CHAPTER 8: WORK INTEGRATED LEARNING

Work Integrated Learning (WIL) is an umbrella term used for a range of approaches and strategies that integrate theory with the practice of work within a purposefully designed curriculum, and through specifically designed co-curricular programs where students’ graduate capabilities are enhanced by co-curricular work experience and community engagement opportunities (Patrick, Peach, & Pocknee, 2009).

Curtin values authentic learning and is committed to developing graduate capabilities through embedding WIL in all courses. Established partnerships and flexible arrangements with industry enable the development of professional practice to be embedded within industry, promoting reciprocal and mutually beneficial outcomes. WIL supports the provision of authentic learning in a variety of settings, within curricula and co-curricular programs, enabling students to develop and maximise their graduate employability. WIL pedagogy supports the University’s endeavour to strengthen students’ capacity to develop work-ready skills through an aligned curriculum where development of Curtin’s Graduate Capabilities is scaffolded across the course. The WIL guidelines apply to all courses at Curtin, see http://curtin.edu.au/wil.

Graduate Employability and WIL

Australian industry defines employability as the “skills required not only to gain employment, but also to progress within an enterprise so as to achieve one’s potential and contribute successfully to enterprise strategic directions” (Commonwealth, 2002, p.3). The employability of Curtin graduates is of strategic importance to the University. Curtin aims to equip graduates with the necessary employability capabilities throughout their studies to ensure they are highly sought after by employers upon graduation.

Scaffolding WIL across the curriculum is a recognised strategy for enhancing students’ employability capabilities. All learning outcomes are aligned to Curtin’s Graduate Attributes and evidenced by authentic assessments that reflect workplace scenarios, thereby focussing on the acquisition of employability skills. The many Curtin degrees accredited by professional or industry bodies provide evidence for this approach.

To ascertain the effectiveness of a course in nurturing employability capabilities, Curtin administers the Graduate Employability Indicator Surveys (GEIs) when appropriate. The GEIs were developed as a result of an Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) Competitive Grant, Building course team capacity to enhance graduate employability (Oliver, Jones, Tucker & Ferns, 2011). The GEIs are a suite of three, online surveys, which gather the perceptions of graduates (of up to five years), employers and course teaching teams about fourteen graduate capabilities.

Authentic Assessment

Authentic assessment focuses on the integration of theoretical knowledge into practice. WIL tasks are assessed through innovative and authentic assessment practices that reflect the world of work and account for the complex, highly contextualised, unpredictable and variable outcomes of the WIL experience. Assessment is designed to ensure incremental achievement of learning outcomes, which are derived from Curtin’s Graduate Attributes. Ideally, all stakeholders, including staff, students, and community and industry partners, play an active role in the assessment process.
The learning design profile for WIL comprises practice opportunities enabling regular and robust feedback on performance to enhance students’ skill development. A variety of assessment approaches are used to enable practice in diverse settings. Reflection, both self- and peer, is pivotal to the development of work-ready skills through the realisation of strengths and limitations, and setting goals to address gaps in skills (Cooper, Orrell, & Bowden, 2010). See Chapter 9 for more information on assessment at Curtin.

WIL in the Curriculum

WIL is scaffolded across all Curtin courses through the constructive alignment of learning outcomes to Curtin’s Graduate Capabilities, ensuring a continuum of practice. Where possible, stakeholders such as students, industry partners, and community partners are involved in curriculum design and review. Authentic and real-world learning experiences are embedded in curricula to enhance employability outcomes for Curtin graduates and assure responsiveness to industry, society and global development that aligns to the University’s strategic vision and mission. WIL activities are situated in the institutional setting, workplace and/or community. Inclusive education principles and guidelines ensure equitable access, participation and progression in WIL for diverse student cohorts. WIL student experiences will value, acknowledge and apply cross-culturally appropriate practices. Reflection underpins generic skills considered highly desirable by employers and should be a component of the WIL experience enabling students to learn from exposure to practice. Given the diversity and range of WIL, courses adopt approaches and practices appropriate to the discipline and/or industry needs.

WIL activities may include work placements, fieldwork, industry-based projects, case studies, simulations, virtual simulations, reflective journals, problem-based learning, mentoring from industry partners, work-related presentations, role plays, laboratories, and capstone subjects and, where applicable, professional industry standards are incorporated in the curriculum design.

