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WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING (WIL) IN AUSTRALIAN
UNIVERSITIES:
THE CHALLENGES OF MAINSTREAMING WIL

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Work-integrated learning (WIL) in Australian Universities: the challenges of mainstreaming WIL

Introduction

Most Australian universities have recently strengthened their commitment to WIL through adding WIL to their strategic directions and re-shaping areas of the university to better manage and support WIL provision. This is occurring in the context of both an appreciation of Australia's labour and skills challenges as well as a greater recognition of the workplace as a unique and valuable learning environment for students. This paper explores how Australian Universities are presently conceiving WIL and attempts to draw some connections to Career Development Learning. Finally, this paper discusses some of the key challenges universities face in extending WIL provision to all fields of education.

Why the interest in WIL?

The current interest in WIL in higher education is closely linked to governments' and industries' concern with lifting workplace participation and productivity, addressing skills and labour shortages and keeping pace with increasing demand and intensifying international competition. Australia is facing major labour and skills shortages but has near to full employment with record low unemployment. In addition, an aging workforce means that there is an increasing need to keep the skills of employees current and relevant while they continue working.

All sectors of education are being asked to respond to Australia's labour and skills challenges. WIL has long been used as a pathway for work-readiness in professional education. Increasingly, however, WIL is being positioned as one of the key opportunities for improving the work-readiness of all graduates even in areas that have not traditionally been linked to clear employment outcomes.

A number of studies from the last decade have raised concerns about the work-readiness of graduates not in terms of graduates lack of disciplinary knowledge but in terms of their generic employability skills (ACNielsen Research Services 2000; ACCI/BCA 2002). A more recent Business Industry and Higher Education Collaboration Council (BIHECC) report which sought to provide advice to the Commonwealth Government on ways to improve employability skills observed that:

Broadly speaking industry representatives are satisfied with the technical or discipline-specific skills of graduates, but for some there is a perception that employability skills are under-developed. 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.(BIHECC 2007)

The report made clear recommendations which emphasise the particular role that WIL can play in advancing employability skills in higher education. It highlighted the need to: improve and increase access to WIL; encourage businesses to provide structured cadetships, and explicitly report on employability skills demonstrated through WIL (BIHECC 2007).

Universities Australia's recent proposal for an Australian Internship scheme also positions WIL as a strategy for enhancing national productivity and addressing growing skills shortages as well as for providing students with income support while they study (Universities Australia 2007, p.1). The proposal aims to provide for more university students from a broad range of disciplines including the liberal arts and social science, as well as more traditional areas such

as engineering, to undertake paid, structured work-based learning in industry during their studies.

For many students, if not most, a strong motivation for studying is entry or re-entry into work and a career. The CSHE First Year Experience Survey found over a decade of surveys that higher education 'students continue to see university as an important means of preparing them for a career' (Krause et al. 2005:v). There is also some indication that when students do undertake WIL, they generally find it beneficial. In a study at Griffith University, Crebert et al (2004) concluded that most graduates recognised the opportunities work based learning offered for the development of generic skills. In addition, they noted that 'data gathered in the course of the study suggested that there was a correlation between the graduates experience of work placement and the relative ease with which they made the transition from university to employment' (Crebert et al. 2004:155). The background paper expands on this point in more depth.

Despite the current emphasis on WIL in higher education, recent research has indicated that the proportion of students who engage in this type of learning while at university in Australia is relatively low. The AUSSE (ACER 2008) measured '*the extent to which learners have blended academic learning with workplace experience*' and found only 33.9% of Australia's higher education students reported blending academic learning and workplace experience. This varied across institutions, and generally mature age and later year students reporting greater blending. ¹This is interesting for a few reasons. Firstly, it indicates how topical WIL is at present. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, WIL is being framed within an 'engagement' construct as one of the activities and conditions likely to generate high quality learning. The Director of AUSSE makes this point when he stated that the results "suggest that students feel their educational experience has been most valuable when they are challenged to learn in a supportive environment and have encountered work-relevant learning experiences." (ACER, 2008)

The concept of 'employability' is not without complexities as McIlveen et al point out in their discussion paper. They draw attention to an important point that universities do not see their job as simply preparing graduates for work. Universities have dealt with the pressure to address employability skills development primarily through developing graduate attributes which have been variously conceived by universities but which generally embody the attributes they consider a well-rounded graduate to have. The recent BIHECC report noted that employability skills can usefully be seen as a subset of graduate attributes and not the other way around (BIHECC 2007). Implicit in these attributes is an understanding that career and employability are necessarily a lifetime learning and development process.

