



Elon Statement on

# WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING *2024*

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From 2022 to 2024, twenty scholars participated in the Center for Engaged Learning research seminar on Work-Integrated Learning (WIL). The seminar facilitated international, multi-institutional, and multidisciplinary research on topics such as student perception of quality WIL, first-generation students' perceptions of work, belongingness for health professions students in WIL, understanding faculty involvement and support of WIL, and the development of leadership competencies in those who supervise WIL students within host organizations.

Each of the three stakeholders—the students, the academic institution, and the host organization—plays a crucial role in shaping the outcomes and effectiveness of WIL programs. Collaboration and investment by each stakeholder lead to quality experiences for all. This statement shares the seminar's meta-level discussions about the current research in WIL, the projects undertaken within the Elon WIL research seminar, and some of the emerging areas for attention and research in the coming years.

# KEY TERMINOLOGY

There are numerous definitions of work-integrated learning which are often institution- or region-specific. There continues to be debate in the field about what's included and what's not included within the umbrella of work-integrated learning. A 2023 publication, *The Routledge International Handbook of Work-Integrated Learning* dedicates a chapter to defining WIL, explores a variety of existing definitions, and provides a discussion on the defining elements of WIL. That definition is as follows:

An educational approach involving three parties—the student, **educational institution**, and an **external stakeholder**—consisting of **authentic** work-focused experiences as an intentional component of the **curriculum**. Students learn through active engagement in **purposeful** work tasks, which enable the **integration** of theory with **meaningful** practice that is **relevant** to the students' discipline of study and/or professional development. (Zegwaard, Pretti, Rowe, and Ferns 2023, 29-48; emphasis added).

There is a collection of keywords to highlight in this definition of WIL.

**Educational institution:** WIL is coordinated and supported in various ways within educational institutions. The way WIL is designed, offered, and supported varies significantly with some institutions having centralized offices and others relying on individual faculty/instructors to be academic mentors who organize and coordinate WIL experiences.

**External stakeholder:** One of the key defining elements of WIL as an educational practice is that it extends beyond the traditional student-instructor relationship of an academic course. The external stakeholder may hold different labels depending on the type of WIL; for example, they might be referred to as an employer in the case of an internship, a preceptor in the case of professional practice, or a community partner in the case of service learning.

**Authentic, purposeful, meaningful, relevant:** These are a collection of words from the definition of WIL that describe the type of “work” that students should be engaged with for the activity to be considered WIL.

**Integration:** One of the main goals of WIL, and in fact what the “I” in WIL represents is the integration of theory and practice. WIL provides the opportunity for students to connect theory with practice.

**Curriculum:** WIL is part of the design of an academic program and involves an assessment component.



# PERSPECTIVES FROM WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING STAKEHOLDERS

## *Students, Academic Mentors, and Host Organizations*

### **Students**

In a WIL experience, students are active participants, deeply invested in gaining hands-on experience, making meaning of the theories they are learning in their academic programs, developing skills, and building professional networks. The successful implementation and sustainability of WIL depend on students' motivation and commitment, alongside the support of various crucial stakeholders which will be discussed in subsequent sections. While students derive benefits from completing a work-integrated learning experience, there are also challenges and risks to participation. Developing strategies as well as understanding supports available is an important component for students to be successful in WIL.

Although the types of WIL a student participates in may vary, the opportunities equip them to recognize the value of fostering partnerships, effective

communication, and active engagement. While there will be curriculum and supports available to the students from the academic institution and the host organization, students need to have agency to advocate for their needs and to maximize WIL as a learning opportunity. Through self-advocacy, students can contribute towards building an environment that maximizes positive outcomes and professional growth. Through WIL, students have the ability to fully engage in their professional development, preparing them to navigate successful and fulfilling careers and to embrace the importance of lifelong learning.

Students are not passive participants, but active partners who are involved in shaping their entry into a professional practice. This engagement allows students to exercise their agency and make deliberate choices that reflect their individual goals, interests, and values. WIL gives students the opportunity to be meaningful participants in their own professional development. By recognizing how engaged





practices enhance entry into a profession, students can proactively seek out opportunities and continually refine their skills. This active involvement ensures that their transition into a profession is not only smooth, but impactful, aligning their personal aspirations with the standards and opportunities of their chosen fields.

