

"WORK INTEGRATED LEARNING: STUDENTS WANT MORE OF IT,  
AND EMPLOYERS ARE REALIZING THE POSSIBILITIES"

**ES**  
EDUCATED  
SOLUTIONS

**VOL. 11**

*Exploring the  
successes and  
struggles related  
to student  
employment in  
Ontario.*

**FEATURE**

*Can an arts and  
social sciences  
degree really lead  
to a good job?*

*By John Milloy  
Page 12*

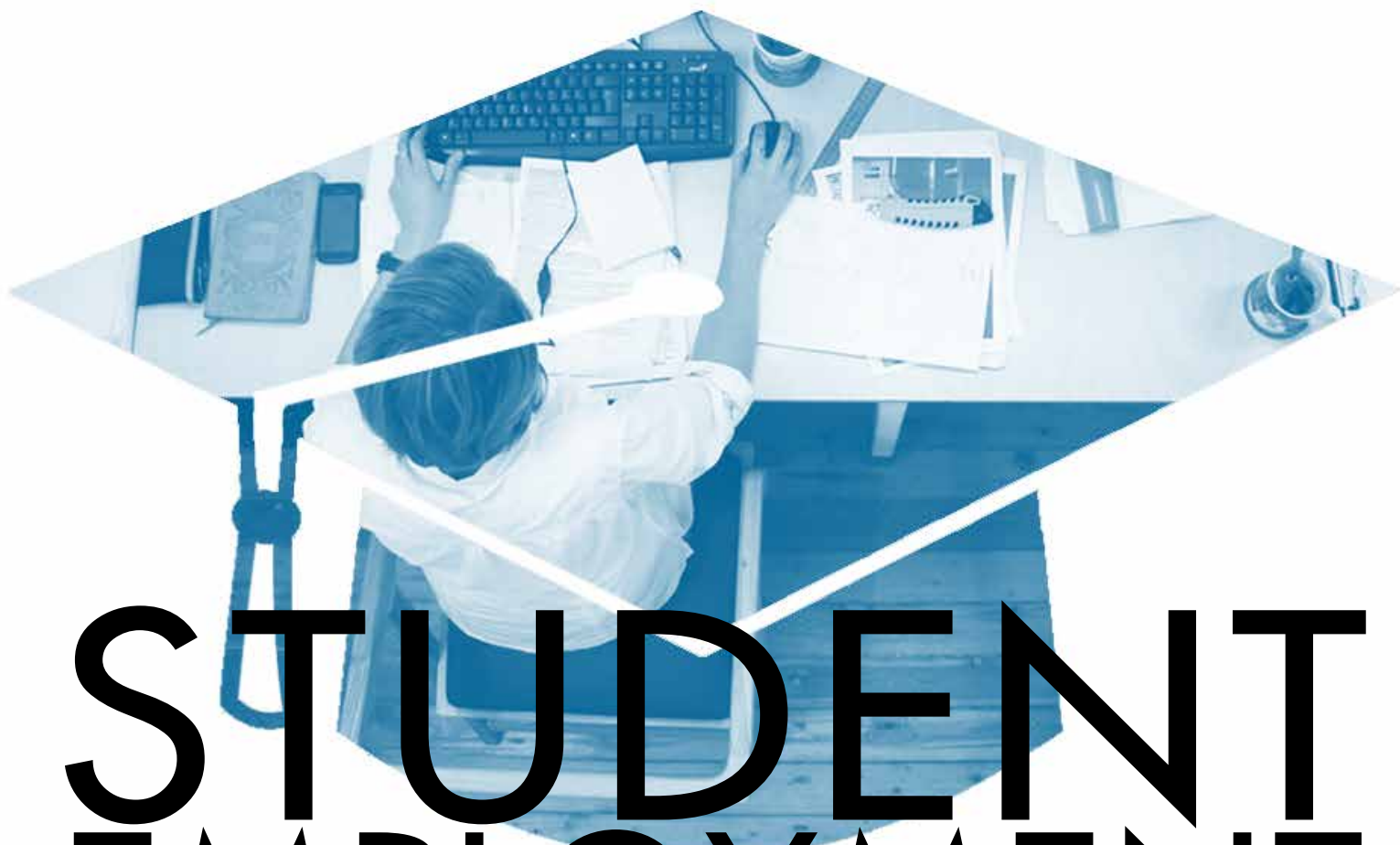
**PLUS**

"EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING:  
A PATHWAY FOR STUDENTS  
TO THEIR FUTURE"

"INSIGHTS INTO  
PROFESSIONAL STUDENT  
EMPLOYMENT"

"EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT  
& EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING"

WITH A FOREWORD FROM PREMIER KATHLEEN WYNNE



# STUDENT EMPLOYMENT

AN ONTARIO UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT ALLIANCE PUBLICATION

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Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance

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## FROM THE EDITOR



**COLIN  
AITCHISON**

*Research & Policy  
Analyst*

## FROM THE PRESIDENT



**ANDREW  
CLUBINE**

*President 2017-2018*

Welcome to Volume Eleven of *Educated Solutions*! This issue is called *Student Employment* and is aimed at exploring both the strengths and challenges the post-secondary education sector encounters as Ontario's students prepare to enter the workforce. To do so, we have brought together a diverse set of perspectives from across the post-secondary education sector to share their thoughts, expertise and experience on the topic.

Students' understanding and participation in "work" affects their university experience in many ways. Employment can serve as both a motivator and hindrance to academic success: it can teach valuable lessons, while also detracting from academic work. With the end goal of a successful career in mind, students often base many of their decisions during their studies on the hopes of getting their first interview for an entry-level position.

Despite these calculated decisions, many students are struggling to enter the workforce. Oftentimes, the term "skills-gap" is thrown around with employers stating that university education no longer provides the skill set necessary for graduates to be successful in the workforce. In reality, undergraduate education provides students with critical thinking, research, teamwork, and additional skills, which are vital to today's workforce.

Thank you to our authors for your contributions; your insight, time, and thoughts have given our sector much to consider!

For most of my undergraduate degree, I worked part-time during school terms and full-time over the summers. I held positions that were personally fulfilling and professionally enriching. I enjoyed working, but was often stressed about how much time it took away from my studies and worried about how my marks would be affected. As the cost of post-secondary education continues to rise and students continue to bear the brunt of these increases, more students are finding themselves in a similar position. Gone are the days when a summer job could cover most costs for the ensuing school year, so they seek employment to finance their education.

A recent OUSA survey suggests that students who study and work concurrently often see their in-study employment as being detrimental to their academic success. On the other hand, those who participated in work-integrated learning programs are more likely to see their employment as complementary to their studies. I suspect that this is because experiential learning programs, in general, can provide a paid work experience while mitigating some of the challenges normally associated with work-study arrangements. They are designed with students' academic schedules in mind and can provide additional benefits, such as professional development opportunities and career mentorship.

Given the increasing recognition of the benefits of experiential or work-integrated learning, it is important for all partners in higher education to work towards improving and expanding these opportunities. This volume of *Educated Solutions* brings together various viewpoints from across the sector and explores future possibilities for experiential or work-integrated learning in Ontario's universities. I am sure that you will find their contributions insightful and exciting.





# FOREWORD

PREMIER KATHLEEN WYNNE  
ON THE WORK THE PROVINCE  
IS DOING AROUND SKILLS  
DEVELOPMENT AND HER HIGHLY  
SKILLED WORKFORCE EXPERT  
PANEL.

## HON. KATHLEEN WYNNE

When I was a linguistics student at Queen's — racing between my dorm, lectures and track meets — how could I have guessed I would one day become Premier of Ontario?

No course or program would have readied me for what was to come, but that doesn't mean I wasn't prepared. During my time at Queen's, and then the University of Toronto, I learned how to listen to people and really hear their concerns. Through work and volunteering, I discovered the power of communities coming together.

Everyone deserves this chance to find what drives and inspires them, which is why we've made tuition free and more affordable for hundreds of thousands of students.

But these days just going to a university or college isn't enough. I hear from students that it's tough, between classes and exams, to feel like you're getting a real sense of the world you'll enter after graduation — the choices you'll need to make or challenges you'll face.

That's why, two years ago, I assembled a team of education and business experts to look at how we can help students explore the possibilities in our workforce. After hearing from instructors,

employers and student groups — including our partners at OUSA — this Highly Skilled Workforce Expert Panel released a final report this past June. I encourage you to read the report. At its centre is the idea that if we all — government, businesses and postsecondary institutions — create more opportunities for students to gain new experiences, you'll take full advantage of them.

Whether through co-ops, work-integrated learning or our new Career Kick-Start program, we want young people to feel prepared for the working world. There may be no way to predict the future, but when we work together to create a better postsecondary education system today, we can ready you for whatever the world throws your way.