Co-curricular WIL

WIL opportunities that develop students’ employability capabilities may be provided through co-curricular opportunities such as: work experience, individual and group projects in the community, voluntary work, work shadowing or part time/vacation employment. Additional co-curricular opportunities for students may involve attendance at professional associations and industry events where information gathering, networking and professional culture and communication are practised. Important generic employability skills are developed through co-curricular WIL opportunities.

Partnerships for Work-Integrated Learning

What is a partnership?

A partnership is a group of individuals (or organisations) who share similar interests and are working collaboratively toward common goals. This involves engaging with key stakeholders both within and external to the University. It is expected that this type of engagement will take the form of mutually beneficial and reciprocal partnerships that apply and produce knowledge.

At Curtin, this may involve an individual forming a partnership with an individual or organisation from business and industry, or community, to provide engaged learning opportunities for students or
to achieve research and innovation outcomes. Such partnerships involve collaboration between the University and its broader communities for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources. Partnerships may also enrich the student experience by presenting opportunities for engaged citizenship and the strengthening of civic and public responsibility.

**The benefits of WIL partnerships are to:**
- enrich the teaching and learning experience
- enhance the curriculum
- enrich scholarship, research and innovation
- enhance the work-readiness of graduates
- build effective relationships with the University’s broader communities
- create and leverage connections that enable the exchange of knowledge and learning
- contribute to building healthy and caring communities
- enable sharing of resources, skills, knowledge and funding
- strengthen social, cultural and human capital
- contribute to the public good
- encourage responsibility towards community needs
- build a shared sense of commitment and responsibility
- accomplish work difficult to accomplish alone
- seek real, lasting and meaningful relationships with the community and our business and industry partners
- respect and build on the work of our partners.

**Characteristics of a successful partnership**
Successful partnerships demonstrate:
- an understanding of the purpose and the value of the University’s contribution – and the partner organisation
- institutional commitment
- good relationships
- shared leadership, responsibility and oversight
- collaboration among all partners and stakeholders
- mutual trust, respect, genuineness and commitment
- mutually beneficial and reciprocal actions
- clear and open communication and a common language
- representativeness
- clearly defined principles and processes established with the input of all partners
- strengths built upon and weaknesses addressed
- reciprocity of resources and rewards
- continuous feedback to improve processes and partnership
- balance of power among partners
- an understanding of intellectual property.
**Fieldwork**

Fieldwork is an aspect of WIL that incorporates approved practical work, teaching, study or research activity, usually conducted outside the normal place of University business, and required by the University as an integral part of the course. Fieldwork education includes, but is not limited to, clinical or practical work placements or activities; participation in laboratories; plant visits; industrial premises or site visits; practicums; study tours; field trips; work experience; service industry placements; isolated and remote fieldwork camps and/or excursions and international field trips/placements.

There are legislative, risk management, access and equity, and other important requirements to consider when organising fieldwork activities. For more information on fieldwork at Curtin see –

**Fieldwork Policy and Procedures:**

**Developing fieldwork coordinators as academic leaders at:**
http://academicleadership.curtin.edu.au/ALFCP/

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**Curtin’s ePortfolio and WIL**

Electronic Portfolios are gaining increasing attention as a mechanism for students to collate and showcase artefacts that provide evidence of skills and attributes acquired through curricula and extra-curricular experiences. The ePortfolio allows for different developmental phases and enables the demonstration of individual growth and development. ePortfolios are useful in a WIL context as a source that validates skill development over time. It can be shared with peers for gathering feedback; teaching staff for assessment purposes; and employers when applying for jobs.

**Contemporary Projects:**

Assessing the impact of work integrated learning (WIL) on student work-readiness
http://olt.curtin.edu.au/research/wil.cfm

WIL leadership
http://acen.edu.au/wil-leadership-project/

Building institutional capacity to enhance access, participation and progression in work integrated learning (WIL)
http://acen.edu.au/access-participation-progression/

Building Leadership Capacity for Work Integrated Learning: Developing Fieldwork Coordinators as Academic Leaders
http://academicleadership.curtin.edu.au/ALFCP
Chapter 8 References