Work-integrated learning opportunities offer students many benefits. Integrating academic study with practical work experiences in professional settings allows students to apply theoretical concepts. Students can explore potential career interests, develop industry-specific skills, and make informed decisions about academic and career paths. WIL cultivates essential skills such as time management and task prioritization, each crucial for meeting professional deadlines. Student motivation to engage with multifaceted projects enhances their multitasking abilities and adaptability to diverse responsibilities. These practical work experiences foster professional relationships with industry professionals, mentors, and colleagues. Professional relationships provide guidance and support for student success and act as resources for future connections and positions. Increased confidence is particularly beneficial for combating imposter syndrome by validating students' skills through practical application.

Student participation in impactful projects hones their problem-solving skills and gives them opportunities to engage with industry tools and software. These experiences provide firsthand insights into potential career paths, enabling students to assess alignment with their skills and aspirations. WIL further refines students' professionalism by instilling workplace ethics and values, enhancing their ability to present and collaborate effectively in professional environments. Ultimately, the personal and professional development fostered by WIL experiences prepares students for successful careers and provides tangible evidence of their readiness and proactive approach to professional growth for future employers.

## Limitations

Despite the variety of benefits WIL experiences can offer, there are also challenges and risks associated with this experience for students. These can include the following:

### **Preparedness and resource limitations**

If a student is not well-prepared for the WIL experience, this can lead to an unsuccessful experience. Limitations can include insufficient academic preparedness, lacking work-specific skills, and resource limitations such as:

- The need for additional financial resources to cover the cost of unpaid WIL
- Access to transportation
- Limited access to technology or equipment
- Many students are juggling academic and personal responsibilities and do not have time to commit to a WIL experience
- Skills do not match the expectations of the host organization

### **Limited support and guidance**

Depending on the work-integrated learning environment they experience, some students may find that support, guidance, and workplace education from their site partners are not always prioritized. This may negatively impact the student, as discomfort and confusion may arise if the student and



supervisor do not have a healthy mentoring relationship. Students receiving limited guidance can succeed; however, many need primary direction and guidance to feel comfortable and confident in their work.

### **Student safety**

Physical and emotional harm are possible risks associated with unsuccessful WIL experiences for students. Ensuring student safety is crucial, yet not always guaranteed, leading to consequences that can make for an uncomfortable and unsafe WIL environment. Physical harm across organizations can vary, from minor incidents like a dog bite to more serious injuries with lasting effects. Emotional harm such as bullying and harassment can occur, making them feel vulnerable to harmful actions in the workplace. Individuals from cultural and gender minorities often face targeted discrimination in these situations. Mental health is also something to consider, as it can suffer due to these challenges. Integrating support and guidance to establish a sense of belonging throughout a WIL experience is essential to mitigating these risks and fostering a positive and safe environment for all participants.

### **Balance between learning and compensation**

The most effective WIL experiences typically involve organizations committed to facilitating learning and providing fair compensation. Remuneration in WIL experiences varies from region to region and from sector to sector. Whether the student is compensated should be considered as a key factor in the design and offering of a WIL program and experience. Unfortunately, in some cases, host organizations may devalue a student's WIL experience by assigning tasks unrelated to the experience's goals. These potentially exploitative practices might use WIL students as a source of cheap labor, having them perform menial tasks rather than contributing to meaningful learning experiences.

Whether the student receives compensation can also impact the level of respect they are shown and can affect students' motivation, engagement, and dedication to the WIL experience.





## Best Practices

Several best practices contribute to the effectiveness of WIL for students in bridging academic knowledge with practical experience.

A strong partnership between educational institutions, employers, and students enhances the alignment of learning objectives with industry needs. Viewing students as active partners in this triadic relationship empowers them to take ownership of their development, display deeper engagement, and enhance their learning outcomes. Clear and effective communication by students demonstrates initiative. Active engagement in project planning and experiences increases the opportunity to apply theoretical knowledge to a field. Work completed during WIL experiences can have significant impact on organizations, companies, and institutions, so students' investment in such work should reflect these impacts.

Facilitated and non-facilitated feedback and reflection also allow students to identify areas for improvement and learning gaps. Pre-WIL reflection can identify preconceived notions, current knowledge, skillsets, and goals for an upcoming experience. During a WIL experience, interactions with the academic mentor and host organization supervisor can open opportunities for students to receive feedback and guidance while giving space to discuss and adapt work to fit the expectations of both parties. Post-experience reflection enables students to recount what they have learned, evaluate what they enjoyed or disliked about the experience, and

determine how they would like to apply their newfound knowledge and skills. These reflective practices contribute to a more meaningful experience, as by speaking or writing about them, students deepen their understanding, internalize their learning, and better integrate their new knowledge and skills into their future academic and professional endeavors.

