Confessions of a WIL Coordinator:

The Challenges and Opportunities

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Work Integrated Learning (WIL) is:

“An umbrella term for a range of approaches and strategies that integrate theory with the practice of work within a purposefully designed curriculum”

- Patrick, Peach, Pocknee, Webb, Fletcher and Pretto (2008)
Opening Thoughts

Although work experience is intrinsically beneficial, for educators the focus of WIL should be on the activity of learning.

Some considerations in design and delivery:

- Subject learning objectives
- Desired student outcomes (i.e. technical and generic skills)
- Assessment design and learning activities
- Program evaluation
Seminar Overview

① Higher Education Context

② The MGMT30012 Experience

③ Challenges and Opportunities for WIL

④ My Research Experience and Interest
Higher Education Context

WIL in Higher Education

WIL is a topical area of interest in higher education:

- **Pedagogy**: Recognition that the workplace as a unique and valuable learning environment for students.
- **Student Experiences**: Positive reports of enriched learning by students who have experience work-relevant learning *(ACER, 2008)*
- **Drivers**: Respond to demands by employers and policy-makers for work-ready graduates.

“Some employers believe that universities are providing students with a strong knowledge base but without the ability to intelligently apply that knowledge in the work setting. This is backed up by international research”

- Business Industry and Higher Education Collaboration Council (BIHECC)(2007)
Higher Education Context

Graduate Attributes and Employability

- Heightened public interest
  - Graduate unemployment worst since 1992-93 recession

- Generic skills and employer concerns
  - Universities failing to develop generic skills of students (Kavanagh & Drennan, 2008)
  - Educators prioritize technical skills over generic skills (Jones, 2009)

- WIL and career outcomes
  - Powerful vehicle for developing generic/professional skills (Knight, 2007)
  - Opportunity to improve student employability and work readiness (Murphy & Callway, 2006)
  - Industry appetite and readiness for WIL (ACCI/BCA, 2002; BIHECC, 2007; ACER, 2008)

Graduate job data for University of Melbourne (The Good Universities Guide, 2015)

Graduate Under- and unemployment rate, 1980-2015 (Grattan Institute, 2016)
The UoM Strategic Plan

- Australian universities are strengthening their commitment to WIL and are incorporating it in their strategic planning and policies.
- The University of Melbourne has identified WIL as a key mechanism for achieving two strategic priorities:

3.3 Career Outcomes
- Facilitate more work-integrated learning experiences for students, particularly at the postgraduate level, including internships, university-based research projects and graduate placement.

5.2 Industry Engagement
- Leverage existing industry partnerships to expand opportunities for work-integrated learning for our students.
Higher Education Context

Are WIL student outcomes over-hyped?

- The benefits of WIL has intuitive appeal as well as enthusiastic industry and university support
  - Few studies have evaluated the purported outcomes
- The anecdotal evidence from MGMT30012 has been compelling:

  “Participating in Management Consulting has by far been the greatest challenge yet in my commerce degree. It was an invaluable experience that has developed my professional and personal skill set, better equipped me for the future, and shown me the importance of a strong mindset when working on challenging tasks”
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A Glossy Overview
The MGMT30012 Experience

A Historical Overview

- MGMT30012 was first run in 2004:
  - First program of its kind within the Faculty and University
  - Template for similar subjects (e.g. GMC, MBP, GBP, Consulting Project, Applied Syndicate Project)
  - Subject size ranges from 60-120 per semester
  - 4-5 students per team

- From 2004-2014, the program structure remained largely unchanged in terms of:
  - Subject/learning objectives
  - Syllabus
  - Assessments
  - Resourcing
  - Administrative processes
Management Consulting 2.0

- MGMT30012 was significantly remodeled in 2015 to:
  - Re-balance administrative and teaching workload
  - Embed industry-based consulting methodologies
  - Streamline assessments (i.e. create nested assessments)

- Subject comprises of five inter-dependent elements:
  - Lectures
  - Lab Classes
  - Workshops
  - Coaching Sessions
  - Client Visits