*The Honourable  
Kathleen Wynne is the  
25th Premier of Ontario.  
She was first elected as  
the MPP for Don Valley  
West in 2003.*



## BALANCING THE MASSIFICATION OF EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING WITH INSTITUTIONAL DIFFERENTIATION

MARC GURRISI

Ontario's policy discourse consistently revolves around the notion of a 'skills gap'. Whether or not the notion of a 'skills gap' is an accurate representation of the province's labour market issues is outside of the scope of this article. Nevertheless, its impact on the broader policy discourse surrounding the quality of university education and metrics for student success is unquestionable. Employers are claiming that they are hiring recent graduates who lack fundamental skills needed for various positions, while the government is looking to universities to take leadership in preparing innovative graduates that are capable of stimulating the provincial economy. High school students further these perspectives, where many are opting to solely pursue degree programs that yield promising employment outcomes. Amidst this 'skills gap' discourse, the province seeks to hold universities to greater account, particularly when it comes to funding structures, as a means to find demonstrable links between budget allocations and outcomes.

One of the predominant developments the province has put forward in service of this intended outcome-based funding structure is the Differentiation Policy Framework. This policy seeks to utilize Strategic Mandate Agreements (SMAs) as a way to establish accountability measures, wherein institutions can only develop programming and request resources for areas in which they already display excellence. Ultimately, the end goal for such an exercise is to establish a diversity of university options for students to consider based on their unique needs and desired outcomes. While the first round of SMAs was just the beginning

of this process, it yielded an unsurprising result: currently, isomorphism and institutional homogeneity run rampant across Ontario's university sector. To put this into perspective, 18 out of Ontario's 20 universities listed experiential learning opportunities as one of their institutional strengths.

Another fundamental influence into the policy discourse to resolve the 'skills gap' came from the report published in 2016 by the Premier's Highly Skilled Workforce Expert Panel. Their assessment of the current landscape of Ontario's skilled labour market yielded a strong recommendation for all students in a post-secondary institution to have at least one experiential learning opportunity before graduation. This policy, arguably, would ensure that all students develop some form of work experience prior to completing their degree, and, as such, become more employable.

**"WHILE THE FIRST ROUND OF SMAs WAS JUST THE BEGINNING OF THIS PROCESS, IT YIELDED AN UNSURPRISING RESULT: CURRENTLY, ISOMORPHISM AND INSTITUTIONAL HOMOGENEITY RUN RAMPANT ACROSS ONTARIO'S UNIVERSITY SECTOR."**

The Government of Ontario has indicated that this is a policy strategy they want to implement in the post-secondary sector, though details of how or when this might be fully implemented remains to be seen. However, while such a policy may be beneficial to enhancing student employment in the long run, it does seem to fly in the face of the broader goal of achieving institutional differentiation in Ontario's university sector.

This begs the question: how might the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development (MAESD) pursue both strategies without one negating the other? Can institutions truly differentiate themselves while ensuring that all their respective students have had at least one experiential learning opportunity?

Answering this question is rather difficult at present, as these broader policy goals are only speculative in nature. Ontario still lacks an updated funding formula that directly incentivizes institutions to differentiate

based on their current strengths, and there is yet to be an official policy statement mandating that each university student must have at least one experiential learning opportunity before graduation. As such, we can only explore the relationship between these two policies in terms of their potentiality. Be that as it may, careful thinking about the interrelationship of these two policy goals certainly warrants the attention of MAESD, university administrators, university faculty and staff, parents, and prospective students alike.

One of the fundamental ways to avoid unnecessary duplication within the university sector's attempts to provide experiential learning opportunities would be to move away from an overreliance on co-op placements and internships. While these forms of experiential learning may be the most appealing to employers and students, they are also the most expensive and least sustainable from an operational standpoint. Co-op programs often come with large price tags for institutions to administer, which means students end up paying rising fees just to access these opportunities. As such, students from low-income families may be discouraged from pursuing these opportunities even if they're available. Furthermore, simply looking at just the sheer number of undergraduate students in Ontario (roughly 450,000), it would be a logistical nightmare to try and secure co-op placements for each of them. Moving away from looking at experiential learning as solely co-op placements or internships is also an important driver of diversity. For instance, since some institutions are more research intensive, it makes sense for their forms of experiential learning to encompass undergraduate research assistantships. On the other hand, an institution with greater commitments to access for Indigenous students might offer unique experiential learning opportunities that embrace Indigenous ways of knowing and involve community engagement. In short, experiential learning can and should take on many forms for all institutions. This would ensure that all students could reasonably be expected to have experiential learning opportunities, while their respective institutions remain accountable to a broader differentiation framework.

**"GRADUATING YOUNG ADULTS WITH AN AWARENESS OF LOCAL COMMUNITY NEEDS IS AN EFFECTIVE WAY TO PROMOTE EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING THAT IS DISTINCT WITHIN VARIOUS REGIONS."**

Another key element in balancing these two policy goals is to promote experiential learning opportunities that are relevant to the populations and communities in which each institution is located. Universities serving student populations in Sudbury should not be providing experiential learning opportunities that are prominent in Toronto, or vice versa. Each of these communities have regional labour market demands that require targeted experiential learning programs relevant to their respective contexts. This is especially important when research indicates that students may be more inclined to remain in the regions in which they studied when they have employment opportunities readily available upon graduation. Graduating young adults with an awareness of local community needs is an effective way to promote experiential learning that is distinct within various regions. Furthermore, it actively discourages the prominence of 'brain drains' from more rural and Northern parts of Ontario. And yet, transferability of skills developed through experiential learning cannot be forgotten about either. Transferable skills (i.e. teamwork, communication, perseverance, etc.) remain the most commonly cited attributes that employers feel are lacking in recent graduates. As such, all institutions would do well to ensure that these skillsets are at the forefront of their experiential learning programs in order to raise the competitiveness of Ontario's university graduates in all jurisdictions.

There is no question that striking a balance between the massification of experiential learning with a robust institutional differentiation framework is no easy task. The provincial government has set an ambitious target for itself. While this could be viewed as a reason to shy away from one or both of these initiatives, it is in the interest of the government and all publicly funded universities in Ontario to move forward with both. These two policies can enhance the overall quality and accountability of the Ontario university sector, while simultaneously putting to rest the 'skills gap' discourse dominating the current landscape.

*Marc Gurrisi is a Research & Policy Analyst with OUSA. He has a Master of Education from York University and a Master of Arts in Political Science from McMaster University. He also previously worked for the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.*





# ENVISIONING A 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY LIBERAL ARTS EDUCATION

**ROB LEONE**

In an economy, society needs people who have a broad range of skills and abilities. At the risk of oversimplifying things, it needs people who will do and make things, people who are specialists in a certain profession, strategic thinkers who oversee plans for improvement, innovators, and people who hold broad perspectives that can challenge existing orthodoxy. We expect those in this latter group to be critical thinkers and we expect people who hold these sorts of roles to have a solid background in the liberal arts.

The irony is, of course, that the link between critical thinking and liberal arts education is an orthodoxy that has itself yet to be challenged. Academics and policy makers keep making the claim that we cannot sacrifice the liberal arts, for if we do, we run the risk of losing people in the economy that provide us with perspective. This claim is made whenever there is a need for further investment in buildings, research or further research.

When I was at Queen's Park, I met with administrators and faculty all over Ontario, and it was hard to escape the inevitable discussion about support for the liberal arts. I heard over and over again that STEM subjects are important, but we cannot neglect the liberal arts. I believe many in the university sector were relieved that they had a critic at Queen's Park with a liberal arts PhD. However, the stats don't lie. Students want access to more hands-on programming, so I would always challenge delegations to brainstorm and problem solve.

Remarkably, the response to the request to brainstorm was uninspiring. It ranged from a renewed appeal that we need critical thinkers to changing course and program titles to make they sound sexier for millennials. I hate to admit it, but since I've returned to university teaching, the attitudes haven't changed all that much.

It would be highly instructive to rethink the liberal arts education by challenging the conventional orthodoxy of critical thinking. We should assess how skillful students have learned critically thinking upon completion of their undergraduate degrees. Anecdotally, I would say the critical thinking skills of BA grads is uneven, with the good ones going to graduate or professional studies and the others going into the workforce without the requisite ability to think critically, which negatively contributes to the perception that liberal arts grads aren't trained to do much at all. Thus, modernizing our approach to liberal arts education is actually quite critical.

There are a couple problems that liberal arts educators face. First, other disciplines have begun to understand the value of perspective. Engineering programs, for example, have discovered how powerful it is to combine traditional engineering professional training with liberal arts education, which is to say that they are teaching people to have a technical skill and perspective. The other major problem is that students and their parents are in the habit of being sequential thinkers. They believe going to school to become something is what you do, but in the end, that's a challenge for those in the liberal arts. People are in the habit of thinking that a person goes to school to become an accountant, a nurse, a lawyer, an engineer, and so on. And in that sense, most of my students will tell you they are in political science because they think it's a good gateway to law school, not to become a diplomat or bureaucrat.

