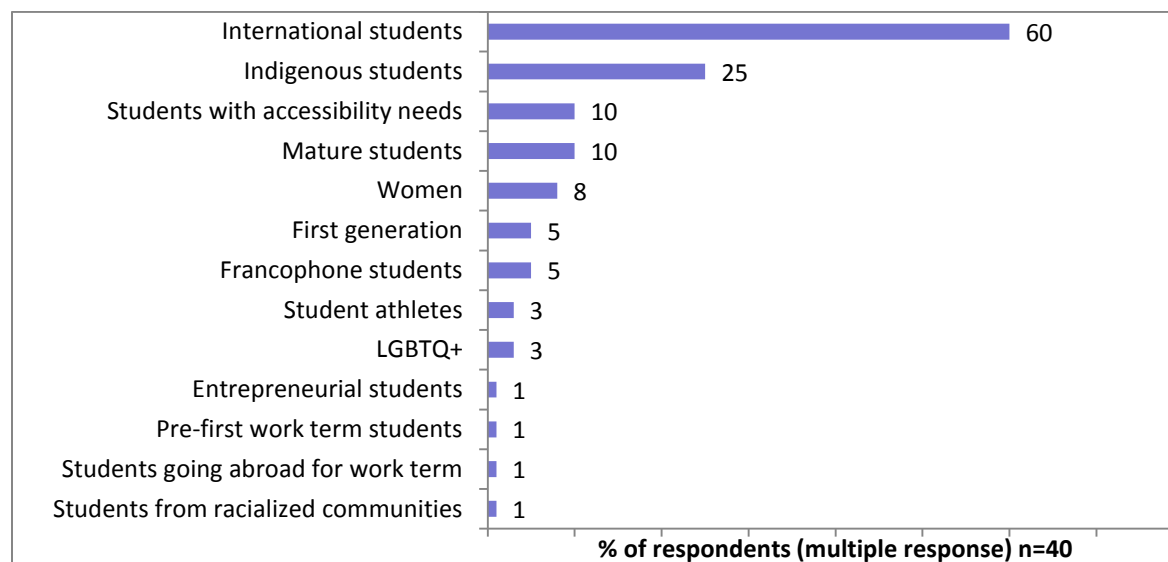
Some informants noted that one situation that might warrant attention is students being inhibited in their ability to have paid employment due to participating in an unpaid placement. For example, one key informant noted that because of the security clearance demands for one of their WIL community partners, students who are placed with this employer cannot be employed anywhere else during their WIL placement.

4.4 Equity and Access

For a number of students access to WIL is especially challenging. Students facing physical, mental or social challenges encounter a number of barriers unique to their circumstances. Other equity and access issues that may put WIL opportunities out of reach for some students include registration fees and grade eligibility requirements for some WIL programs. This section will explore strategies used to ensure international students as well as students facing physical, mental or social challenges are supported as they access and complete WIL opportunities.

When asked what demographic groups received targeted strategies to help them engage in WIL programs, the majority of respondents (68%) indicated that they did not know of any strategies targeted at specific demographic groups. A further 10% of respondents indicated they do not have targeted strategies for specific demographic groups.

Among respondents indicating that they have targeted strategies to help engage specific demographic groups in WIL programs, the proportion providing specific strategies to international students (60%) was larger than for any other group of students (Figure 23). One-quarter of survey respondents also mentioned having targeted strategies for Indigenous students.

Figure 23: Demographic Groups Receiving Targeted Strategies

Demographic Group	% of respondents
International students	60
Indigenous students	25
Students with accessibility needs	10
Mature students	10
Women	8
First generation	5
Francophone students	5
Student athletes	3
LGBTQ+	3
Entrepreneurial students	1
Pre-first work term students	1
Students going abroad for work term	1
Students from racialized communities	1

% of respondents (multiple response) n=40

Survey Question: For what other demographic groups has your institution developed strategies to facilitate their participation in WIL programs? Note: Excludes "don't know" and "none" responses.

Key informants acknowledged that for the most part the strategies they use to engage students in WIL programs apply to all students regardless of whether they belong to a certain demographic group. However, a few informants spoke of efforts to engage specific demographic groups (e.g., organizing events for women): "This year we had a Women in Web panel, so the faculty member who runs the career course invited some women (previous graduates) and another entrepreneur and they came in to talk about their experience as female web developers. This was the first time we did this. It went great."

4.4.1   Assisting International Students

International students face unique challenges when attempting to participate in WIL opportunities. They may have English language competency issues or limited knowledge about the local labour market and workplace culture. Prolonging their periods of study may be a challenge. They may face challenges related to employer attitudes and perceptions. They may even experience delays in obtaining work permits. These are all issues that most other students do not face.

Only 14% of survey respondents indicated having no strategies to assist international students participating in WIL. Among those who do assist their international students, there was no one dominant strategy. The most frequently mentioned strategies include: having a dedicated WIL adviser for international students (26%) and providing on-demand workshops tailored to international students (25%).