At VU for example, we are viewing employability as being embodied by a graduate who is:

Work ready– with a set of skills, knowledge and experiences to move seamlessly into work after VU, and

Career ready – with transferable skills and knowledge to manage their own way through the changing world of work, and

Future ready – with skills and capabilities to continue to learn, contribute and be adaptable as citizens of the changing world and their communities. (VU 2007)

¹ To use an international comparison 53 per cent of later-year US students had participated in a practicum, internship, fieldwork or clinical placement, while only 28 per cent of Australasian students had taken part in such an experience. This is based on results from a different category than that listed above which relates to a scale which was specifically developed for the AUSSE but has no equivalent in the NSSE on which the AUSSE was based.

WIL is not just about preparing students for work and careers, it is a teaching and learning approach which has the potential to provide a rich, active and contextualised learning experience for students which contributes to their engagement in learning. This is based on recognition that the workplace is a unique site for learning which affords learners different opportunities to learn than the lecture theatre or classroom does. It recognises that powerful learning can occur in workplaces and community settings. In this conception of WIL, it is not just about preparing students for their future careers (although this is undoubtedly one of the intended outcomes), but about students engaging in a range of different types of educationally purposeful experiences which are both experiential and self-directed.

As pedagogy, LiWC is a form of education that is grounded in experience as a basis for learning. There are a number of disciplines which inform the field of WIL. In particular experiential learning theories provide some clarity on the nature of the types of experience from which students can learn as well as the importance of critical reflection to ensuring the experience is meaningful. Kolb attempted to operationalise experiential learning by means of a four stage experiential learning cycle that included the stages of concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation (Kolb 1984:40). Kolb describes this approach as a '*holistic integrative perspective on learning* combining '*experience, perception, cognition and behaviour*' (Kolb 1984:21) Effectiveness of learning from experience is widely considered to hinge on the act of critical reflection on this experience as in Kolb's model.

This broader conception of WIL is demonstrated by VU's statement that Learning in the Workplace and Community (LiWC) initiatives will provide:

- Opportunities to experience theoretical concepts as they are applied in practice and to learn in contexts which present them (students) with similar challenges to their life after and outside VU will.
- Opportunities to develop and apply generic and transferable skills (as formulated as VU's Core Graduate Attributes and Employability Skills) in challenging situations.
- Opportunities to take responsibility for their own learning, through effective teaching and facilitation by academic and teaching staff, and informed and practicing workers, employers and community facilitators.(VU, 2007)

What is happening in Australian universities?

Work-integrated learning is already a fundamental part of the curriculum in some areas of professional education (e.g. Engineering, Nursing, Midwifery and Teaching). However, the interest in WIL is increasingly broader than these traditional areas. There is the notion that if WIL can be used in one discipline for enhancing learning, and enhancing graduate skills, this experience can inform other disciplines to achieve similar goals.

It has been noted that, 'The majority of universities in Australia are increasing their involvement in WIL, whether through placement-type WIL or through more broadly ensuring strong industry/community engagement in their course delivery. In the last few years, and even in the last few months, many universities have added WIL to their strategic directions, and are funding and reshaping elements within their institution to enable that increased focus.'² In a recent survey conducted by ACEN for the Carrick project 'Over 70% of respondents (representing 15 universities) rated the importance of WIL as falling between 7 and 10, with 1 being not very important, and 10 being of a high level strategic importance.' (Patrick 2008)

² This view has been expressed in personal communication by Joyce-Carol Patrick from Griffith University.