To compound matters, Ontario's colleges are reporting that a large portion of their student body, in some cases close to 50% of students, have had either a completed university degree or partial completion. It is plausible that



## “SO HERE’S A REVOLUTIONARY IDEA. LET’S LISTEN TO WHAT STUDENTS REALLY WANT.”

such students, particularly those that didn’t finish a degree, just couldn’t meet the rigours of university education. However, it is equally plausible, particularly for students who have already completed university degrees, to go back and learn a hard skill that will land them a job. These students, as I’m fond of saying, are voting with their feet; they are creating an education that mixes theoretical knowledge with applied skills.

In response to this trend, universities have incorporated more experiential learning into their education. Experiential learning asks students to apply the theories they learn in the classroom to real-world experiences. In a sense, it tries to provide the applied learning aspects by exposing students to outside-the-classroom activities. Pedagogical innovations further push the envelope to create more student-centred learning. I like case studies, mock negotiations, and problem-based learning activities that transform the traditional lecture’s ‘sage on the stage’ approach that is still prominently featured in many liberal arts courses.

So here’s a revolutionary idea. Let’s listen to what students really want. Speak to the average graduating liberal arts student and hear what they have to say. They will say they enjoyed the subjects they learned about, some notable faculty members who taught them, and they will remember the projects, assignments, and exams that were either brutally difficult or tremendously inspiring. They will tell you they have written dozens of essays and were sick and tired of them, but preferred those exercises, assignments and projects that gave them something they can use in their jobs.

In addition to this, what we need to better understand is the portfolio of hard skills that employers are looking for once they graduate. Having had experience outside the academy in politics, I came up with a few. In my line of work, writing policy and legislative briefs instead of essays were far more impactful. Writing news releases that are less than a page long were equally important. I ask whether students can use their critical thinking skills purposefully in strategic planning. In one of my classes, students spend an entire semester writing components of an entire campaign plan, and many graduates have used this campaign plan in trying to find political work or work in public affairs. We spend a lot of time making and defending an argument through essays and debates, but in the labour force it isn’t necessarily about making and defending an argument more than it is about negotiating between parties so that everyone comes out with a better outcome. I have set up mock negotiations to teach students the difference between zero sum positions (where a win by one party corresponds to a loss by another), compromise, and consensus. It is the sort of skill that many may find useful in their work.

Talk to graduates – not the ones who go on to graduate school or other professional school, but the ones that go into the labour force – they will tell you what they needed to learn quickly that they didn’t get for the \$40 000 they spent on their brand new BA.

A 21st century liberal arts education may not be framed in terms of the traditional disciplines, but for the jobs that may be open to social science and humanities graduates in government, business and the third sector. Imagine if we organized our courses in terms of skills required to be a political staffer, policy advisor, public affairs advisor, non-profit administrator, immigration consultant or diplomat. It would cater to the public understanding of what liberal arts graduates do, where they work, and the skills they offer in the broader economy.

Society may be ready for a transformation of liberal arts education, but are educators? Only time will tell.

*Rob Leone was the MPP for Cambridge and served as the Critic for Training, Colleges & Universities. He is currently an Assistant Professor of Political Science at Western University, and is the Director of Ontario Programs at Niagara University.*





# UPDATING THE ESA: SETTING A NEW STANDARD FOR STUDENT EMPLOYMENT

VICTORIA LEWARNE

***“This mistreatment is apparent in the growth of unpaid internships, apprenticeships, and so on. With work-study students’ tasks mirroring those of regular employees, there is no basis for this disparity. Yes, it is true that students do receive course credit in exchange. However, the inconsistency between hours worked and credits provided is widespread.”***

In with the new, and out with the old. The cycle of students who enter – and exit – work-study, co-op, or work-integrated learning (WIL) programs is practically endless. These experiential learning opportunities provide such a unique chance for individuals to interact with the work force first-hand, while gaining the necessary competencies to successfully transition into full time employment after their impending graduation. However, all too often, students maintain the belief that in order to gain valuable experience they must face a period of vulnerability. This notion has become a romanticized vision of millennial youth. How has this image emerged, and who has deemed it acceptable?

In Ontario, workers rely on the Employment Standards Act (ESA) to provide them with protection. Through this Act, the minimum standards for most workplaces in Ontario are set out in law. This includes, but is not limited to, minimum wage of employees, minimum hours of work, rights to personal leave, and benefit plans. One may say that it works tirelessly to prevent the mistreatment of Ontarian employees. This is, unfortunately, not always the case.

What often remains unclear are the rights and responsibilities students are afforded under the ESA when they are participating in WIL programs administered by their university or college. The ESA explicitly excludes “individuals performing work under a program approved by a college of applied arts and technology or university.” This is particularly problematic as it exposes students to potential mistreatment and exploitation in the workforce.

This mistreatment is apparent in the growth of unpaid internships, apprenticeships, and so on. With work-study students’ tasks mirroring those of regular employees, there is no basis for this disparity. Yes, it is true that students do receive course credit in exchange. However, the inconsistency between hours worked and credits provided is widespread. With the time allocated to a full-time WIL opportunity vastly outweighing the learning hours of a standard course credit, student work is being valued at a lower level than their colleagues.

There have been notable strides toward improving the rights of students in co-op programs. For instance, in 2014 Bill-18, Stronger Workplaces for a Stronger Economy, was enacted in order to provide greater protection under the Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA) to those participating in experiential learning opportunities. The amendments to this bill redefine what it means to be a ‘worker’ in Ontario to

IT IS CLEAR THAT AS A RESULT OF LOOPHOLES IN THE LEGAL SYSTEM, THOSE UNDERGOING A WIL OPPORTUNITY ARE BECOMING INCREASINGLY VULNERABLE TO MISTREATMENT. THIS DEVALUATION OF STUDENT LABOUR IS NO LONGER ACCEPTABLE AND IT IS HIGH TIME FOR THE SYSTEM OF SKILLS TRANSLATION TO UNDERGO TRANSFORMATION.

include those who undergo an unpaid internship through a college or university program. Thus, these individuals are now afforded coverage under the OHSA.

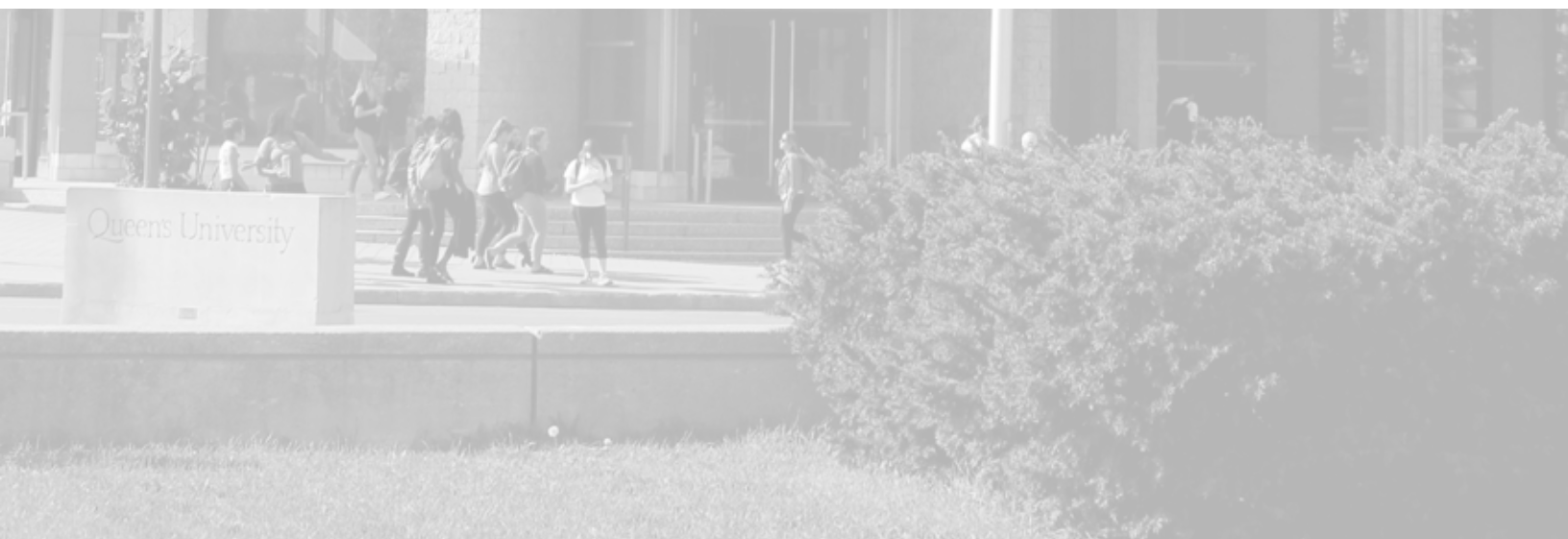
While there have been positive movements toward closing legal loopholes, there is still much to be done in order to create a balanced and safe working environment for students. The solution seems rather clear, the government of Ontario ought to amend the ESA, Pat III, Section 3(5) by striking Line 2, which states that “an individual who performs work under a programs approved by a college of applied arts and technology or university,” is not protected under this Act. This is not a standalone statement. In 2014 MPP Peggy Sattler spoke out against the restrictions against students in the ESA through the Greater Protection for Interns and Vulnerable Employees Act. However, after its introduction and success during the First Reading, little has been done to advocate on behalf of this issue.