Figure 24: Strategies for Helping International Students

Strategy	%
Dedicated international student WIL adviser	26
On-demand workshops	25
One-on-one career advising	23
International office/centre	22
Preparatory WIL course for international students	12
Employer event showcasing international talent	9
Assist international students get work visas	9
Inform about specific workplace and work culture	8
Part of supports and services provided to all	6
Networking/mentoring	6
WIL program only for international students	5
Cultural diversity training for faculty and staff	3
Assist with work placements outside Canada	1
Prepare them for job interviews	1
Encourage students to apply for work visas first year	1
Other	3

% of respondents (multiple response) n=106

Survey Question: What strategies and tools has your institution implemented to assist international students to enter and complete WIL programs? Note: Excludes "don't know," "none" and N/A responses.

Differences by WIL type were relatively minor. There were, however, differences between the strategies employed by colleges and university. As shown in Table 21, a greater proportion of survey respondents from colleges had a dedicated WIL adviser for international students (31%) as compared with universities (17%). This may be more of an organizational difference as the proportion of respondents offering one-on-one career advising was significantly greater from universities (39%) than from colleges (14%). A larger percentage of university respondents offered international students assistance in getting work visas (19% versus 4% from college respondents).

Table 21: Strategies for Helping International Students by WIL Type and Institution

Strategy for helping international students	College n=70	University n=36
% of respondents using strategy (multiple response)	%	%
Dedicated WIL adviser for international students	31	17
On-demand workshops on topics tailored to international students	27	22
Having an office or centre dedicated to international students	24	17
One-on-one career advising	14	39

Strategy for helping international students	College n=70	University n=36
Preparatory WIL course tailored to international students	14	8
Provide WIL programs dedicated to international students	14	8
Employer events to showcase international talent and/or provide tips on how to recruit international students	11	6
Provide international students with information/workshops about a specific workplace and/or work culture	9	6
Part of supports and services provided to all	9	-
Offering networking opportunities and/or mentoring international students	6	6
Assist international students in getting work visas	4	19
Cultural diversity training for faculty and staff	1	6
Assist international students in obtaining work placements outside of Canada	1	-
Encourage international students to apply for their work visas during their first year of study	1	-
Prepare international students for job interviews	-	3

Survey Question: What strategies and tools has your institution implemented to assist international students to enter and complete WIL programs? Note: Excludes "don't know," "none" and N/A responses.

Key informants indicated that they used the following strategies to assist international students secure and complete their WIL experience: an English credit course as part of an international student's degree; a transportation program offered through the international centre that provides reimbursement for students who need to travel locally for a WIL interview; a resource hub for employers regarding the hiring of international students; allowing international students to complete three co-op work terms in a row (full year) so they can return to their home country for their WIL experience — the student then returns to do a fourth year of academic courses. One informant noted that their postsecondary institution has connections with recruitment agencies/offices in key source countries where international students originate. The postsecondary institution informs these agencies/offices of the need for work visas, driver's licences and workplace cultural practices so that they can help students prior to arriving in Ontario for study.

A few informants found that in general, international students and/or recent immigrants are very well prepared for their WIL and do not need extra assistance. One informant indicated that several employers are more than willing to take international students because often they are very talented. One employer interviewed stated that as an international company, they make a point of hiring international WIL students because they are usually multilingual and help to enforce the global perspective of their company.

One key informant noted that many of their internship programs were restricted to Canadian citizens and permanent residents, which presents a challenge for international students. The informant noted that if the WIL is a mandatory component, international students who are not eligible for a specific placement are provided with alternative options such as an on-campus research study or a volunteer opportunity to satisfy

their WIL requirement. In cases where the WIL is optional, international students cannot participate due to restrictions around obtaining a work permit.[5]

4.4.2 Effectiveness of Strategies for Assisting International Students

Survey respondents identified many strategies for assisting international students that they believe are very effective. Table 22 compares the usage of those strategies with their perceived effectiveness. It shows that only three strategies considered to be very effective are being offered by a quarter of the postsecondary institutions in Ontario. This suggests that there is a significant opportunity for institutions to choose from a range of effective strategies to assist this segment of the student population. Differences between WIL types were minimal.

Table 22: Comparison of Strategy Usage and Effectiveness (Helping International Students)

Strategy for helping international students	Respondents rated strategy very effective (n=Variable)	Respondents used the strategy (n=106)
% of respondents	%	%
Dedicated WIL adviser	64	26
One-on-one career advising	59	23
Encourage international students to apply for work visas in first year	57	1
Assist students in getting work visas	56	9
Work with international students to prepare them for job interviews	50	1
A preparatory WIL course tailored to international students	46	12
Host employer event showcasing international talent	45	9
Inform students about the specific workplace and work culture	44	8
Assist international students in obtaining work placements outside of Canada	43	1
On-demand workshops	38	25

Survey Question: How effective are the following strategies at allowing international students to enter and complete the WIL component of their program?
Note: Descending order by Rate Strategy Very Effective

Key informants indicated that international students are usually very motivated but need help with understanding Canadian work culture and processes for finding and/or securing work placements. One informant noted that for their program there are a minimum of two semesters before a WIL placement. This allows international students some time to become more integrated into Canadian culture by becoming

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5 In order to obtain a co-op work permit international students must have a letter from their postsecondary institution confirming that all students in the program need to complete work placements to get their degree. http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/study/work-coop.asp

involved on campus. Another informant reported encouraging international students to become more engaged and speak up in class so they can improve their soft skills, such as interacting with team members.