From a student perspective, WIL offers a unique opportunity for students to learn about themselves, build capabilities for self-advocacy and gain work experience. The experiences students are exposed to through WIL enhance employability while helping develop crucial professional and personal skills. We have acknowledged that there are challenges and risks associated with WIL for the student, however, the benefits associated with WIL typically outweigh the challenges and risks. Effective work-integrated learning experiences provide the student with meaningful work experience, invaluable hands-on experience, and professional networking opportunities, which will prepare them for successful and effective careers and lives.

By implementing best practices, stakeholders can maximize the benefits of WIL while lessening the challenges and risks. Best practices increase the quality of WIL experiences, while also empowering students to engage in their own personal and professional development. That said, a supportive and welcoming WIL environment can greatly increase the student's academic, personal, and professional growth.



# Academic Mentors/ Universities

The perspective of the academic side of work-integrated learning programs really includes multiple parties: the academic institution as an entity and everyone who supports the student in the work-integrated learning experience, often including career services professionals and/or a disciplinary academic mentor (often faculty). Most WIL scholarship focuses on either the academic institution as a unified whole or specifically on the individual mentor who is working directly with the student.

Having students participate in WIL experiences can be tremendously valuable for everyone involved in the process, and it carries unique benefits for the academic mentor. Many mentors engage in WIL as faculty/staff because they themselves were a part of WIL during their education, and hope to give back to current students by helping students prepare to enter the discipline. WIL experiences also offer academic mentors a chance to work with students more personally and to play a role in a student's professional and career development that classroom teaching does not always afford. Faculty and staff can additionally benefit from this type of work through compensation for WIL programming efforts and from the recognition and value that their institution places on WIL.

From the perspective of the academic institution, WIL programming can increase interest and reputation, particularly in an era where many families are concerned about the return on investment for college and the prospect of the student obtaining a job. Internship and co-op programs not only enhance student skills and competencies, but also give clear pipelines to later work. They also offer students high-caliber work preparation experiences, which can be a major draw from an admissions perspective. WIL can also enhance the academic institution's reputation in and connection to the local community.

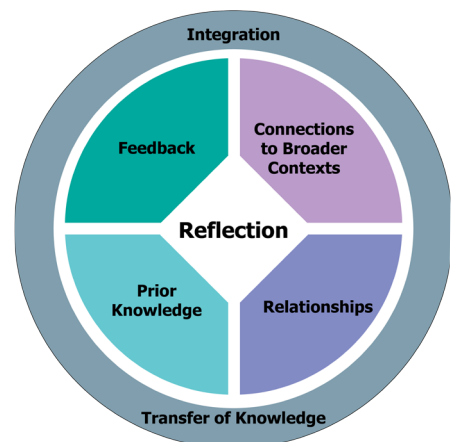
However, WIL efforts do not come without risk. At

some institutions, WIL is not highly prioritized and those engaged in it may not be fairly compensated or valued. Many faculty and staff report feeling isolated in their WIL work, and they carry a heavy load to bring these opportunities to students. Research suggests that women, junior faculty, and faculty of Color bear an unequal share of this load. WIL also comes with liability risks for the academic institution, and if WIL placements are difficult or unsuccessful on either side, these relationships can cause strain with the community.

To maximize benefit and minimize risk, it is important for everyone in the academic setting to have established policies and clear written guidelines around WIL. Collaboration across different departments within the academic institution, mentors, career services, etc. is essential to making the experience as effective and safe as possible for students. Collaboration between the academic institution and the host site/organization is also essential. Clear and open lines of communication are critical prevention against misunderstanding and risk. At best, academic mentors and institutions will nurture ongoing relationships with community partners. At least, university-based mentors should be in touch with site partners to touch base as the student transitions into and out of their role and offer contact information for any issues that arise.

In terms of how to best support students in their work-integrated learning experiences, Jessie Moore's key practices for fostering engaged learning (Moore 2023; Fig. 1) suggest important ways that academic mentors can scaffold student learning in WIL.

Figure 1: Key Practices for Fostering Engaged Learning (Moore 2023).