Ultimately, we as a society need to overcome the perception that the development of workplace competencies is equal to that of employee rights and protections. It is clear that as a result of loopholes in the legal system, those undergoing a WIL opportunity are becoming increasingly vulnerable to mistreatment. This

devaluation of student labour is no longer acceptable and it is high time for the system of skills translation to undergo transformation. This is especially pertinent in light of the Premier’s Highly Skilled Workforce Expert Panel recommendation to ensure all high school and postsecondary students experience at least one WIL opportunity before graduation. If the provincial government wants to seriously pursue this policy initiative, it must do so only after the proper rights and protections are secured through the ESA.



*Victoria Lewarne is a recent graduate of Political Studies at Queen's University, with a focus on international relations. She is currently serving as the Academic Affairs Commissioner for the Alma Mater Society.*





# CAN AN ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES DEGREE REALLY LEAD TO A GOOD JOB?



JOHN MILLOY

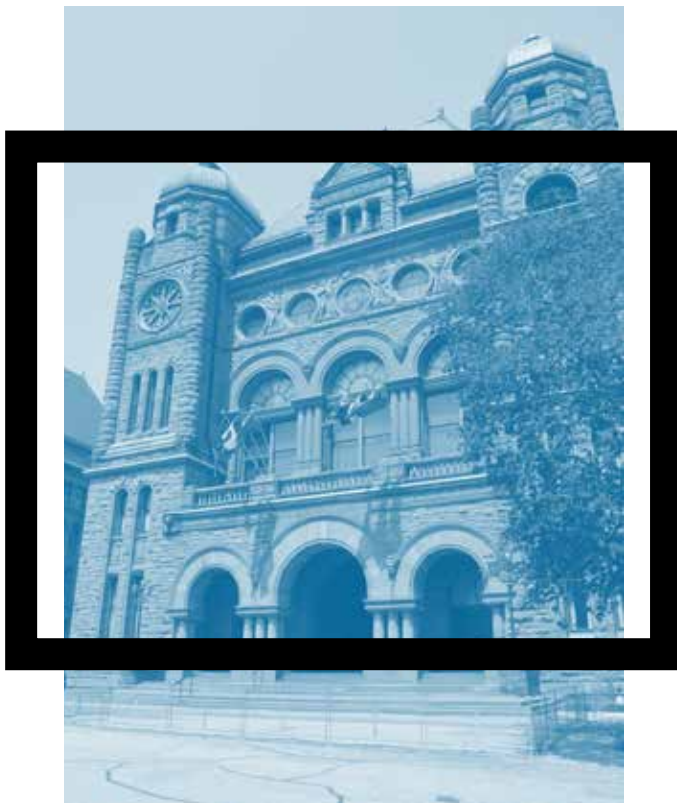
**S**hould arts and social science students abandon all hope and quickly transfer to business, computer science, or engineering? Or should they be confident about finding a good job in the current world of work?

Hearing that question reminds me of a mid-1980s comic that chronicled the comings and goings of an eccentric family.

The father asks his son what he has decided to choose as his major in university. When the boy responds, “history,” Dad asks whether it will be easy to get a good job with a history degree. “No,” the young student responds, “but it will help me become a great Trivial Pursuit player.”

As a young history undergraduate at the time, I got a good laugh from that particular strip which seemed to populate every history professor’s bulletin board at my university. Back then I didn’t necessarily disagree with the sentiment behind the comic. Although I loved history, I didn’t really believe it would lead anywhere in terms of employment. I decided, however, to be a rebel and pursue an arts degree anyway.

I was wrong. Arts and social sciences degrees are great preparation for the world of work. And they are becoming even more relevant in the current knowledge economy.



Admittedly that perspective is not always an easy sell. But it was something I tried to advocate strongly for during my tenure as Ontario's Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. And it's something that I continue to proclaim in my new role within the university system as a teacher of primarily arts and social sciences' students and director of an academic centre in the arts and social sciences field.

Making the case for that bundle of subjects loosely called arts and social sciences must begin with the specific knowledge students gain. Whether we are talking about history, languages, philosophy, theology, gender or Indigenous studies, we need citizens with an understanding of these important subjects to help interpret and analyze the rapidly changing world around us.

But that's not all. It is also about gaining a variety of transferable skills and competencies that prepare students well for future employment.

I always begin with communication skills, particularly writing. As a politician, I employed many recent arts and social sciences graduates. I was also in contact with the many employed in the public sector, broader public service as well as groups, organizations and businesses advocating with the government. I cannot overstate the value of anyone who could write clearly and succinctly.

It is not a minor skill!

I often tell students of the many talented people I have encountered who were held back from career advancement by poor writing skills. I also speak of people of mediocre ability who have progressed quickly because they were good writers. And it's not just written communication. The ability to make strong arguments orally in both formal and informal settings can often be one of the drivers of success in many career paths.

And learning to communicate well is one of the cornerstones of most arts and social sciences programs. The many hours spent writing research papers and seminar presentations are designed to help hone excellent communication skills that will payoff later in life.

It's easy to continue cataloguing a whole range of transferable skills and competencies gained in

*“Whether we are talking about history, languages, philosophy, theology, gender or Indigenous studies, we need citizens with an understanding of these important subjects to help interpret and analyze the rapidly changing world around us.”*

the arts and social sciences field including: critical thinking; problem solving; the ability to work in teams as well as engage in continuous learning.

But let me focus on two trends that give arts and social sciences students a real edge in the knowledge economy. The first is the struggle that many employers face in trying to deal with the absolute deluge of information circulating in the world today – the volume of which seems to be growing exponentially. It takes a certain skill set not to become overwhelmed and set to work distilling vast quantities of information into something manageable. Enter the arts and social sciences graduate. Someone who has spent their entire academic career learning how to analyze huge amounts of information and express their findings in relatively short papers or presentations.

The other trend is that of “fake news” or “alternative facts”. Arts and social science graduates have the potential to be at the vanguard of the fight for the truth.

One of the most important skills that I learned as an arts undergrad was not to believe everything that I read. There is nothing easy about

challenging information that is presented strongly and authoritatively whether in a book, article or on the web – which is why we have so many competing versions of events out there. And yet so much of our arts and social sciences training is about questioning the accepted version as well as ensuring that we support our arguments with evidence, not opinion.

I admit that little of what I have written is startlingly novel or earth shattering. Professors have been making similar cases to their students for years. Unfortunately, students haven't always been listening – something we have been hearing from employers.

As a follow-up to the report of the Premier's Highly Skilled Workforce Expert Panel, Wilfrid Laurier's Political Science Department held a policy dialogue between university administrators, faculty, alumni, students and the employer community. Although the session focused primarily on experiential learning outside of the classroom, much of what was heard applies equally to what happens within the formal course setting.

The consensus at the meeting was clear. Students are gaining valuable skills and competencies, both within and outside of their courses, but are often unaware that it is occurring. This is hurting students in two ways. First, it prevents them from maximizing the benefits of their learning experience. When you fully understand the skills that you are developing from a particular academic exercise and can reflect upon the experience, you gain much more.

More importantly, this lack of awareness is preventing graduates from adequately selling themselves to potential employers by properly presenting the skills and competencies they have gained and making a solid link to the needs of those looking to hire.

This lack of awareness is a serious issue that is holding many graduates back, particularly in the arts and social sciences field. The good news is that there is a growing awareness within the university community of the need to arm students with a more complete understanding of their learning experience. I have been delighted with the work taking place at Wilfrid Laurier University to create a better understanding among students of the link between their experiences with the development of transferable skills and competencies. I have also been impressed with efforts to give graduates, particularly in the arts and social sciences field, better tools to make the case to potential employers. And I know that WLU is not alone. They are being joined by institutions across the province that are better preparing students to make their case to the world.

So, arts and social sciences students – be confident. Your degree is not only going to equip you with important knowledge, but it is going to prepare you well for the new world of work. I speak from experience. My history degree has served me well in a varied career that spans government, politics and academia. I am also not that bad at Trivial Pursuit.