The MGMT30012 Experience
Using Industry-Based Methodologies

- CASE: Kenan-Flagler Business School WIL Program
  - Student Teams Achieving Results (i.e. STAR Program)
  - Embeds ‘TEAM FOCUS’ methodology into syllabus
  - Students engage in content and process learning
The MGMT30012 Experience

Content and Process Learning

- MGMT30012 uses a standard consulting methodology
  - Structure problem solving
  - Provides a project and problem-solving architecture
  - Students are required to learn and to trust the process

“The autonomy and freedom of thought that we had over our individual project was a very great way to learn and think independently and not to be reliant on a textbook or our lecturer. I enjoyed attending the lectures, particularly in learning about how to structure my thoughts in a coherent and logical way.”

- MGMT30012 Student Feedback
The MGMT30012 Experience

MGMT30012 Syllabus

Week 1
The Consulting Mindset

Week 2
Evidence-Based Consulting

Week 3
Applied Secondary Research

Week 4
Coaching Session 1

Week 5
Generating Insights & Recommendations

Week 6
Writing Business Reports

Week 7
Presenting to Clients

Week 8
Coaching Session 2

Week 9
Coaching Session 3 (Project Presentation)

Week 10
Consulting Careers and Practice

Week 11
Peer Review of Deliverables

Week 12
Coaching Session 4

Technical Skills (Lecture/Workshop)
Soft Skills (Lecture/Workshop)
Structured Coaching
The MGMT30012 Experience

Subject Structure & Assessments

**Assessment 1a – Team Contract**
- Students team prepare a team contract by the end of week 1. Worth 5%.

**Assessment 2 – Workshop Participation & Attendance**
- Worth 10%

**Assessment 3 – Project Presentation**
- Project presentation in week 9 to deliver the key findings and recommendations based on the project aim and scope articulated in their project charter. Worth 15%.

**Assessment 5 – Client Evaluation**
- Client evaluation of individual student and team performance. Worth 10%.

**MGMT30012 Student Feedback**

“The lectures and workshops were a learning opportunity to discover [consulting] skills, and guided us throughout the process of consulting. The coaching sessions with the team coaches allowed us to gain direct constructive feedback on our work”

Although the assessments, especially the progress notes, were very annoying and tedious, they do help us to formulate the project in a better way and forces us to learn the consulting process effectively.”
Student Learning Outcomes

- Reported student benefits from WIL experiences:
  - Development of professional soft skills (e.g. business report writing, presentation skills, client management)
  - Awareness of workplace cultures and dynamics (e.g. professional behaviors, client-consultant conflicts)
  - Awareness of career options
  - Applying knowledge to real-world contexts
  - High performance teams
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Challenges and Opportunities for WIL

Challenges

▪ **Teaching approaches**
  - Emphasis ➔ teacher controlling the learning process vs. students managing their own learning
  - Challenge students’ learning mindsets

▪ **Coordination workload**
  - Adds considerable workload for academics
  - Not a ‘standard’ subject

▪ **Assessment tensions**
  - What client wants vs. what coordinator wants
  - Perspectives of ‘quality’ work

▪ **Equity and access**
  - Not all students are suited to project-based WIL
Opportunities

- **WIL Innovation**
  - Most FBE WIL offerings are variants of the same subject
  - Classroom-to-workplace vs. Workplace-to-classroom

- **Scale and specialization**
  - Cross-faculty programs (e.g. MAP)
  - Professional subjects designed around students’ work experiences (e.g. cadetships, vacation work)

- **Knowledge Sharing**
  - More active engagement with the WIL community (e.g. Australian Collaborative Education Network)

- **Differentiation**
  - Clients are ‘scarce resources’
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My Research Experience and Interest

Research Experience and Interests

▪ Cross-disciplinary research experience
  - Management education, social issues in management, organizational behavior, operations management, positive psychology
  - Research strength in qualitative methods but steering towards mixed-methods research

▪ Research and Practice Interests in Business Education
  - Work-integrated learning → learning design and evaluation
  - Graduate careers and employability → graduate attributes and generic skills
  - Contemplative inquiry / Community of inquiry → collaborative constructivism
  - Case based teaching → Instructional design and delivery
Thank You

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