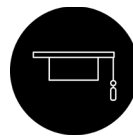


From a disciplinary perspective, faculty can help students call up prior knowledge to prepare for and make connections during their WIL experience. Likewise, faculty can help students bring what they learn in WIL back to the academic sphere and to generalize that knowledge beyond the bounds of the WIL environment. Academic mentors can also help students learn to elicit and process feedback and to use networking to build their connections. At the core of WIL is reflection. Faculty and staff can prompt students to consider how what they are learning is changing their views of themselves, of the discipline, and of the world.

In addition to considering personal and academic growth, mentors can facilitate career and professional development. The National Association of Colleges and Employers suggests that WIL experiences can assist students to grow in the following eight career competencies, and that mentors should explicitly address and encourage reflection on these competencies (National Association of Colleges and Employers 2024). Across personal, academic, and professional learning goals, academic mentors can encourage students to reflect and grow in many ways.

In addition to considering the academic needs of students, it is also important for academic mentors to consider student well-being and safety, inclusive of student identity, student need for accommodation, and access to WIL experiences. Mentors serve an important role of preparing students to meet the professional expectations of the workplace, but must also prepare students to advocate for their needs and safety in the workplace. WIL experiences can be unpaid and/or costly, so considering and supporting students' access to them is a key role that academic

institutions play. Providing a safe space for students to process their concerns and helping them to advocate for themselves are just as important as facilitating disciplinary connections.



Career & self-development



Communication



Critical thinking



Equity & inclusion



Leadership



Professionalism



Teamwork



Technology

Iconography by NACE. 2024. "Competencies for a Career-Ready Workforce."

## Host Organizations and Supervisors

Since there are many types of WIL programs as well as many different types of external organizations involved in WIL, the role that external organizations—and specifically supervisors—play is quite varied. External organizations involved in WIL may include large multinational organizations, small and medium sized businesses, entrepreneurial ventures, not-for-profit organizations, and government agencies. They may offer opportunities for students to be physically or remotely part of their organizations full-time or part-time for a few months to a year, or they may be working with students as part of an academic course in solving a specific industry- or community-related problem.

In the 2023 *Routledge International Handbook on Work-Integrated Learning*, Fleming, Ferns, and Zegwaard summarize the literature on the benefits of WIL for host organizations (Fleming et al. 113-130). There are two frequently cited reasons organizations participate in WIL: one is focused on short-term outcomes for the organization and the other on longer-term outcomes.

In the short run, WIL can be seen as a way to accomplish specific projects or work in a way that is often considered a cheaper and/or more flexible way for the organization to accomplish its work rather than the organization hiring regular full-time workers.

The other most frequently cited benefit is focused on a longer-term view. WIL has been documented to help organizations build brand awareness with the next generation. It can put these organizations at the forefront of students' minds when they consider where they may want to work. WIL is a demonstrated strategy in filling talent pipelines for organizations, identifying candidates they may want to recruit after students graduate. WIL has also been shown as a way that professionals want to give back to their profession by investing in the development of the next generation of talent.



While those may be the most cited reasons that organizations participate in WIL, there are a couple of other reasons to highlight. Research has shown that students' engagement in WIL can change the dynamic of the workplace team. The way in which the student affects the team dynamic is often described as changing the energy of the team, where the student brings enthusiasm and ideas to the organization. Another benefit to highlight (which connects to one of the Elon research teams' work) is how supervising a WIL student contributes to the development of leadership capabilities for the supervisor.

Research has identified a number of challenges and risks that organizations face in participating in WIL. A frequently cited challenge or reason that organizations do not participate in WIL is they feel they do not have suitable work for the students to complete. Another challenge for organizations is the amount of time required to train, supervise, and mentor WIL students in relation to the potentially short amount of time the student may be part of the organization.

The amount of time required to support students is related to how prepared the students are for the WIL experience, including skills, attitudes, and behaviors. The risk for participating in WIL increases when students are not prepared to meet the expectations of the organization. An additional challenge reported by organizations is the overhead required to work with higher education institutions and academic mentors to understand and navigate the WIL policies and processes to know what is expected of them as a WIL partner.