**"THERE IS NOTHING EASY ABOUT CHALLENGING INFORMATION THAT IS PRESENTED STRONGLY AND AUTHORITATIVELY WHETHER IN A BOOK, ARTICLE OR ON THE WEB – WHICH IS WHY WE HAVE SO MANY COMPETING VERSIONS OF EVENTS OUT THERE."**



*John Milloy is a former MPP and Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities for Ontario. He is currently serving as the Director of the Centre for Public Ethics and assistant professor of public ethics at Waterloo Lutheran Seminary, and the inaugural practitioner in residence in Wilfrid Laurier University's Political Science department. He is also a lecturer in the University of Waterloo's Master of Public Service Program.*



# EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING:

## *A Pathway for Students to their Future*

**DAVID MCMURRAY & JAN BASSO**

There has and continues to be a lot of talk on our campuses and in our communities about Experiential Learning. It seems like everyone including government, academic administrators, faculty, staff, parents, students, and employers are keen about the kind of deep learning and substantial outcomes that come from doing.

At Laurier, the institutional foundation for Experiential Learning is firmly secured in the university's identity for "Inspiring Lives of Leadership and Purpose", the institutional proposition that is designed to reflect its educational ethos, the unique experience of its students, and the responsible actions of its graduates. This holistic educational approach affirms our obligation to deliver an enriching and engaging academic and personal learning experience that considers the student as a whole. It is educationally intentional and engages students in meaningful ways through application, reflection, and synthesis, all having a powerful influence on student success.

Much of the current discussion surrounding Experiential Learning is that it is not particularly easy to define. Recent efforts however have been focused on doing just that, to make it clear what it is, where it takes place, and what impact results. In Laurier's case, Experiential Learning involves student engagement in experiences and reflection through which individuals have the opportunity to expand knowledge, develop skills, clarify values, increase their self-awareness, and explore career options.

Laurier aims to connect Experiential Learning, as a major pillar of the current Strategic Academic Plan, with program learning outcomes and the creation of opportunities for all students. Experiential Learning extends beyond the curriculum and embraces co-curricular experiences both on and off campus. In all cases, these experiences include the integration of learning through reflection. The result... when learning in and beyond the classroom is integrated, active, and focused on the whole student, the level of student engagement is extraordinary! The challenge that we are focused on addressing head on is to enhance the student's awareness of the important skills and competencies they are developing, and how they can best articulate these outcomes clearly, concisely, and with confidence.

**“WHETHER STUDENTS DEVELOP SKILLS IN A WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENT, THROUGH VOLUNTEERISM, AS LEADERS IN STUDENT CLUBS AND ASSOCIATIONS, AS RESIDENCE LIFE STAFF, THROUGH TEAM-BASED PROJECT WORK IN THEIR CLASSROOMS, AS LAB INSTRUCTORS OR RESEARCH ASSISTANTS FOR EXAMPLE, THEY ARE DEVELOPING SKILLS THAT EMPLOYERS ARE SEEKING.”**

Laurier has a clear mandate to lead the field in high impact, innovative, and engaged teaching and learning strategies. Exceptional faculty design and deliver instructional pedagogies in response to this aspiration. And, the administrative organizational structure complements this imperative with overall responsibility for teaching and learning shared between the Vice President: Academic and the Vice President: Student Affairs.

Further, the identity Laurier has established for its commitment to Experiential Learning and Career Development is a bold statement that positions Laurier in a leadership role in post-secondary education. The appointment of the Assistant Vice President: Experiential Learning and Career Development and the accompanying portfolio articulates clearly the understanding that we as an institution have about the connection between experiential learning and career development that emphasizes the intersection of curricular and co-curricular learning. The evidence based competencies framework developed purposefully to support this work is a further testament to the intentional expectations we have in the way in which our graduates are not only prepared for the workplace, but how they will flourish.

Of key importance to the majority of students is the relationship between education and their future... how well their experience at college or university has prepared them to enter the labour market. The

lack of experience is often a critical challenge faced by students but so too, is their ability to articulate their competencies and skills in terminology that resonates with employers. Experiential Learning responds to both of these challenges.

Whether students develop skills in a workplace environment, through volunteerism, as leaders in student clubs and associations, as residence life staff, through team-based project work in their classrooms, as lab instructors or research assistants for example, they are developing skills that employers are seeking. However, reflection on those activities is critical to assist students in understanding what they are learning to make meaning of their experiences.

Considerable research has been conducted and published on skills employers are seeking in candidates. When reviewed, competencies and skills often expressed include communication, collaboration and teamwork, critical thinking, problem solving, technological ability, functional knowledge (i.e. discipline and/or job specific skills), and professional attributes such as time management, organizational skills, and a strong work ethic. These can all be learned through both curricular and co-curricular experiences, but guiding students through the process of reflecting on skill development to prepare them for the job search process is important.

Importantly, Experiential Learning is not just about securing employment. It can also be about becoming more self-aware, learning about what values you hold as a person, developing intercultural competencies, and understanding your contribution to society and the community in which you live. It is about expanding your knowledge base, applying what is being learned in the classroom, and integrating that knowledge into approaches in the future.

Post-secondary educational institutions are well-prepared to offer a breadth of Experiential Learning opportunities from which students can choose. Curricular examples of these range from work-integrated learning programs such as co-operative education which alternates learning in the classroom with learning in a work environment; community service-learning which often connects course content to experience in the not-for-profit sector; field placements and practicum in professional programs such as education and social work; field experiences in disciplines such as Environmental Studies and Archaeology; and



other in-course program experiences such as case exercises and survey design.

On the co-curricular side of the spectrum, there are many on-campus work experiences available to students such as administrative, service and program development roles; Work-Study positions which support students in financial need; and international student work experience programs. In addition, many institutions recruit students into both paid and volunteer peer leadership and peer advising roles. Student government positions and leadership roles in student associations are also excellent opportunities through which students learn by doing. Mentorship programs and job shadowing experiences are often of a shorter duration but of significant value. Volunteerism in the local community provides students with an opportunity to learn but also contributes to a community organization's goals. Underpinning all of these opportunities is the need to ensure a quality learning experience for the student through intentional institutional programming, assessment and measurement of outcomes.

As a leader in the field of co-curricular records, Laurier has recently launched a new Experiential

Learning platform in partnership with Orbis Communications. The highlight of this platform for students involves the introduction of the Laurier Experience Record. This new Record encompasses both curricular and co-curricular experiences in which students have been engaged. The Record is a more comprehensive recognition that captures student engagement, reflection, the identification of developed competences, and the ability for students to plan their own unique pathway to gain relevant experience. At the same time, the Record provides rich data enabling institutions to measure and advance Experiential Learning programming on the campus.

The era for Experiential Learning is upon us... for learning, for career development, and to meet the recruiting needs of employers.

What can students do? The possibilities are plentiful... it's just a matter of doing!



*David McMurray is the Vice President, Student Affairs at Wilfrid Laurier University. An accomplished, award winning student affairs and services professional, David has successfully implemented strategies in a wide variety of student affairs, services and experiential learning venues achieving high standards of excellence, innovation and recognition.*



*Jan Basso is the Assistant Vice President: Experiential Learning & Career Development at Wilfrid Laurier University. An award winning career education professional, she has held multiple leadership roles in national organizations related to the field of career development including the Canadian Association of Educators and Employers and the Canadian Education & Research Institute for Counselling.*



# EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT & EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

DR. AMIT CHAKMA

IN AN INCREASINGLY KNOWLEDGE DRIVEN AND GLOBAL ECONOMY, THE IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION HAS NEVER BEEN AS GREAT AS IT IS TODAY AND WILL BE TOMORROW.

The methods of dissemination and acquiring knowledge also continue to evolve, albeit slowly. Core skills any university-educated person must possess, including literacy, numeracy and critical thinking, will never change. On the other hand, sectors of our economy requiring specialized knowledge, such as engineering, law, medicine, music and technology, will continue progressing at an ever-faster place.

Nations need jobs and good jobs to thrive and Canada is no exception. There is a strongly held myth in some quarters, however, that the education system is not meeting Canada's employment needs because it is failing to produce graduates who are "job ready". The slogan they use is "people without jobs and jobs without people".

That slogan may be valid for non-university graduates but the evidence for university graduates is exactly the opposite. The probability of a university graduate being unemployed or under employed is low.

What is true is that some businesses are being hobbled because they can't find people with the required skills to fill good jobs is true. This has resulted in a growing demand by various stakeholders to increase "experiential learning" with a primary focus on "co-operative education".

While experiential learning can help prepare graduates for the job market, it is not possible to draw a straight line connecting hands-on learning and job market needs. Experiential learning should be looked at more broadly as an effective tool in enhancing the learning experience of students in areas where applied skills are desired.