A few informants noted that the biggest challenge they face with international students is ensuring students have their work visa before they begin their WIL placement. Informants noted that the process for obtaining work visas can take four months (or more) and they urge students to apply early in order to ensure they have one before beginning their WIL experience. One informant indicated that their WIL program had recently implemented a new policy stating that international students could not enter into their job search process without proof of a work visa.

4.4.3   Assisting Students Facing Challenges

Survey respondents identified a number of strategies used to support students with physical, mental or social challenges as they participate in WIL experiences. Among the strategies noted in Figure 25, having an accessibility adviser to assist students and employers was the dominant strategy, employed by 53% of all survey respondents. Only 12% of survey respondents indicated that their institution did not have WIL strategies specifically aimed at students facing physical, mental or social challenges.

Figure 25: Strategies for Helping Students Facing Challenges

Survey Question: What strategies has your institution implemented to assist students facing physical, mental or social challenges enter and complete WIL programs?
Note: Excludes "don't know," "none" and N/A responses.

There were no significant differences in the usage of these strategies by WIL type.

Most key informants indicated they work with their students to help them find the best WIL fit for their goals and abilities. While informants noted that a wide range of resources and services is available to accommodate students with special needs, the extent to which a student receives this help depends largely on whether or not the student self-identifies and seeks assistance. Some informants said their WIL application forms allow for students to indicate considerations they may need when participating in a WIL experience, but students are not obliged to disclose any information they do not wish to share. One

informant observed that some students are hesitant to reveal special needs because they do not know their co-ordinator and have to establish a level of trust and comfort first: "We know we have students that have disabilities but have chosen not to disclose to the co-op office ... If they have chosen to disclose, then we are able to support that, through a collaborative approach with their co-op adviser, the employer relations consultant and the accessibility coordinator."

4.4.4   Effectiveness of Strategies for Assisting Students Facing Challenges

Survey respondents identified many strategies they considered very effective in assisting students facing physical, mental or social impediments to WIL participation. Table 23 compares the usage of those strategies with their perceived effectiveness. It shows that just over half of survey respondents indicated their institution offers one of the most effective strategies: having an accessibility adviser available to work with students and employers. Table 23 also shows that many effective strategies are underutilized. Similar to the case with international students, there is an opportunity for institutions that are interested in supporting this student population to add from an array of effective strategies.

Differences between WIL types were not significant.

Table 23: Comparison of Strategy Usage and Effectiveness (Helping Students Facing Challenges)

Strategy to assist students facing physical, mental or social challenges	Respondents rated strategy very effective (n=Variable)	Respondents used the strategy (n=111)
% of respondents	%	%
Dedicated WIL adviser	65	3
An accessibility adviser to work with student and employer	55	53
A preparatory WIL course designed to help all students face challenges	53	2
A workplace transition consultant	53	9
Assistance identifying and pursuing WIL opportunities that are a good fit	50	4
One-on-one career advising	51	17
Access to other types of WIL	43	2
On-demand workshops	33	2

Survey Question: How effective are the following strategies and tools at assisting students facing physical, mental or social challenges enter and complete the WIL component of their program?
Note: Descending order by Rate Strategy Very Effective

There is general consensus among key informants that strategies such as having a workplace transition consultant, a dedicated WIL and/or accessibility adviser and one-on-one advising are very effective in helping students with physical, mental or social challenges. However, some key informants suggested that students who disclosed that they have or may have physical, mental or social challenges are often referred to institution-wide supports, which do not distinguish between the needs of WIL students and other

students. A few informants felt that while awareness of mental health and supports for students dealing with mental health issues have increased, there is still much stigma around mental health and as a result students may feel more comfortable accessing support discreetly through student services than directly approaching their WIL and/or program coordinator.

Several informants stated that they receive only a few accommodation requests from students per year. One informant speculated that this could be because students may screen themselves out of a WIL program due to the structures and rules around the WIL. They may also feel that they would not be able to handle the workload. One informant suggested that some students need additional supervision and may require a more detailed explanation to help them understand WIL placement policies. Other informants stated that if students' challenges prevented them from securing or completing a specific type of WIL experience, they would be accommodated in an alternate WIL format.

Another informant acknowledged the challenges of keeping students with special needs in co-op programs as these students often struggle to find and keep their WIL placement. This informant noted that their WIL program had developed additional tools and resources to help both students and WIL coordinators. They provide WIL and career advisers with accessibility training and mental-health first-aid training. They are also developing a guidebook on accessibility for counsellors. An accessibility committee to address co-op and career related accessibility issues has also been established. One informant offered a unique strategy designed specifically for students with special needs — a corporately sponsored fund that provides paid placement for up to 30 students who are considered at-risk and/or have a high level of need. This fund allows these students to participate in a WIL experience with extra support provided.

One informant noted that despite the increased availability of resources to address accessibility needs, there remain gaps with respect to accommodation obligations in voluntary, job shadowing and field placement types of WIL compared with the level of academic accommodation the student can receive.

