

Learning to Earning | Higher Education and the Changing Job Market Session Summary

**Civic Ballroom
Sheraton Centre Toronto
123 Queen Street West, Toronto, M5H 2M9**

Thanks to Ian Hartlen and Adrian Philp, recent graduates from the Master of Public Policy Program at the University of Toronto, for their work in summarizing the conference.

Day One | Thursday, November 1, 2012

Session 3A | Work-integrated learning across colleges and universities

Facilitator: Richard Wiggers, Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario

Lesley Cooper, Wilfrid Laurier University

What are the challenges in work-integrated learning

Work-integrated learning (WIL) is an intersection of theory and practice. It is value added learning. Examples include practicums, internships, cooperative education, and service learning both international and domestic.

There are many challenges in work-integrated learning. Some of these stem from the fact that WIL is seen as a quick and cheap fix to student problems in the workplace. However, WIL is not cheap if it is not done properly. The goal is the integration of work and academic learning. This involves a mixture of specific and general skills learned both in the classroom and in the workplace. In this model, student learning is the responsibility of both the university and the employer.

How do we assess WIL in the face of enormous diversity of experience? Discussion and pertinent information should be public and involve all stakeholders. Regular feedback to students is important and, though present in the classroom, is often overlooked in the workplace. There are multiple purposes for assessment and it makes a difference what evidence is used. The dangers of oversimplification are many. WIL is a complex issue and the skill needs of staff, faculty and students must be addressed.

WIL is in a period of transition from being a cottage industry (individualistic, voluntary, multiple standards) to being enterprise based. Partnerships with employers are important and must be sustained and supported to ensure secure placements that meet the needs of both the industry and the students. Difficulties such as safety and discrimination must be managed.

Julie Peters and Peggy Sattler, Academica Group
WIL in Ontario postsecondary education

In 2009 HEQCO launched a major project on work-integrated learning.

Three sets of surveys were taken of students, faculty and employers. The findings reveal WIL motivations and benefits.

First, it is important to define WIL, both generally and as various different types. WIL is an intersection of theory and practice and there are many different types, from internships to service learning and more.

Findings:

- Students chose WIL for practical purposes such as experience and enhancing CVs.
- High student satisfaction. Drawbacks include lack of pay and prep time, time demands and unexpected costs.
- WIL students showed greater overall satisfaction with PSE.

- Faculty showed concerns about finding enough quality placements.
- Faculty also expressed concern that WIL perpetuates a business-oriented model for PSE and may divert funding from more purely academic endeavours.
- Most faculty do not feel supported by institutions to engage in WIL activities.

- Employers had varied motivations for and benefits from WIL. Examples include the development of work force skills, pre-screening of potential new hires and a sense of giving back to the community.
- Challenges for employers include lack of work and staff time, as well as a lack of skills on the part of students.
- Employers perceived the skills of new hires as similar whether or not they had WIL experience, but tend to give higher salaries to those with WIL credentials.

Institutional recommendations include:

- That greater recognition be given for WIL activities.
- Better communication between stakeholders.
- More administrative and financial support.

A planned follow-up will assess labour market outcomes.

Anne MacLennan, York University
Dreams to reality

Study focused on student experience in the communications studies field at York University. The presentation employed footage of students answering questions about their expectations and experience.

The students who are least focused are those who have no work experience. Those with the least work experience are also more likely to believe in the “fantasy” of a liberal arts degree which leads automatically to a great career. More experienced students have a somewhat more realistic (perhaps bleak) set of expectations and have the most specific goals and steps in mind to achieve them.

Over all, the perception among students is that WIL is helpful.