Waterloo has the best-known co-op education model in Canada, where students alternate between four months of study and four months of work. It is important to also recognize that there are many different paths to experiential learning. For example, the very real challenges businesses face today are brought to life in classrooms at Western and elsewhere through the Ivey Business School's case method of teaching.

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"THE CURRENT MARKET FOR CO-OP AND INTERNSHIP OPPORTUNITIES IS ALSO OVERSATURATED. IT IS INCREASINGLY CHALLENGING FOR STUDENTS TO FIND **MEANINGFUL CO-OP EMPLOYMENT** IN CANADA. MANY, AND PARTICULARLY THOSE IN THE IT SECTOR, ARE HAVING TO GO THE UNITED STATES TO FIND CO-OP PLACEMENTS.

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The table below shows the employment rates of graduates of three prominent Ontario universities, who started their university education in 2012. (Source: CUDO)

	<b>EMPLOYMENT 6 MONTHS AFTER GRADUATION</b>	<b>EMPLOYMENT 12 MONTHS AFTER GRADUATION</b>	<b>ENTRANCE AVERAGE GRADE</b>
<b>QUEEN'S</b>	<b>91.00</b>	<b>94.81</b>	<b>89.00</b>
<b>WATERLOO</b>	<b>87.21</b>	<b>94.14</b>	<b>88.20</b>
<b>WESTERN</b>	<b>88.52</b>	<b>94.00</b>	<b>88.90</b>

Nearly half of Waterloo students are in co-op programs, whereas only a small portion of students at Queen's and Western participate in co-op programs. The fact that Waterloo's employment rate, six months after graduation, is lower than for Queen's and Western graduates, means one could make the case that average entering grades are a better proxy for gaining employment than co-op experience.

In the following table, employment rates of engineering graduates are compared for the three universities. Co-op is mandatory for all Waterloo engineering students. (Source: CUDO).

	<b>EMPLOYMENT 6 MONTHS AFTER GRADUATION</b>	<b>EMPLOYMENT 12 MONTHS AFTER GRADUATION</b>	<b>ENTRANCE AVERAGE GRADE</b>
<b>QUEEN'S</b>	<b>87.55</b>	<b>93.36</b>	<b>90.60</b>
<b>WATERLOO</b>	<b>91.77</b>	<b>96.91</b>	<b>91.00</b>
<b>WESTERN</b>	<b>90.14</b>	<b>95.83</b>	<b>89.20</b>

Again, there is a correlation between employment rates and entrance average grades, and it doesn't prove that co-op education produces higher employment rates.

This is not to say that students don't gain tremendous benefits from co-op education. More universities should be encouraged to create work-integrated learning programs on a large scale. The point is that co-op education on its own is not a panacea to ensure students come out of universities with the exact skills employers are seeking at that specific moment in time.

The many forms experiential learning takes, including co-op education, should be a priority but that won't happen until we first understand the hurdles standing in the way.

The current market for co-op and internship opportunities is also oversaturated. It is increasingly challenging for students to find meaningful co-op employment in Canada. Many, and particularly those in the IT sector, are having to go the United States to find co-op placements.

That is not surprising, given that between 2006 and 2015, Ontario experienced total annual job growth of 0.82 percent, while Ontario universities granted over 30 percent more degrees during the same period. The fact the university graduate rate out paces the growth in jobs so substantially not only impacts full-time employment rates but also the availability of co-op or internship opportunities for our students.

We need the private sector to create more co-op and internship opportunities but that requires employers recognizing their current and future talent needs, as well as their willingness to investment in talent development. There needs to be agreement that students participating in work-integrated learning provide value to those businesses and all meaningful work should be paid work.

The federal government has taken a welcome step with plans to invest \$73 million as an incentive for private sector companies to hire 10,000 students, over the next four years, in areas such as information and communication technology, aerospace and aviation, the environment, and biotechnology and business. However, students studying non-STEM related courses can also benefit from intern opportunities.

Small and medium enterprises create most of the job growth, but these businesses have not traditionally been very active in co-op education, in part because of the cost.

Offering direct government subsidies to businesses, as the federal government plans, provides a strong incentive to participate.

Knowing there is a solid increase in meaningful positions available would, in turn, encourage more universities to get involved. But given that co-op and internship programs costs nearly 20 percent more to operate, universities will first need incremental resources to launch or expand experiential learning.

All of these obstacles can be overcome and the investment required will be more than repaid from the benefits a nation accrues from a workforce that is, not only capable of filling current job openings, but also has the knowledge and skills to keep creating employment opportunities for others.

The primary role of universities is not to educate our students so they can land a job today that won't even exist a decade later. Rather universities must continue to focus on basic and fundamental knowledge, as well as skill sets, that will enable students to thrive in a changing world.

If universities, businesses and governments collaborated to create a range of experiential and work-integrated opportunities open to all students, the result would be flexible life-long learners able to adjust to the constantly changing job market. And that's where Canada's competitive advantage lies.

*Dr. Amit Chakma is the 10th President & Vice Chancellor of Western University. He previously served as Vice President, Academic & Provost at the University of Waterloo.*





EXPERIENCES THAT HELP STUDENTS TRANSLATE LEARNING INTO REAL WORLD SCENARIOS ARE CALLED

# WORK INTEGRATED LEARNING (WIL)

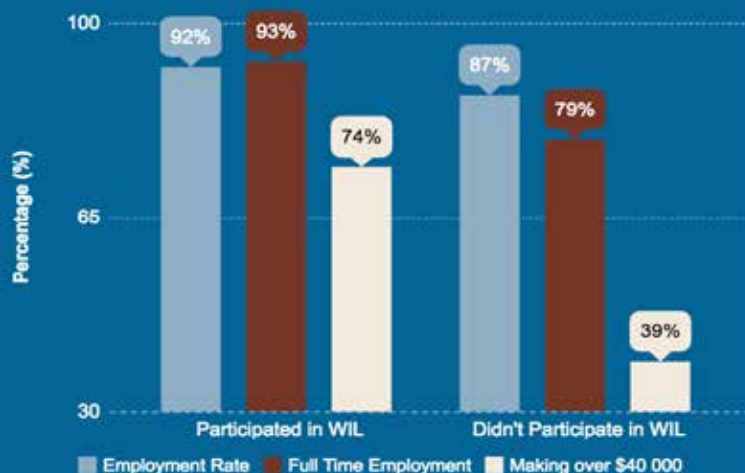
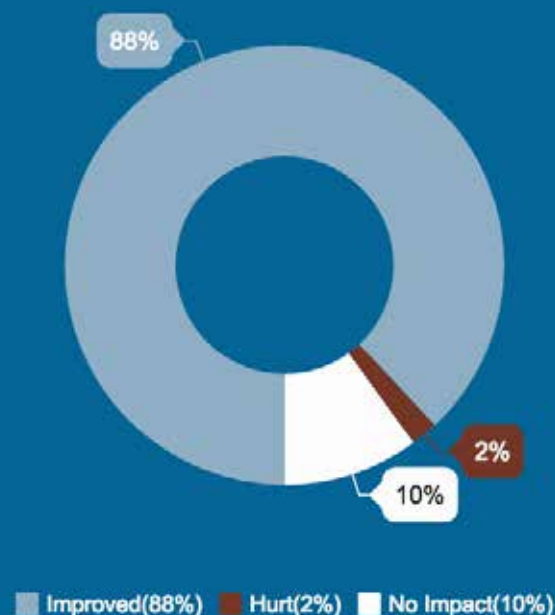
IT'S A VARIETY OF OPPORTUNITIES THAT HELP STUDENTS TO GROW, APPLY THEMSELVES, GAIN IMPORTANT SKILLS FOR SUCCESS, AND EXPLORE DIFFERENT CAREER PATHS.



Co-op is only one of these experiences and is not fit for every program.

**ACCORDING TO HEQCO, WIL PARTICIPANTS IN UNIVERSITY ARE MORE LIKELY TO HAVE A JOB ARRANGED BEFORE FINISHING THEIR DEGREE.**

88% of students feel WIL improves their post-secondary experience.



Participation in WIL leads to higher employment rates that are more likely to be full-time compared to non-WIL participants.

This employment is also more likely to be related to the subject matter studied.

WIL participants also earn more after graduation.

\*Data taken from the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development.

# INSIGHTS INTO PROFESSIONAL STUDENT EMPLOYMENT

*an interview with Stephen Franchetto,  
Giuliana Guarna & Roch Goulet*

AS ONTARIO PREPARES TO BETTER EQUIP UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS FOR THE WORKFORCE OF TOMORROW, OUSA WANTED TO SIT DOWN WITH PROFESSIONAL STUDENTS TO DISCUSS THE SUCCESSES AND CHALLENGES THEY EXPERIENCED DURING THEIR PROGRAM.