4.4.5   Exceptions to Allow Students Entry into WIL

Some students may not meet the academic requirements to be eligible to register for a WIL. As shown in Figure 26, survey respondents were fairly evenly divided as to whether or not they were allowed to request exceptions to allow a student entry into the WIL should the student not meet the academic eligibility requirements.

Figure 26: Requesting Exceptions to Allow Students Entry into WIL (% of Respondents)
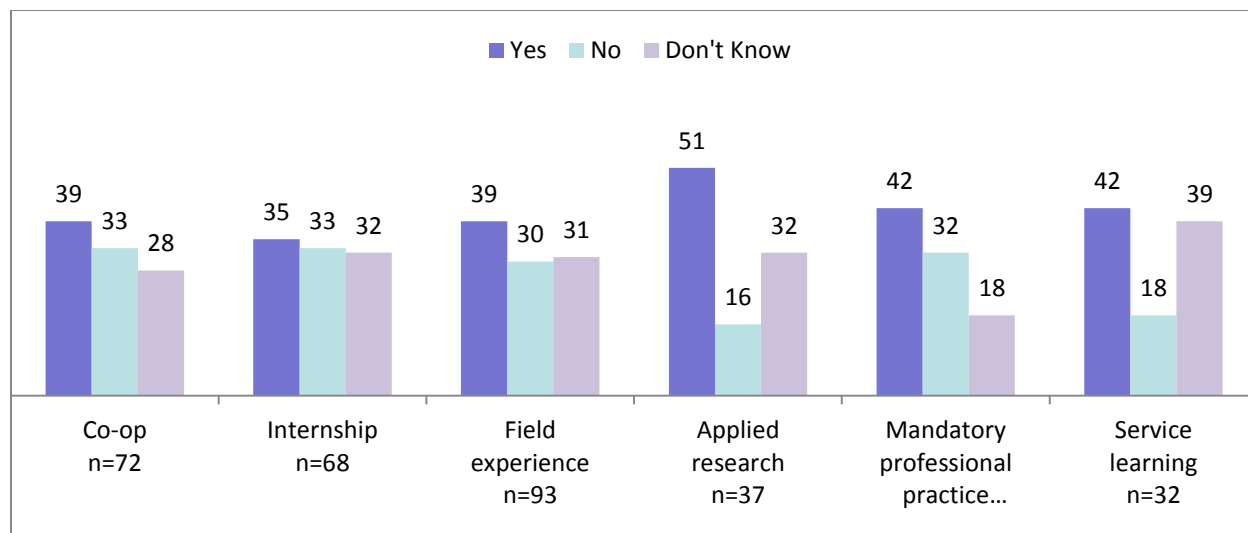
Survey Question: Can faculty request exceptions to allow the student entry into the WIL if student does not meet the academic requirements to be eligible?

### 4.4.6   Alternative Solutions when not Eligible for WIL

Many key informants acknowledged that when students are not eligible or able to complete a WIL experience, several options may be available to the student including: switching to another type of WIL such as an applied research project or voluntary community service learning; completing a capstone project as part of an academic course; in-class simulations and/or experiential learning assignments/projects; job shadowing or mentorship; or having the student switch to an academic program that does not have a mandatory WIL component. Key informants suggested that some students may not be ready to do their WIL independently so instead of the student participating in the WIL opportunity, faculty will encourage the student to focus more on learning or improving their skills and will provide these students with experiential learning opportunities in class.

4.5   Institutional-level Strategies and Policies

This section looks at the extent to which formal policies are in place to help students overcome barriers and increase their participation in WIL. These policies will also be compared to policies found in other jurisdictions such as British Columbia, Alberta and Australia.