In Australia a number of universities have made substantial commitments to increasing WIL in most if not all disciplines. For example,

Making Learning in the Workplace & Community a universal feature of VU courses is one of the key commitments which will lead to a renewed VU by 2016. At least 25% of the learning in our courses will draw upon student workplace and/or community experience. (VU 2007)

All RMIT higher education bachelor awards will have one or more core courses totalling at least 24 credit points where WIL activities of Principle 1 above are the predominant assessments (RMIT 2007)

Griffith University have set a target of having '70% of degree programs with a component of work-integrated learning by 2010.' (Griffith University 2006)

While most Australian universities are increasing their involvement in WIL, there are variations in approaches. Some universities are emphasising engagement with community, especially their local community, as an important incentive for enhancing WIL, or more specifically service learning, in their universities. For example, both UWS and VU are highlighting service learning and community-based learning as a key way of engaging with the communities they are situated in as well as larger communities. UWS state, that 'Through such activities, working in partnership with our many and varied communities, we aim to contribute to the development, wellbeing and prosperity of the communities and regions we serve, starting with Greater Western Sydney (UWS website)³. In addition, Macquarie University recently announced their Global Future Program which also takes a community-based learning approach which aims:

to develop partnerships, both local and international, which make valuable contributions to communities, and which are mutually beneficial. Programs will be developed in conjunction with local community groups, regional and remote councils, Indigenous groups, and nations throughout the South Pacific and South East Asia. (Macquarie University website)

How are universities framing WIL?

The background paper for this symposium provides a thorough discussion of some of the terminology in this area which doesn't need to be re-stated in this paper. Instead this section discusses some of the ways different Australian universities are conceiving WIL.⁴

In a scan of Australian Universities websites and related policies, the term work-integrated learning (WIL) seems to be fairly commonly used to signify aspects of educational programs that are linked to work. Many universities have adopted WIL as their overarching or generic term or alternatively they are using other terms sometimes with the purpose of either differentiating their WIL programs or emphasising a particular aspect of their approach to WIL. The following list outlines how a small sample of Australian universities are framing WIL.

- Victoria University - Learning in the Workplace and Community (LiWC) is an umbrella term to include all activities, which use 'the workplace as a site for teaching and learning' (VU LIWC Policy 2007). Learning in the workplace and community refers to the practice of students engaging in learning in a workplace or a community setting. Learning activities that explicitly utilize work and community as an element of

³ University website addresses are detailed in the University resources and policies section of the bibliography.

⁴ Due to the fact that there is presently no central resource which details information on WIL, much of the information included in this section is based on university websites and other publicly accessible documents which may or may not be the most up-to-date source.

curriculum are therefore considered learning in the workplace and community, as are assessment practices and processes.(VU website)

- University of Western Sydney – Career and Cooperative Learning and Engaged Learning are both used at UWS. WIL related activities are a subset of 'engaged learning' at UWS. 'Engaged learning contexts can be situated within university settings...[and/or] community settings, for example internships, student-work placements, practica, clinical services, and academic service learning projects'... (UWS website)
- Flinders University - Work Integrated Learning (Practicum). 'Work Integrated Learning is the term normally used to describe educational activities that integrate theoretical learning with its application in the workplace.'(Flinders University website)
- Swinburne – Swinburne Professional Learning which includes Industry based learning (IBL), Co-operative Education Within Swinburne's Professional Learning Model, undergraduates undertake a range of experiential learning activities, receiving feedback on their development of generic skills while becoming increasingly capable in their chosen disciplines.(Swinburne University website)
- Griffith University – Work-integrated learning. 'Work-integrated learning is the term used to describe educational activities that integrate theoretical learning with its application in the workplace. These educational activities should provide a meaningful experience of the workplace application that is intentional, organised and recognised by the institution, in order to secure learning outcomes for the student that are both transferable and applied.'(Griffith University, *Definition of Work Integrated Learning* 2006)
- Queensland University of Technology – Work Integrated Learning 'Work-integrated learning, which provides opportunities for students to apply theoretical knowledge, develop and consolidate skills, reflect on practice, and develop an understanding of the relevant profession or related sectors is essential to providing real-world experiences. (QUT, *Work Integrated Learning Policy*, 2006)
- RMIT - Work Integrated Learning – 'The intent of this policy is to make a significant contribution to all our graduates' work- and industry-readiness: specifically their development of the core skills and capabilities of practice. The focus of this policy is for our students to 'learn by doing in context and with feedback'. Students learn how to 'put it all together' and deepen their knowledge of their own professional practice in realistic contexts. These Work Integrated learning (WIL) experiences and assessments provide students with the opportunity to develop the holistic capabilities of practice that employers and the community expect. The experience of the workplace, real or simulated, also improves the employability of our graduates.' (RMIT, *Work integrated Learning (WIL) at RMIT*, 2007)
- Murdoch University - Workplace Learning: 'A form of study where students undertake training and practical experience in a location physically different to the University to gain knowledge and skills in the field they are studying.' (Murdoch University, *Workplace Learning Policy*, 2007)

