

CARRICK INSTITUTE : DISCIPLINE BASED INITIATIVES



Work Integrated Learning : A national framework for initiatives to support best practice

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Vignette title and details	<p>Work Integrated Learning Courses in the Bachelor of Business (Management)</p> <p>WIL 1 and 2 is composed of two single-semester courses in semesters five and six of the three-year Bachelor of Business (Management) degree.</p> <p>They form part of the Management specialisation in the Bachelor of Business degree. All Bachelor of Business degrees at RMIT have three and four year versions of the degree, except for Management. The four-year applied versions contain a one year co-operative education component, but Management does not offer this and instead offers two single-semester WIL courses.. In WIL 1 students develop and refine their project management, business research and managerial problem solving knowledge and tools. Additionally they advance their job application and search techniques in order to secure their own placements for WIL 2. In WIL 2 students work in a placement organisation for one day a week on their organisational problem-solving project. .</p>
Discipline	Business
Employment sector	Multi-sector
Student numbers	Approximately 158
Optional/compulsory	Courses are compulsory though students may apply for RPL. RPL granted if student can demonstrate application of academic learning and meeting of specific project requirements, not just work experience in the field.
Credit bearing	
Assessment	
Payment	In the majority of cases students are unpaid.

Number of staff involved	Four
Weblink	http://www.rmit.edu.au/bus/mgt/bbm
Key Words	Work integrated learning; problem solving; unpaid placement, industry based project, research, graduate employment capabilities, employability skills.

Overview

The Employability Skills Framework

'Employability skills for the future (DEST 2002¹) presents the findings of extensive research undertaken by the Business Council of Australia (BCA) and the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) in 2001. The report identified personal attributes required for today's employees, as well as eight employability skills.

'Employability skills are defined as 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.' (DEST 2002)

These skills were seen to have relevance to both entry-level and established employees. It was also recognised that the skills would be prioritised and adapted to suit various job-roles. The eight identified skills are:

- Communication skills that contribute to productive and harmonious relations between employees and customers
- Teamwork skills that contribute to productive working relationships and outcomes
- Problem solving skills that contribute to productive outcomes
- Self-management skills that contribute to employee satisfaction and growth
- Planning and organising skills that contribute to long-term and short-term strategic planning
- Technology skills that contribute to effective execution of tasks
- Life-long learning skills that contribute to ongoing improvement and expansion in employee and company operations and outcomes
- Initiative and enterprise skills that contribute to innovative outcomes.'

Structure of Program

Work Integrated Learning is designed to integrate students' academic studies with practical work experience. It is basically a two semester course which develops an understanding of the symbiotic relationship between theory and practice. In the first stage (WIL 1), students focus on a hypothetical issue emanating from a contemporary issue. Electric cars is a current theme being used for example enabling students to focus on a hypothetical case study written by the course co-ordinator that underpins the development and focus of many business and individual conceptual learning and teaching capabilities. In the first stage the emphasis is placed on the use of a case study that will require real research enabling the application of theoretical knowledge to develop skills. The case study is also used to describe a hypothetical company and students apply for graduate positions within simulated interviews to apply for positions within that company and prepare cover letters and CVs.

Students form consultant groups to identify and resolve problems the company may face thus developing their reflection and research skills. Emphasis is placed on the array of graduate capabilities/employability skills with a major focus on problem solving skills within WIL 1 and WIL 2.

Research indicates that Australian employers express a significant level of concern about student capacity in regard to this vital area underpinning learning, working, innovating competing, changing and sustaining. The second part of the course (WIL 2) is where students work in industry in either paid or unpaid positions to identify

¹ DEST 2002, *Employability skills for the future*, a report by the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Business Council of Australia for the Department of Education, Science and Training, Canberra.

an organisation problem and establish a goal to resolve that problem in conjunction with a supervisor/manager and identify the cost of the problem and the return on investment given the proposed solution from their research. This draws together theoretical knowledge practice with a business management academic context. Overall students engage in a variety of learning activities that are designed for the adult learner. These include group work exercises, assignments and presentations as well individual exercises, self assessments and assignments.

WIL 1 also concentrates on data and research pertaining to the labour market (both global and domestic). Key aspects relating to this area include an array of statistics, skills/vocational shortages, the ageing and subsequent new work practices to maintain skilled older workers in enterprises, reduced youth, apprenticeships/traineeships/professions and the array of differing staff who are crucial to enterprises including semi and unskilled staff, education levels, immigration, emigration, and so forth.

WIL 2 involves placements (paid and non-paid) in for profit and non-profit organisations to again identify a problem and establish strategies to partly or fully resolve that problem through various academic and practical processes. Employers are involved in identifying problems, solutions. They provide feedback to students. They can and occasionally do observe student presentations and read final reports. At times confidentiality and commercial in confidence contexts are observed. These aspects are used as assessment parameters.

Special features

WIL within the School of Management at RMIT is designed to test students' ability to demonstrate how theory informs practice and vice versa and to heighten their understanding of theory and practice and how it merges and is applied. 'Too frequently theory loses much of its vitality if it is uninformed by reflection on practice' (Raelin 2007, p495).²

Our aim is for students to

- understand and reflect on graduate attributes in terms of the students individual abilities and skills as well as colleagues and future subordinates as managers
- develop communication and introspection skills to improve the prospect of gaining employment at a professional level in fields related to the area of academic study – Business Management.
- understand the context and complexity of business academic theory and how it merges with practice and vice versa; and
- develop research techniques and strategies to resolve problems

² See Raelin J. 2007 Toward an Epistemology of Practice Academy of Management Learning & Education. Volume 6 No. 4 p. 495 -519