Survey respondents were asked the extent to which their postsecondary institution had formal policies designed to help students overcome barriers and increase student participation in WIL. Only 39% of respondents indicated that formal WIL-related policies were in place, while an additional 13% said WIL-related polices were under consideration at their postsecondary institution (Figure 27). Of particular note is that 36% of respondents did not know whether such policies were currently in place or being planned.
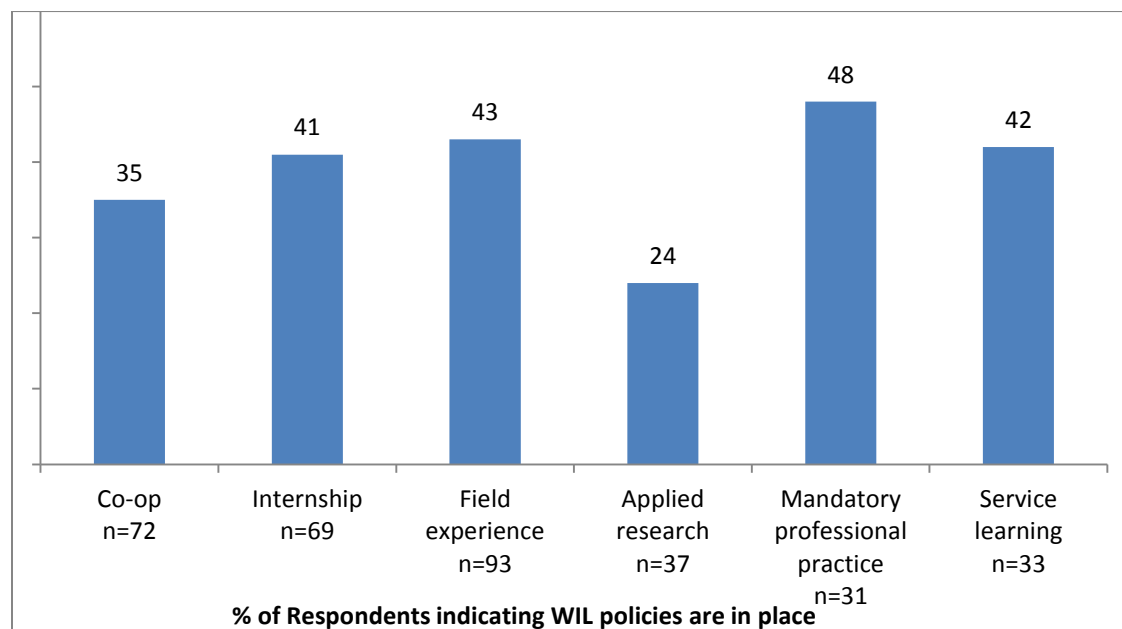
Figure 27: Percentage of Institutions with Formal Policies
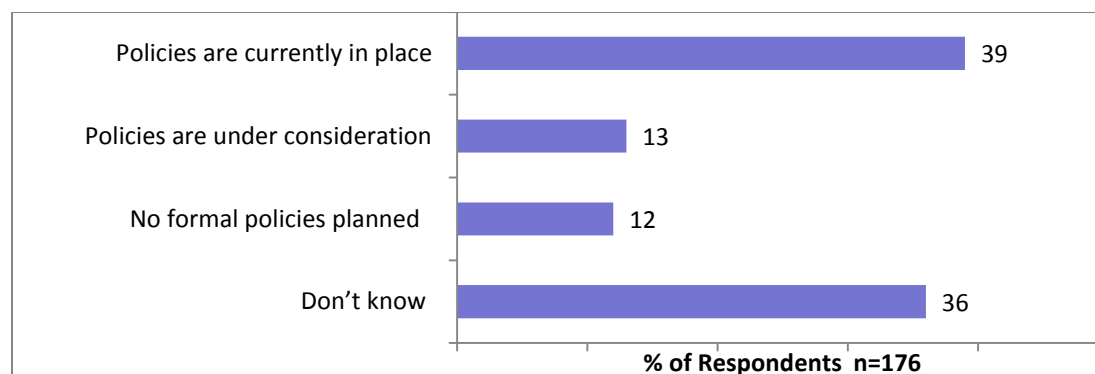
Survey Question: Which of the following best describes the formal policies at your institution to help students overcome barriers and increase student participation in WIL? (n=176).

As can be seen in Figure 28, a significantly lower proportion of respondents involved in applied research had formal WIL policies in place.

**Figure 28: Percentage of Institutions with Formal Policies (by WIL Type)**

Survey Question: Which of the following best describes the formal policies at your institution to help students overcome barriers and increase student participation in WIL? (POLICIES ARE CURRENTLY IN PLACE).

4.5.1 Existing policies

Survey respondents who indicated that their postsecondary institution had WIL-related policies in place were asked to identify specific policies they felt were effective at promoting WIL programs. As can be seen in Figure 29, no one policy was being widely used.

Figure 29: Existing Policies
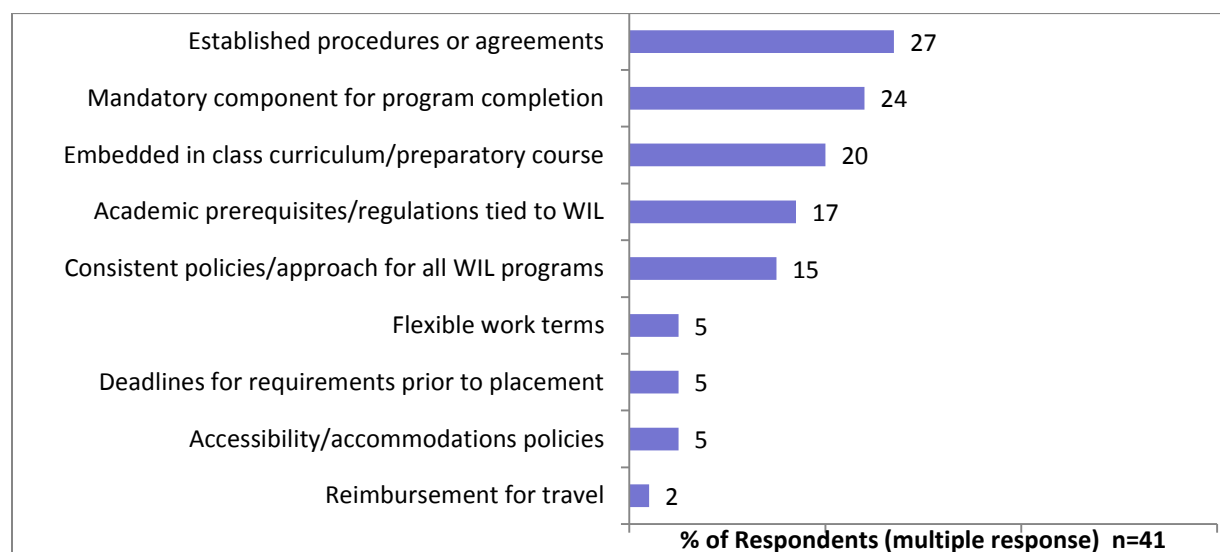
Survey Question: What specific policies do you feel have been the most effective at promoting WIL programs at your institution?
Note: Excludes "don't know," "none" and N/A responses.