Generally within these generic terms universities are including a range of different approaches including cooperative education, work experience, placements, practicum, internships, field work, workplace projects, workplace research, work-based learning, sandwich years, and cadetships, community-based learning and service-learning. WIL activities can vary

substantially in terms of the type of participation, who arranges it, duration, timing within a course (in-term or vacation, first year to final year), relationship to other course content, elective or compulsory part of course, project or research based, assessment, remuneration and teaching/supervisory practices. In addition, the partnerships on which WIL are based can vary from more informal one off arrangements to highly formalised and collaborative relationships between the university and industry.

Given that WIL programs can vary so much in the way they are structured and some of the practices associated with them, what is it that makes them all WIL? As a generic term for activities of this sort, WIL is useful on one level because it does not denote a structure, duration or other features of the activity in the same way that many of the terms used in this area do. However, it is also valuable for another reason in that it ensures that learning is the focus of the activity, rather than work being intrinsically beneficial (though it may be). Arguably, this sets WIL apart from those activities such as 'work experience' where the aim may be for a student to simply experience another context. Griffith University on their website state 'Strictly speaking, WIL Programs do not include the kind of work experience 'outside and independent of the course of study' (e.g. part-time work at McDonalds or in supermarkets) (Griffith University website).

Generally, the emphasis across the board on WIL in Australian universities seems to be on structured, activities which integrate theory and practice. Many universities require WIL to be both embedded within a course and to be assessed and therefore accredited. Most universities provide some sort of advice for the practice in WIL of both a pedagogical and legal nature. The following are examples of how three universities are attempting to ensure good practice (in terms of pedagogical practice) in their WIL programs.⁵

- Murdoch University - The following principles must be applied to all instances of Workplace Learning:
 - (i) Equivalence – credit for Workplace Learning assumes equivalence in learning standards and outcomes to learning in units offered in non-workplace learning modes.
 - (ii) Focused learning - the workplace is the context for focused learning, determined by objectives and outcomes, under educational supervision
 - (iii) Educational supervision - guides the process of setting learning goals and engaging in reflection and assessment in relation to outcomes.
 - (iv) Academic control - workplace learning for credit at Murdoch University requires that Murdoch Heads of Schools that offer workplace learning units take responsibility for: ensuring appropriate academic standards in supervision and assessment, including where some elements of the supervisory process are delegated to an appropriately qualified external supervisor; and ensuring that placements are appropriate contexts through which to achieve these goals. (Murdoch University 2007)
- Victoria University - VU requires WIL to be an assessable component of the course because assessment provides evidence that learning has been achieved. VU developed a list of ten good practice guidelines based on a literature review of the field which all WIL programs should meet:
 1. The activity is beneficial for all parties: learner, university and partner organisation
 2. Learning in the workplace is an integral part of the curriculum

⁵ Flinders University - Flinders University produced a detailed 'Workplace Management Manual' which outlines a model of good practice in the preparation, placement and post placement phases of the WIL process. It is too lengthy to include in this discussion but can be sourced from: <http://www.flinders.edu.au/teach/t4l/practicum/resources/manual.pdf>

3. Intended learning outcomes that include generic attributes are clearly defined
 4. Critical reflection on learning from experiences in the workplace is an integral part of the activity
 5. Assessment tasks accurately reflect intended learning outcomes and emphasise authentic products and processes
 6. Assessment criteria, including levels and standards, are clearly defined
 7. All parties are adequately prepared for the activity
 8. Learners are supported in the workplace
 9. The quality of the activity is subject to continuous improvement
 10. The activity is resourced appropriately (Keating 2006)
- Griffith University - Griffith University requires WIL to encompass the following practice elements:
 - Work/Professional Experience-based, where the learning is in context with the student spending an appropriate period of time (for the mode of learning/WIL) in the work/professional environment, or engaged with workplace institutions, individuals or issues;
 - Relevant primarily to the student's area of academic study and, secondarily, to the student's career aspirations. Activities have definable academic underpinnings, and clear linkages with/to the knowledge/skill base of the qualification/education Program;
 - Productive, where the student does 'real work' that has a social/economic value or definable benefit to the employer/placement/community, and can be measured by either outcomes or assessment;
 - Structured, with formal (academic and placement) monitoring, supervision, direction (and assessment); and
 - Assessable, with assessments linked to specific areas of study/academic Program (for Academic Course Credit activities). (Griffith University, Definition of Work Integrated Learning 2006)

