

Stakeholder Summary

Faculty who are involved in WIL more likely to support its growth

Work-integrated learning (WIL) – or co-operative education, internships, work placements and apprenticeships – is becoming more widespread in today's colleges and universities as a way to better integrate learning and work. Faculty with WIL experience say that even more of it should be available to students and employers, according to a new study from the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO).

In *Faculty Experiences with and Perceptions of Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) in the Ontario Postsecondary Sector*, faculty across 13 institutions were surveyed as they play a critical role in designing, supporting and implementing WIL opportunities.

Project Description

As the second phase of a three-part study, faculty were surveyed to explore the value and benefits of WIL; whether views about WIL differ by employment status, program, gender, years of teaching, previous employment experience, or their own past WIL experience; how faculty integrate students' work experiences into the classroom; and whether WIL should be introduced or expanded at other Ontario institutions. The survey included responses from 1,707 college and 1,917 university faculty.

Also included in this phase are a graduating student survey and an employer survey. The graduating student survey will be administered in March 2012 across 14 Ontario institutions to better understand students' WIL experiences. The employer survey will begin shortly to explore how Ontario employers feel about WIL, the quality of the students they receive as employees, and how the overall experience could be improved.

The first phase of the study – a literature review and environmental scan of WIL opportunities in Ontario, was published in 2011. The third phase of the study is a follow-up student survey that will be administered 16 months after the original survey to explore students' labour market and post-graduation outcomes.

Findings

Most faculty are supportive of the current level of WIL at their institutions; over half of college faculty felt that WIL opportunities should be increased and a quarter thought it should be kept the same. University faculty felt slightly different with less than half reporting that WIL should be increased and a quarter saying it should be kept the same. Faculty who personally taught a course with a WIL component, who had participated in WIL as a student, who had more years of employment experience outside of academia and who taught in business faculties were more likely to report that WIL should be increased.

WIL is valuable according to the majority of college and university faculty. Perceived advantages include helping students better understand work realities and developing networks, strengthening links

between the institution and the business community, and connecting the institution to the broader community.

Challenges faculty face while administering WIL include finding quality placements for students, finding enough placements, and balancing WIL with large class sizes and workload.

Policy Implications and Further Research

The faculty survey offered a number of recommendations to improve work-integrated learning opportunities at Ontario's postsecondary institutions. If institutions wish to expand or improve WIL opportunities, increasing faculty awareness of the purpose and benefits of WIL is necessary. Institutions must also ensure that there is dedicated financial and administrative support available; that faculty are recognized for their WIL-related work; that better links with employers and community partners are forged; and that assistance is provided to recruit and build relationships with host sites to alleviate workload issues.

Further research should explore how the barriers and workload issues differ between different types of WIL; whether WIL influences how faculty teach; how to get faculty more involved in WIL; and best practices in the administration and support of faculty-led WIL initiatives.

And stay tuned for the results of the student survey, employer survey, and follow-up student survey!

Faculty Experiences with and Perceptions of Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) in the Ontario Postsecondary Sector was written by Julie Peters, Senior Policy Analyst, Academica Group Inc.