Key informants confirmed that many of their policies related to WIL were program- or department-specific and embedded in class curriculum and/or preparatory courses. Informants also noted that they used a combination of formal and informal policies that are laid out in student manuals and/or guideline materials. Such manuals typically explain the policy and procedures for the department and specific WIL course, and provide details of the responsibilities of the student, the training organization/employer and the department. One informant suggested that while they have a guidebook for some WIL programs, it would be very challenging to have guidelines and policies that cover all WIL types at their postsecondary institution because of the variety of WIL types they offer and variations within each type that are specific to a particular program. Some informants suggested that there was no need for separate WIL policies; they felt WIL is embedded in the program as part of its design. Each program has its own procedures for the WIL component and therefore forms part of the student framework of policies at a given postsecondary institution.

Among the WIL-related formal policies implemented by postsecondary institutions, key informants mentioned the following:

- Experiential Learning Placement Policy outlining goals and objectives of service learning component of a program
- Formal placement/affiliation agreement with service delivery organizations/employers covering legal issues, student rights etc.

- Requirement that all students must complete a preparatory course/seminar prior to completing WIL
- Requirement that the evaluation methodology and process for assessment of student be clearly communicated to both students and WIL host/employer
- Student terms of conduct and/or student formal agreement
- Set minimum and/or maximum hours for WIL
- Unpaid education placement procedures and/or declaration
- Mandatory co-op bursary for travel
- Recruitment process outlining number of job offers student can decline
- Insurance related to students doing an unpaid internship/WIL
- Formal policies relating to issues in work term and/or issues around academic standing and WIL eligibility
- Policies and procedures where students may petition a WIL-related decision

4.5.2 Policies under consideration

Respondents who indicated that their postsecondary institution and/or department is considering formal WIL policies were asked to identify the specific policies. The most mentioned policy under consideration was one related to accessibility and accommodations for WIL students (30%). Due to the low proportion of respondents indicating WIL policies were being considered (n=27), analysis by WIL type or institution could not be reliably conducted.

Figure 30: Policies under Consideration
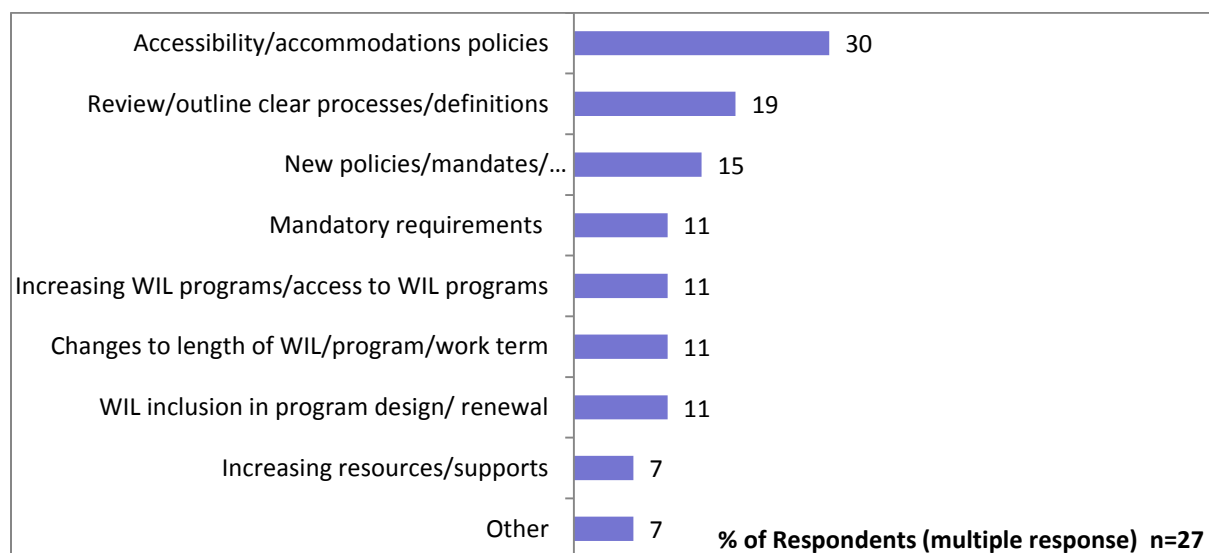
Survey Question: What specific policies are under consideration at your institution to help students overcome barriers and increase student participation in WIL?
Note: Excludes "don't know," "none" and N/A responses.

Key informants spoke of a number of WIL-related policy initiatives that were either underway or under consideration at their postsecondary institutions. Some informants indicated that their department was looking at revising or implementing additional policies and procedures aimed at formalizing some of the strategies they currently use to assist students with preparing for their WIL experience. For example: making

it mandatory that all WIL students have one-on-one consultations with their WIL coordinator or adviser to ensure they have completed all requirements and are progressing as anticipated.