TO DO SO, OUR EDITOR MET WITH STEPHEN FRANCHETTO, A WESTERN LAW ALUMNUS, GIULIANA GUARNA, A MCMASTER MEDICAL STUDENT, AND ROCH GOULET, A LAURENTIAN CONCURRENT EDUCATION STUDENT TO DISCUSS THEIR EXPERIENCES REGARDING PROFESSIONAL STUDENT EMPLOYMENT AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT.

***Educated Solutions: Recently the government committed to ensuring that every Ontario student receives at least one work-integrated or experiential learning opportunity while attending a post-secondary institution. Within the post-secondary sector, much of the discourse around this initiative has been around preparing undergraduate and college students for the workforce. Have you heard of any initiatives targeted towards professional students?***

Stephen Franchetto (SF): I haven't heard of any government-sponsored initiatives targeted towards law students in particular. That being said, with a significant number of law students entering law school with particular career aspirations in mind (some of that undoubtedly because many individuals enter law school with some prior work experience), work-integrated/experiential learning (WIL) opportunities are available in law schools and the legal community.

To provide a few examples, most law schools offer legal clinics in a variety of areas such as: traditional legal aid for low income persons, criminal, estates, immigration, start-up and small businesses, and dispute resolution to name a few. Western also recently began offering short-term "internships" for course credit during the year (one working with Western's in-house counsel, another offering the opportunity to clerk for Superior Court judges in London or Toronto) as well as capstones and curriculum streams for particular areas of the law. Finally, many professors hire students as Research Assistants during the summer.

Additionally, the legal "industry" traditionally hires students in the summer, using a model that resembles a co-op term. These are (usually) paid positions and offer students the opportunity to gain experience in legal practice before they graduate.

***Educated Solutions: Do you believe that WIL during an undergraduate degree also helps prepare students for professional studies?***

SF: Absolutely. From my co-op placements, to my volunteer and work experience in general, these opportunities helped prepare me for my law school career and current articling position. My co-op terms gave me an opportunity to learn how the professional services industry works in practice, providing context to the theoretical concepts learned in the classroom. My undergraduate WIL opportunities prepared me for

professional studies by giving me a solid foundation of knowledge and skills in areas that were not taught in law school, such as financial statement analysis. Furthermore, my work and volunteer experience created the opportunity to develop the "soft skills" like teamwork, networking, and being detail-oriented that are transferable, and expected, in law school.

Giuliana Guarna (GG): Yes. I believe that WIL is integral to entering any workforce. WIL gives students the opportunity to develop a skillset outside of the classroom. A number of these skills developed will be transferable skills that are critical to success in any field. I think, most importantly, WIL allows you to work in new teams and environments, something that will happen over and over in professional studies.

Roch Goulet (RG): While I can't speak from a graduate perspective, I can certainly say that WIL opportunities have been valuable as a prospective teacher. The skillsets developed through WIL opportunities alone help any student prepare to enter the work force. The same can be said for professional programs, such as teaching.

***ES: So, did your program provide you with WIL opportunities such as a work placement, practicum or co-op? Or did you find your own WIL opportunities to develop the skills necessary for your future careers?***

SF: WIL opportunities were not "provided" in the sense that students were given a WIL experience; however, they were available for students to apply for. WIL was not mandatory. Western did not arrange the placements.

Often, WIL took the form of an extracurricular activity or an option that students could pursue. I volunteered for the Western Business Law Clinic and Sport Solution Legal Clinic. I also completed the Higher Education Internship, spending a month shadowing and working for Western University's in-house counsel. I took advantage of Western Law's new Corporate Law Curriculum Stream, which focused on the mechanics of the early stage of a business acquisition, providing an opportunity to practice the legal drafting skills that are often used in practice. Finally, I spent the summer between my second and third years of law school working at Gowling WLG in Toronto, an international full-service firm, giving me exposure to legal practice in corporate law.



GG: Given the nature of medical school, absolutely! All medical students are required to complete a certain number of weeks in clinical placement to obtain our license to practice medicine. What is unique about my medical school is that we have other opportunities for WIL. Firstly, we had a mandatory 18-hour family medicine placement early in medical school. This allowed us to develop some of our physical and clinical exam skills in a low stress and supportive environment. Secondly, we are able to do observer-like placements at our leisure to either consolidate past learning, create new learning opportunities, or to rule in/out future specialities. Overall, I find the nature of medicine requires WIL for success.

WIL HELPS TO CONSOLIDATE PAST CLASSROOM LEARNING AND MAKES IT **COME TO LIFE**. IT IS SO MUCH EASIER TO REMEMBER PATHOPHYSIOLOGY WHEN YOU CAN REMEMBER A SPECIFIC PATIENT OR CASE, AS OPPOSED TO JUST LEARNING ABOUT IT IN LECTURE OR READING ABOUT IT.

RG: My undergraduate degree has required me to complete 4 total practicum sessions. As I begin my last year, I will be completing two more of these before I enter my professional school in the Fall of 2018. Each practicum was mandatory and Laurentian only provides arrangements for the first two.

*ES: Roch and Giuliana, you both mentioned that you had mandatory placements, while Stephen you mentioned that you worked at Gowling WLG one summer and completed an internship through Western. Were you financially compensated for these placements, or were they unpaid placements?*

SF: I was financially compensated for my summer at Gowling WLG. None of the other WIL experiences were compensated. That being said, the internship and capstone class both were completed for academic credit and taken in lieu of traditional academic classes, so there was no “burden” on my studies.

Also, participating legal clinics required dedicated time outside the classroom, in addition to my studies. While this likely placed a burden on my academic obligations, the impact was not significant, and well worth the learning experience I received.

GG: We are not compensated for placements. At times, placements can be up to an hour away and any transportation/housing costs are the students’ responsibility. Medicine is kind of unique in this way.

RG: No, we are not financially compensated. However, the knowledge acquired through my experience was very relevant to my field of study, which softened the overall burden to my studies.

*ES: How do you believe WIL can help complement your studies as an education, medical or legal student?*

SF: WIL complements the learning that occurs in law school by providing opportunities to learn about the practice of law and how law can be applied to particular challenges. This experience is invaluable for two reasons. First, law firms, and lawyers in general, are focused on adding value for their clients. Practicing the application of theoretical knowledge to real problems is incredibly important to understanding what clients are looking for, how lawyers can help them, and how you can contribute as you begin your career. Second, while the legal industry is adapting, law schools still primarily focus on theoretical learning, rather than practical applications. WIL is important because it fills a need that the law school curriculum is not fully addressing. WIL is particularly valuable for students specializing in corporate law, as I did, because moot court experiences cannot capture the work a corporate lawyer traditionally does.

GG: It helps to consolidate past classroom learning and makes it come to life. It is so much easier to remember pathophysiology when you can remember a specific patient or case, as opposed to just learning about it in lecture or reading about it. It's also really helpful in deciding which specialties you do or do not want to pursue in the future.

RG: I think the most beneficial aspect of WIL for an education student is the networking aspect of it. Our practicum placements place us directly in educational institutions, providing us with a vast network of experienced professionals. We often rely on these individuals to help us find future opportunities can be very beneficial as an education student as you are working with experienced professionals, so WIL helps unlock the power of networking and allows us to engage with the professional community.

**ES: Do you believe that the WIL opportunities provided by your program have helped you prepare for your future/current career?**

SF: Yes, summering at Gowling WLG, where I am now articling, provided a valuable glimpse into legal practice, case management, problem-solving, client relations, and provided me with new feedback on the technical aspects of legal work. Beyond the obvious, the internship and capstone were helpful and interesting, giving me an opportunity to gain exposure to a range of career options, gain perspective on the mechanics of corporate transactions, and consolidate the learning that occurred throughout law school. Working in legal clinics provided opportunities to think critically about issues, make decisions affecting real clients, and understand some of the challenges associated with legal practice. All of these provided perspective and knowledge that will be transferable as I begin my legal career.

GG: Yes! There are so many opportunities for on-the-job training. Plus the nature of medicine is that after medical school, we spend anywhere from 2-5 years doing more specialized on-the-job training. More than any other profession, WIL is a core component of our learning process.

RG: I do believe that my experience with WIL, throughout my program, has prepared me for my future career. With the connections made from WIL, I have the references that makes my application that much stronger over other candidates.

**ES: Is there anything you would change about the structure of your program's work-integrated learning opportunities?**

SF: As the program didn't have a set or required WIL program, I'd say, in general, law schools should continue to invest in WIL. In particular, longer internships and further developed capstone courses would be beneficial.

RG: Throughout my undergraduate degree, I have yet to be placed in a classroom despite being an education student. While I do believe my experiences are still valuable, I would recommend that there be more of an incentive for supervisors to increase the amount of opportunities for students. Overall though, the subject of WIL is a great topic that merits future conversation. It's an experience worth investing into as the benefits definitely outweigh its potential inconveniences for an institution. I appreciate everything Laurentian has done for me thus far, and hope they continue to utilize the unique education experience that WIL brings.