Organisational structure for WIL

Universities are organising and reshaping elements within their institution to support and facilitate WIL. In the Co-operative Education Manual produced by the Canadian Association for Co-operative Education it is noted that:

There are a number of organizational models and reporting relationships that can be used for the administration of co-operative education. Usually there are two options for a reporting relationship; one is to report to the academic side and the other is to report to the service side. (CAFCE, 2000 p.8)

They outline three key approaches to this: a centralized model; a decentralized model which situates co-op operations and personnel in the relevant academic unit, or thirdly a centralized/decentralized model which involves a centralized management to which the decentralized, academically-based personnel report (CAFCE, 2000 p.8-9). Australian universities are taking different approaches to this. The Swinburne Professional Learning (SPL) Unit reports to the teaching and learning Academic area whereas VU has a central unit reporting to the Careers Services area.

Career Development Learning (CDL) and WIL

Career development is defined by McIlveen et al in an Australian context broadly as the:

overarching term pertaining to deliberate activities that go toward the improvement of an individual's career. Career development can be conceived of as a professional activity performed by Career Development Practitioners and alike; it can also be conceived of as a subjective experience-in-process of developing one's career (McIlveen et al 2008, p. 38)

Most universities policies or statements on WIL articulate benefits to students in terms of their career development. This relates to career development as a subjective experience for a student rather than career development as a professional activity. Below is an example of how two universities have articulated the benefits to students including some CDL outcomes:

Flinders University	Griffith University
Development of the "soft" skills of Communication and Human Relations, Email and Writing skills, Punctuality and Attendance, Team Work, Leadership and Career Development.	Working in a setting in which theory is put into practice;
Working in a setting in which to put theory into practice;	Developing an awareness of work-place culture;
Developing an awareness of work-place culture and expectations;	An opportunity to develop a range of personal attributes;
An appreciation of the fluidity of a rapidly changing world of work;	Enhanced employment prospects;
An opportunity to develop a range of personal attributes;	Assistance in developing career strategies;
The development of key interactive attributes;	Awareness of opportunities and building up a network of contacts; and
Short-term financial benefits - some students are earning whilst studying,	Development of a portfolio of work experiences.
Enhanced employment prospects and the potential of commanding higher wages	
Assistance in developing career strategies,	
Awareness of opportunities and building up a network of contacts;	

Often WIL is specifically framed in terms of the potential for students' to develop and enhance their graduate attributes and capabilities. While aspects of CDL are generally embedded or at least implied in some of these capabilities, as are employability skills, for the most part they are not explicit nor are they necessarily a complete conception of CDL. This is reflected in the project background reading where it is stated that 'the systematic development of work integrated learning with integration of all career development elements and generic employment skills was not evident or well documented' (McIlveen et al, 2008 p. 7).

Universities are incorporating CDL into their WIL programs in various ways but some more explicitly than others. At VU the Learning in the Workplace and Community unit operates under the leadership of the Associate Director Learning for Work and sits within VU College which also incorporates Student Learning. The rationale for doing this was to ensure that career development was an intrinsic part of Learning in the Workplace and Community and vice versa. Swinburne University makes explicit links to CDL in their Swinburne Professional Learning Program through a *Careers in the Curriculum* unit which functions as a type of preparation for industry-based learning and placements. On their website they describe the unit as follows:

Careers in the Curriculum has been developed by Swinburne Careers and Employment which provides advice and feedback on completing job applications and

undergoing interviews, and is directed at both obtaining professional (Industry-Based Learning) placements and graduate employment. Careers in the Curriculum is a one semester compulsory unit normally undertaken in second year, in time to assist students to apply for IBL and other professional placements. The unit is tailored to the professional employment outcomes relevant to Swinburne's disciplines. (Swinburne University)

What challenges does WIL present to Australian universities?