Several informants indicated that their postsecondary institutions were looking at higher level, institution-wide policies aimed at ensuring consistent planning and delivery of existing WIL programs and/or expanding WIL to other/all faculties within the institution. Some informants noted that working groups and/or committees have been established to look at how WIL should be fostered across all facets of the institution. This includes: developing consistent definitions and terminology regarding WIL; establishing pedagogy of WIL; mapping learning outcomes for WIL; and alignment of WIL type with industry and academic courses. A few informants said their postsecondary institutions were looking at ways to streamline or centralize some WIL processes related to the administrative and promotion/marketing aspect of WIL. Still other informants commented that they were starting hubs or WIL learning communities where information and strategies could be shared with faculty, administrators and WIL coordinators across the institution.

Key informants were asked for their perspectives on incorporating some form of WIL in every course offered at postsecondary institutions in Ontario. While informants overwhelmingly supported the concept, they raised a number of concerns, namely how WIL would be defined and what policies and resources they felt would need to be in place to effectively realize WIL in every course.

Many key informants commented on the daunting task of trying to define what WIL is for their institution. Informants suggested that part of the challenge is determining what WIL means versus what experiential education means within the context of what forms of both the institution offers. While informants acknowledged that WIL typologies have been developed by some postsecondary institutions and organizations such as HEQCO, they stress that no standard typology exists or has been adopted province-wide or institutionally. Many informants say they would support government ordained and/or institution-wide definitions of WIL that can be applied consistently across all institutions and departments within an institution.

While most informants agree that some form of WIL and/or experiential learning should be a mandatory part of all programs, they feel that postsecondary institutions must also be willing to dedicate resources to support the change and adoption of such a policy. Informants suggested that there needs to be both a central source of knowledge and resources to support WIL administration as well as departmental-level resources to allow for direct engagement with hosts/employers and students to ensure the best possible WIL experiences. One informant suggested there needs to be top level proactive support to promote and communicate core information about WIL across all platforms, disciplines and programs: "We do have significant institutional focus and support, it is budgeted centrally, we don't rely strictly on co-op fees to fund operations, so it means there are dedicated resources, relatively high profile in the organization and it has been [for a while]."

Many informants felt that it was important for their postsecondary institution to have an overarching WIL policy, but also felt it was just as important to have flexibility built into the policy to allow departments to design what works best for them and for their students. Several informants stressed that maintaining personal connections between the student and WIL coordinator as well as between the employer and WIL coordinator is crucial to successful WIL experiences. The WIL coordinator needs to know the program to understand what learning is associated with the WIL opportunity. In addition, WIL coordinators have long-

standing partnerships with employers and hosts that need to be nurtured in order to have quality experiences for all.

> It is not one size fits all, or one singular approach ... To obtain success in WIL for students I think we have to have multiple strategies and multiple approaches and multiple failsafe and support mechanisms, one approach isn't going to work. We have a complex student learner population, which is getting more complex. That is one piece and because every institution has operationalized these forms of WIL differently it is hard to also again have a one-size-fits-all approach.

5   Conclusions and Discussion

5.1   Student Demand for WIL as Part of all Postsecondary Learning is Increasing

Student demand for WIL as part of all postsecondary learning is increasing. Many WIL opportunities (both optional and mandatory) are often oversubscribed. Ontario postsecondary institutions are adapting to this demand through the use of a wide variety of policies, strategies, tools and supports to both promote WIL and help their students to secure and complete WIL experiences. However, study findings also suggest that more could be done to ensure that WIL is promoted to specific demographic groups to increase the participation of first-generation, Indigenous and other racialized/minority students in WIL programs.

5.2   Ontario PSE Institutions Use Multiple Approaches to Address Challenges Faced by Students Participating in WIL

In general, no one approach was found that can reliably address any particular student challenge; rather postsecondary institutions employ a suite of supports and strategies to help ensure students are fully prepared to successfully secure and complete a WIL experience. The top strategies used and found to be very effective in preparing students for their WIL experience include: having a structured preparatory WIL course (optional or mandatory); having a dedicated WIL adviser; having students/graduates speak about their WIL experiences; seminars and group presentations about WIL; in-class discussions and/or assignments related to WIL; one-on-one discussions with students; and having a pre-participation expectation and outcome guide.

5.3   WIL Programs Rely on Institutional Resources to Help Deliver Programs and Support Students

While the majority of study respondents recognized the effectiveness of the various strategies, many are implementing less resource intensive strategies mainly due to a lack of resources. As Peters (2012) found, "One of the primary challenges reported in the literature is that delivering WIL programs requires considerable faculty time and energy." Study results suggest that the supports available to students involved in WIL opportunities at the same postsecondary institution reflect the priority their program and department place on WIL. Many WIL programs work collaboratively with other departments in their institution to ensure students have access to the supports and services needed for successful WIL experiences. Rather than duplicating efforts, WIL programs are leveraging systems and processes already in

place. For example, collaboration across departments such as career centres, equity offices and international centres help to make the best use of limited resources.