# SEMINAR RESEARCH FINDINGS

## Research Teams

The research teams part of the Work-Integrated Learning Research Seminar (each named for trees on Elon University's campus) contributed significantly to WIL scholarship from the perspectives of each of the three primary stakeholders in WIL. Their teams are described below:

### **An International Exploration of Students' Conceptions of Quality Work-Integrated Learning**

**Team Oak:** Monica Burney, Elon University, (United States (US)); Nancy Carpenter, Elon University (US); David Drewery, University of Waterloo (Canada); Michelle Eady, University of Wollongong (Australia)

### **What Does 'Work' Mean to First-Generation Students?**

**Team Maple:** Neil Baird, Bowling Green State University (US); Tim Diette, Hampden-Sydney College (US); Mariko Izumi, Columbus State University (US); Christine Kampen Robinson, Canadian Mennonite University (Canada)

### **Exploring the Interrelationships Between Work-Integrated Learning, Belongingness, and Health Professions Students**

**Team Magnolia:** Cindy Bennett, Elon University (US); Deborah O'Connor, Manchester Metropolitan University (England); Robin Selzer, University of Cincinnati (US); Leah Stade, University of Nebraska (US)

### **Understanding Faculty Involvement in and Support of WIL**

**Team Holly:** CJ Eubanks Fleming, Elon University (US); Kristin Geraty, North Central College (US); Letitia Henville, Writing Short is Hard consulting (Canada); Denyse Lafrance Horning, Nipissing University (Canada); Catherine Wilson, University of New Brunswick (Canada)

### **The Development of Transformative Leadership Behaviors in Student Supervisors**

**Team Dogwood:** Borghild Brekke Hauglid, Kristiania University College (Norway); Anne-Marie Fannon, University of Waterloo (Canada); Rachael Hains-Wesson, University of Sydney (Australia); Ina Alexandra Machura, Siegen University (Germany)

There is a significant gap in the literature examining students' perceptions of quality within WIL programs (Team Oak). The literature that does exist, though, reveals ten key themes, highlighting the multifaceted nature of quality from the student's perspective: development, relationship, work environment, relevant work, evaluation, impact, reflection and debrief, authentic experience, student attributes, and program design. Similarly, postgraduate WIL experiences are vastly underreported, with most studies focusing on undergraduate levels. Despite these gaps, it is evident that quality is a significant concern for students who value programs that

incorporate community context, robust educational settings, and active student participation.

In the context of first-generation students, their perceptions of work are deeply influenced by cultural backgrounds, emphasizing community and collective values (Team Maple). There is a need to move beyond the deficit model on first-generation students and WIL and advocate for a strengths-based approach. These students' understandings of the interplay between cultural scripts and their beliefs about work reveal a strong awareness of both individual and systemic oppression. Expanding



methodologies traditionally used in WIL research promises new insights, aligning research practices with the lived experiences of first-generation students. This inclusive approach is essential for fostering a supportive learning environment.

In exploring the nuances of WIL in healthcare, the BeWIL pilot study, conducted across three sites in two countries and encompassing 12 allied health professions, used the Belongingness Scale-Clinical Placement Experience (BES-CPE) to measure belongingness across three domains: esteem, connectedness, and efficacy (Team Magnolia). Factors such as duration of WIL experience, age, and regional differences impact students' sense of belongingness. Students participating in longer WIL experiences indicated a heightened sense of belongingness. These findings highlight the need for further exploring and expanding WIL studies to ensure a comprehensive understanding and enhancement of student experiences across diverse healthcare fields.

As higher education institutions continue to develop and promote WIL programs, the need for more recognition of WIL as a high-impact and resource-intensive activity within tenure and promotion agreements becomes even more important (Team Holly). Dedicated faculty WIL advocates are essential for advancing these programs, often without adequate institutional acknowledgment or support. The Faculty Engagement Model (FEM) is a framework that suggests that there are personal, professional, and institutional factors that all contribute to faculty participation in engaged learning activities. Research on this model in the WIL context suggests that the model is relevant in WIL and that the decision for faculty to participate in WIL is affected by a complex set of factors. Despite increased attention to and participation in WIL by faculty and universities, barriers to faculty engagement persist. Faculty members have varied perspectives on what support is needed for effective WIL integration, underscoring the need for further professional development in this area.

Future research should focus on faculty mentorship and adapting WIL pedagogy to meet students'

evolving profiles and experiences of students, addressing these barriers. These efforts are essential for creating a more supportive and effective environment for WIL, enabling higher and more sustained WIL engagement by faculty.