There are a number of challenges to mainstreaming WIL in Universities. The key challenges include:

- Securing placements as WIL becomes more widespread
- Fitting in with industry needs, and becoming a partner with industry and business in their human resource development
- Skills and experience of academic and general staff
- Embedding WIL in pedagogy and courses
- Incorporating career development learning in WIL.
- Resource-intensiveness

The increasing interest in WIL in Australia undoubtedly creates more competition for places for students. A recent BIHECC report stated that the real challenge was to obtain

an increase in the total number of employers offering placements rather than just a sharing of available placements. (BIHECC 2007, p. 32.)

In the Universities Australia proposal on internships they suggest that the responsibility for increasing opportunities for structured placements is shared.

Naturally addressing industry work experience issues is not a matter solely in the hands of universities. Rather a range of government and industry responsibilities also pertain, implying a clear need for a partnership approach – rather than any simple presumption that universities alone can remedy this deficiency (Withers 2007, p. 3).

WIL is generally considered more likely to succeed as a learning experience if it is conceived of as a partnership in which the host organisation is involved in the planning and delivery and is committed to student learning. Lyons notes that a 'partnership means engagement in the design, delivery and review of learning' (Lyons 2006). Working with industry is a new role for many university staff and extending WIL provision means working with a whole range of industry and community organisations of all sizes which are to varying degrees committed to student learning. Maintaining academic standards and ensuring high quality learning outcomes for students in every placement is a challenge. There is a fine balance needed between meeting the demands of industry and community and meeting the universities requirements for high quality learning.

Anecdotally where WIL is optional there is often difficulty in getting students to engage in it. There are probably numerous reasons why this is often the case not least of all the need for students to support themselves financially while they study. The recent internship proposal addresses this constraint. However in a recent research project being conducted by VU, there is some indication from employers in certain industry areas where there are skills shortages that students may not be seeing the need for WIL because their perception is that they will have no difficulty obtaining jobs when they graduate (PEC, incomplete 2008). Conveying to students and academics in these areas the importance of viewing career as a complex lifelong experience not a one off decision is important.

Another fundamental challenge that WIL presents to universities relates to WIL as pedagogy. Embedding WIL in the curriculum in a way that produces good quality learning outcomes which address graduate attributes and employability skills is a significant challenge and requires a sophisticated understanding of the field. This is a challenge beyond universities playing a role in satisfying skills shortages and employability challenges. It is one of universities reframing their pedagogical approach to integrate theoretical, professional and experiential models of learning. Integrating WIL and CDL is also important, but so too is building recognition in universities of the centrality of learning and pedagogy in these areas and therefore their legitimate place in the educational planning and debate in universities.

WIL therefore requires academics who have not facilitated WIL before to adapt to a different teaching and learning context, one in which there is less emphasis on the teacher controlling the learning process and more emphasis on students managing their own learning processes. As Cooper et al point out the challenges to staff are significant.

Practicum coordination impacts considerably on the workloads and careers of academics in professions education because it involves multiple complex educational and legal responsibilities including duty of care. A broad scope of knowledge and skills is required for academics to undertake work so that placements are: educationally effective, ethical and legal; safe for students, host organisation and their clients; and enhance community/university/industry relationships and collaboration. (Cooper et al 2003)

Some Universities have created formal professional development programs for those new to the role. Flinders University run a 'Practicum (Work Integrated Learning) Management' program for those newly engaged in the field. However, it is not just an issue about academics developing the skills to manage and facilitate WIL effectively but also about academics being recognised and rewarded for their work in this area.

Reshaping elements of our universities in order to better facilitate and manage WIL is a key challenge that many universities are beginning to undertake. There are many areas of the university that can potentially be involved in supporting WIL (and CDL) practice, including the academic/course coordinator, school/faculty, a central WIL unit, academic support, careers services, external engagement office.

Lastly, WIL is undoubtedly resource intensive. The actual costs may vary with the particular type of WIL program and the setting but the transaction costs of maintaining partnerships with many employers, sourcing WIL opportunities, developing and evaluating curriculum for WIL and supporting a body of students who are geographically dispersed are considerable.

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