While the use of multiple strategies may have had its impetus in fiscal necessity, it also addresses the need to have strategies that reach a diverse student body including recent secondary school graduates, mature and international students, as well as students requiring various accommodations. In addition, the use of strategies such as group advising (beyond WIL preparatory courses) not only addresses the issue of limited resources, but can also serve to create space for students to feel like they are being heard, as well as create peer-to-peer connections and support.

5.4   Consistent Messaging is Key to Managing Expectations

Key informants note that a large part of promoting WIL opportunities involves setting or managing student expectations of what is involved in a particular WIL experience. Having clear, consistent messaging presented to students early and often helps to reduce misconceptions about what a specific WIL experience entails and helps students develop an understanding of their own role and responsibilities within their WIL experience. Findings suggest that faculty and employers also benefit from being kept informed about the various WIL options available. This allows faculty to better advise their students on appropriate WIL opportunities and allows employers the ability to choose WIL programs that best fit their needs and objectives.

5.5   Faculty Support of WIL Essential to Student Participation

Key informants agreed that having faculty support to promote WIL to their students was essential, particularly if WIL is optional as students may be less inclined to participate if their teachers are not supportive of WIL. Survey findings also suggest that the use of faculty champions is a very effective way to promote WIL to students. However, it should be noted that this strategy may not be widely used among all Ontario postsecondary institutions. Many key informants noted a lack of WIL awareness within other departments at the same institution. The study also identified faculty reluctance to get involved with WIL, primarily because of the time commitment, and for some, because of a philosophical ideology that their role is to instill higher academic learning and not prepare students for the workforce.

5.6   Resources are Available to Help Students Manage Time and Financial Pressures

Key informants acknowledge that while completing a placement or job search along with an academic load can be challenging, numerous tools and strategies are available to assist students in this process such as limiting the number of work placement hours, allowing some flexibility for when the work placement can be completed and providing seminars, tutorials, guides and/or materials on time management. Study findings also suggest that one-on-one support and/or mentoring, and ensuring expectations and priorities for WIL are clearly defined are very effective strategies for helping students balance their WIL with their other commitments. However, informants stress that even with supports, for some students the demands of work placement, academics and other commitments remains intense.

Students who must relocate for their WIL are provided with information, resources and in some cases financial assistance to help them find housing. Students concerned about being financially prepared for their WIL experience are offered advice, seminars or courses on money management and can often obtain financial support through resources such as scholarships, bursaries, awards, financial aid, special or dedicated funds and OSAP.

5.7 Barriers Faced by Disadvantaged Students Are Being Addressed through a Combination of WIL-specific and Institution-wide Supports

Survey findings suggest that WIL programs are implementing effective strategies to assist international students and students facing physical, mental or social challenges so they can get involved in WIL. Strategies found to be very effective for assisting international students include: having a dedicated WIL adviser; one-on-one career advising; encouraging and assisting international students to apply for work visas; and working with international students to prepare them for job interviews. Top strategies for assisting students facing physical, mental or social challenges are having an accessibility adviser and/or a workplace transition consultant, and working one-on-one with students to ensure the WIL experience is successful.

Many WIL coordinators note that they rely on centralized supports within their PSE institutions for these and other students. There are offices for international students and for students living with disabilities at most PSE institutions. WIL coordinators note that they refer students to those resources when students self-identify that they require the support. While this appears to be an efficient use of resources, it relies on the premise that students will self-identify. Some key informants indicated that their PSE institutions are currently looking at developing or revising policies to ensure that students in WIL are fully aware of the resources available to them, particularly as they apply to their WIL experience.

5.8 Postsecondary Institutions Have a Number of Formal and Informal Policies in Place to Support WIL Implementation and Delivery

Postsecondary institutions have a number of formal and informal policies mainly at the program or department level to support WIL. According to key informants, postsecondary institutions are supportive of WIL and some have committed to implementing WIL in all of the programs they offer. There is evidence that some postsecondary institutions have also begun the process of defining WIL and what that means within the context of the institution and developing institutional-wide WIL policies. Many key informants were in support of having provincial or better still, global standardization of WIL definitions, including common practices and policy documentation that all institutions can refer to.

Currently those involved in the delivery of WIL opportunities share effective practices. There are formal structures for the sharing of such information both within the province and at a national level; however, it is primarily focused on co-op forms of WIL. In addition, as demand for WIL continues to grow and as WIL offerings continue to evolve, there will be an increasing need for more frequent opportunities to share best practices. This is particularly the case when efforts are needed to address challenges where currently the number of strategies is limited.

5.9   The Combination of Institution-wide WIL Processes and/or Policies in Partnership with Academic/Department Level Practices Can Serve to Create Consistency and Strong Expectations for the Quality of WIL Programs

Many informants felt that it was important for their postsecondary institution to have an overarching WIL policy but also felt it was just as important to have flexibility built into the policy to allow departments to design what works best for them and for their students. As postsecondary institutions move towards defining their approach to WIL within the context of the overall goals and mandates of their institution, they have an opportunity to leverage the best practices already in place across numerous departments while maintaining the uniqueness of WIL in each program. Informants suggested that there needs to be both a central source of knowledge and resources to support WIL administration as well as departmental level resources to allow for direct engagement with hosts/employers and students to ensure the best possible WIL experiences.

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