Supervisors of WIL students develop leadership skills through mentorship and support of students and collaboration with academic partners (Team Dogwood). Regular feedback is essential for quality student experiences, necessitating enhanced support and recognition systems for supervisors. A systematic literature review was conducted of 9,349 peer-reviewed articles from 2010 to 2023 to explore student and supervisor perceptions of quality WIL supervision and identify research trends and gaps. The review revealed significant differences in perceptions: students value positive relationships, support, trust, inclusion, affirmation, and feedback, while supervisors prioritize clarity of expectations, early goal setting, theory-practice connections, and self-reflection.

Structural elements crucial for effective supervision include quality training, incentives, and rewards. There is a recognized need to broaden WIL research by diversifying researchers, methodologies, and focusing on key elements for effective supervision. Advocates also call for integrating developing economies into mainstream WIL research through fellowships, collaborations, and conferences. The review underscores the importance of inclusive, multilingual research practices and fostering collaboration to enhance WIL understanding and implementation across diverse contexts.

Overall, the collective insights from this seminar suggest that creating effective WIL programs necessitates a comprehensive approach that integrates community contexts, educational settings, and active student involvement. This strategy is essential for fostering an environment where quality WIL can thrive, benefiting all participants in these educational experiences.



## CROSS-CUTTING THEMES IN WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING

Based on the work of our five teams, inclusive of their extensive literature searches as well as their original contributions to the research, four primary cross-cutting themes have emerged in the WIL domain.

### **Student voice**

The main takeaway from our work together on WIL is the absolutely critical role of student voice in WIL development, design, and research. Our teams found that even research that evaluates the quality of WIL relatively rarely focuses on student perceptions, and that student voice has not typically been used as a form of evaluating and researching WIL.

And yet, we also found that student experience, student success, and student perceptions are at the very heart of why we do what we do, regardless of one's position in the WIL ecosystem and cutting across all industry/community sectors and academic domains. The commitment to meaningful, authentic, and effective experiences for students is the main throughline of our work in WIL, and further research focused on the student experience is essential to the future success and longevity of WIL.

### **The need for evolving and innovative research**

Beyond the need for further focus on student voice, our research teams found ways to innovate with their current research and had ideas for further creative approaches to exploring WIL. Some groups focused on using established models and systems that have been tested in other areas (e.g., community engagement) extending those to a broader context of WIL, and others brought novel approaches to WIL research such as conversation analysis. The groups discussed the value of connecting WIL research to the wider scholarship of teaching and learning approaches, as well as continuing to bring new perspectives into our work. Our collective research discovered that much of the current WIL scholarship focuses on employability and career outcomes or, separately, on teaching and learning activities. Our hope is that these areas can be more deliberately connected in the future.

### **Shared barriers and benefits**

Much of the work in the literature and in our seminar focuses on barriers, facilitators, risks, and benefits, from the perspective of each stakeholder in the





WIL relationship. Although each stakeholder faces different challenges and makes unique gains, there is significant overlap and interrelation among them. Faculty tend to be focused on student success rather than their own, but do express the need for additional support and recognition of their work.

Faculty seem to either be a WIL champion or to have limited awareness of WIL. Supervisors focus on student educational gains, but also face organizational and training challenges as they engage in WIL. Students gain from WIL personally, academically, and professionally, but access to opportunities and financial barriers can be major challenges. Across stakeholders, simply being aware of WIL opportunities, being able to identify and define WIL, and knowing what makes quality WIL are challenges of their own. For WIL to continue to be valuable and relevant, both institutions and industry/community partners will need to embrace WIL and make it a part of their mission. It is essential for students to be at the heart of this mission, with appropriate support and resources being provided for students, academic mentors, and site supervisors alike.

### **“Wise” practice and adaptability**

Our research groups all highlighted issues related to equity and inclusion, a focus on well-being, and a need for flexibility and adaptability. Related to our common finding, WIL scholars Valencia-Forrester, Webb, and Backhaus (2019) suggest a move from “best” practice in WIL to “wise” practice that starts with shared values and principles and adjusts with the best interests and needs of each unique stakeholder. Wise practice includes attention to many complex issues in the WIL realm. For example, there is considerable attention to paid vs. unpaid opportunities and the impact that pay has on student access, and host organization supervisors—as people navigate complex interactions of identity and power structure in WIL. Attention to cultural safety and helping students to navigate their needs and identities in both academic and work contexts in essential work as WIL practices grow and evolve.

To summarize, we saw the need for communication, collaboration, and connection among stakeholders, with student voice as our central driving force.





# EMERGING WORK IN WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING

There are many emerging trends that are impacting the higher education landscape and the future of work. Trends in both of those areas will have an impact on WIL practice and research.

## **Reducing barriers for students in WIL**

Removing barriers and ensuring inclusion in WIL programs will continue to be an area of focus in the future. Understanding student perspectives, particularly of those from underrepresented backgrounds, on challenges to participating in WIL and the issues they face when they do participate in WIL, need more attention.

Additionally, there needs to be more attention from host organizations on examining processes for selecting students to better address sources of bias, and to provide support and accommodations where needed. Lastly, higher education institutions and host organizations need to consider how the design of the WIL programs may create barriers for groups of students when they are unpaid, full-time, and may require relocation.

## **Wellness and belonging for students**

As higher education institutions are increasingly strained to support students around mental health and wellness, the complexity of WIL courses and programs will add to the need for student support. It will be important to acknowledge that in many cases, WIL experiences will add to students' stress. This is one of the reasons that preparation for WIL experiences is so important.

Helping students navigate and adapt to the stress and pressure they experience during WIL helps to build resilience that will be needed in the future.

More research is needed to explore the connection between wellness and belonging in the WIL context and the ways that academic mentors and host organizations can work to create a sense of belonging for WIL students.

## **Support and recognition for academic mentors/faculty and external partners**

Future work should create opportunities for more faculty to engage with WIL in a variety of ways. From designing and supporting WIL experiences in their courses, to enhancing their curriculum by connecting to and integrating students' WIL experiences, to 1:1 career mentoring for students, higher education institutions who see the value in WIL should provide resources and develop mechanisms for recognizing those contributions as legitimate scholarship and service.

As there is a need to expand capacity in organizations to host or offer WIL experiences, there is a need for resources and recognition for workplace supervisors. There is often little training provided to supervisors of WIL students to help make the most of their experience and the student's experience and yet there is evidence of how this kind of supervisory relationship helps develop the management and leadership skills of the supervisor. There is an opportunity for higher education institutions to offer this type of support to WIL host supervisors who might benefit from that kind of training. When it comes to recognizing the role of the supervisor, while supervising a WIL student may not be the same as supervising other employees, there are not necessarily fewer challenges, but rather different challenges. Therefore, recognition for the responsibility should be equitable.

## WIL as more than employability

Employability is the most common outcome attributed to work-integrated learning programs. While employability is a multi-faceted concept often including a wide range of skills and attributes, WIL leads to more than just employability for WIL students. If focused on employability as the outcome of WIL, other key outcomes such as identity development and civic engagement are overlooked. Some types of WIL (such as service learning) do not see themselves as part of WIL, as employability isn't the key outcome of those types of programs or courses. While employability is an important and key outcome of many WIL programs, it is important to recognize that it is not the only outcome.

## Impacts of artificial intelligence (AI)

Generative AI is having a significant impact on higher education at the same time as it disrupts all corners of the economy. Within higher education, there are numerous ways that generative AI is impacting and will continue to impact work-integrated learning.

- *Selection/application process:* Students can be coached on how to effectively use AI in their job search and application preparation process. AI can help identify roles that they would be suitable for, and can help students align resumes and cover letters with those opportunities. There are ethical factors that need to be considered, including ensuring application materials are an accurate portrayal of students' skills and experiences, and care needs to be taken in the design and use of AI tools to ensure that biases are not introduced in the process.
- *Simulations and augmented reality:* Often there is a need for students to develop a certain level of skill in an area before they are ready for a WIL experience. In this way, simulations and augmented reality can be an excellent way to prepare students for what they may encounter in their WIL experiences.
- *Within host organizations:* Organizations that host WIL students will have different policies and practices with respect to the use of

technology and AI in the daily activities of their organization. With the usage of generative AI expanding at a rapid rate, students need to be prepared and educated on how to use it and be aware of the ethics and policies of use in their specific organization.

- *Reflection:* Reflective activities or assignments, often in written form, are commonly part of the design of WIL learning and, in some cases, assessment. Responses to written assignments where there isn't a "right" or verifiable answer are particularly susceptible to be generated by AI. Just as they do in their other academic courses, educators will need to scaffold and evaluate reflective learning experiences so that students deeply engage in the reflection and see the value of the exercise.

## RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

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## CITATION

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