**ES: Thanks again for taking the time to discuss your personal experiences. I think the insight you have provided helps paint a broad overview of work-integrated learning in Ontario's professional programs.**



*Stephen Franchetto holds a JD from Western University and a BBA from Wilfrid Laurier University. He previously served as Chair of the Board of the University Students' Council of Western University and as Vice President: University Affairs of the Wilfrid Laurier University Students' Union.*



*Giuliana Guarna is a medical student at the Michael G. DeGroote School of Medicine. She holds a BSc from McMaster University and previously served as Vice President Administration & CAO of the McMaster Students Union.*



*Roch Goulet is a psychology and concurrent education student at Laurentian University. He is currently serving as the President of the Laurentian University Students' General Association.*

*\*The interviews have been edited for clarity.*



# Building WIL programs isn't an exercise in corporate philanthropy

Apprenticeships, co-ops, internships or field placements. Applied research projects, service learning, bootcamps and hackathons. Call it experiential learning, out of classroom knowledge, or work-integrated learning (WIL), the challenge remains the same - students want more of it, and employers are realizing the possibilities.

Currently, aggregated studies suggest that about half of Canadian university students, and 65 to 70 per cent of college students, take part in some form of work-integrated learning. The problem isn't an issue of demand – an Abacus Data study on work-integrated learning found that 89 per cent of students support more work-integrated learning programs, a fact supported by OUSA's research. Rather, we suffer from a lack of supply. Despite widespread appeal, institutions and industries aren't offering enough opportunities.

Employers are on the same page. A 2015 survey of major Canadian companies conducted by the Business Council of Canada emphasized how WIL helps students kick-start their careers, with one noting that “the mix of on-the-job experience and exposure, combined with their education, prepares them well for the workforce.”

Launched in 2015, the Business/Higher Education Roundtable (BHER) represents some of Canada's largest companies and leading post-secondary institutions. Although partnerships between higher education and industry have existed in other countries for decades – including the U.K., U.S. and Australia – Canada has lacked a coordinated strategy to strengthening cooperation between employers and educators.

Building high-quality WIL placements isn't an exercise in corporate philanthropy – it's a savvy way for smart businesses to navigate future challenges. Benefits of a WIL program for employer participants include:

## 1. A TALENT PIPELINE

When banks, insurers and other financial services companies analyzed potential problems, the answer was clear: not enough talent to navigate the disruptive impacts of artificial intelligence, big data and global pressures. Enter ASPIRE, a WIL initiative launched through the Toronto Financial Services Alliance to help companies meet, train and work alongside potential new recruits

## 3. BRIDGING POTENTIAL PARTNERS

In March 2016 IBM, Hamilton Health Services and McMaster University launched a collaborative research initiative focused on healthcare innovation, a type of industry/academic research partnership that could have huge benefits not just for participants, but the wider community. But learning how to navigate complex post-secondary institutions can be daunting – especially for smaller businesses. Building a program can be a first step to understanding the potential collaboration.

## 2. INNOVATIVE THINKING

As Steven Murphy, Dean of the Ted Rogers School of Management at Ryerson University recently wrote in *The Globe and Mail*, “Tech-savvy, resourceful, purpose-driven and unburdened by the baggage of corporate culture, students can inject the exact kind of adrenalin a company needs to spur innovation from within.” Whether through co-ops, internships or boot camps, students supply creative thinking and out-of-the-box approaches into organizations that may be slow to adapt.

## 4. CREATING AMBASSADORS

It's no secret that when employees have a positive relationship with a company, the goodwill continues into the future. Many alumni of work-integrated learning programs report staying in touch with their former employers, even as they've gone on to other industries or organizations. As a former George Brown College student, who completed multiple work terms with EllisDon Corporation said, “I'm not with that company anymore, but I'm close to members of that team. I'll reach out to discuss my upcoming projects and ideas.”



# ISABELLE DUCHAINE

## – it's a savvy way for smart businesses to get ahead.

### STUDENTS KEEP CLAMOURING FOR WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING – AND EMPLOYERS ARE SEEING THE BENEFITS

These reasons are why WIL is increasingly becoming a priority for business. In May 2016, BHER members agreed on a target: for 100 per cent of undergraduate students – college and university included – to have some form of work-integrated learning before they finish school.

Since then, the group has supported industry-led pilots featuring a coalition of employers and institutions in the financial services, construction, advanced manufacturing, mining and entrepreneurship with others in the works. Meanwhile, federal and provincial governments have increased funding to boost opportunities, recognizing the impact of WIL in easing students' transition into the labour force.

There are barriers. Like with many issues in post-secondary education, a lack of comprehensive data at the program, institution and provincial level makes it difficult to know exactly how many students benefit from WIL, and how many positions are concentrated in STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) programs.

Employers starting WIL programs tend to gravitate towards technical programs, which appear to have more immediate impacts on their business. It takes a bit more creative thinking to build programs that focus on the “human skills” developed through the social sciences and humanities. Identified by Seth Godin as those skills that “encompass our ability to interact and work collaboratively with others, as well as to think strategically and regulate emotions”, human skills are the type that will differentiate people from computers in a future of intelligent machines.

One of the many business leaders thinking about the future of skills and changing nature of work is Dave McKay, President and Chief Executive Officer of RBC. As the leader of BHER's WIL taskforce, he has pushed other Canadian executives into investing in programs, using his own story to underscore the value of work-integrated learning. In an article in *The Globe and Mail* in 2015, he wrote that as a computer science student at the University of Waterloo, his RBC co-op terms “opened my eyes to a world that involved strategy, people and the finance I was studying, and I never looked back.” Now, he says that “as Canada comes to grips with its place in the age of disruption, our university and college co-op programs are among our quiet strengths. We need more of them, and to do a lot more with them.”



*Isabelle Duchaine is the manager of the Business/Higher Education Roundtable, an organization representing the CEOs of 14 of Canada's largest companies and the presidents of 14 of the country's leading universities and colleges.*

The world of work comes with the anxiety of navigating a host of unknowns: the speed and impact of automation, changing trends in global competition, and the integration of new technologies. Work-integrated learning isn't the cure for all the challenges facing organizations – and this includes businesses, not-for-profits, or governments. But as more employers realize how work-integrated learning strengthens their organization over the long term, the more everyone can thrive.

# EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

DANNY CHANG

Involvement in extracurricular activities (ECA) oftentimes provides university graduates with their fondest memories from their time as a student. However, students often do not realize that there are general skills and professional competencies being developed through the clubs, teams, and groups they have joined while at school. Personally, I know that I have never sat down and actively thought about the “professional or transferable skills” I was gaining from being involved with campus clubs, intramurals, or my involvement in student government; however when I started working my internship at OUSA this past summer, I started to realize how many skills I had at my disposal and the value of ECA for my professional development. In the increasingly competitive job market, research is showing that employers and university alumni are also now recognizing the greater value in hiring recent graduates who have partaken in ECA due to the variety of professional skills they bring to the table (Stuart et al., 2011). That is why there needs to exist better recognition and support from university administrators and faculty regarding ECA: to help students develop professional skills outside of the classroom and prepare for future employment.

ECA teach a variety of professional skills for students pursuing activities based on their interests. A benefit of ECA is that students are often able to develop professionally without the pressures and often inflexible commitments of working while studying in school. OUSA’s biannual survey of its member schools found that the majority of students who worked while taking courses found that employment negatively impacted their academic performance (Bassett et al., 2015). ECA that are concurrent with post-secondary studies provide an opportunity for professional

development without sacrificing academic performance. The flexibility of ECA gives students the autonomy to decide their time commitment to their activities and the chance to gain professional experiences related to their areas of interest.

Let’s face it: in the current job market, a university degree doesn’t provide the competitive edge that it used to. With almost a quarter of the entire Canadian population holding a university degree, recent graduates are having a tough time differentiating themselves to potential employers. The opportunity to join ECA related to future employment-related

fields gives students a competitive edge when they pursue employment after they graduate. Employers are now being more cognizant of volunteer and ECA experiences that students have gained alongside their university degree. In fact, many recent graduates successful in securing employment often thank the networks they developed through their ECA in university for their new jobs. Involvement in ECA often connects students with external partners/stakeholders and develops professional networks with future employers early-on in students’ university careers.

As someone who has worked towards a degrees in mathematics and physics, I can say that my academic career has challenged me and taught me many skills I value deeply, such as the ability to think critically and solve problems effectively. However, I can also say that I have learned just as much, if not more, from my involvement outside of the classroom. I have learned how to write policy and amend by-laws, how to collaborate with others in small and large teams, to delegate tasks efficiently, to lobby effectively, and to analyze both qualitative and quantitative data to name a few of the skills I have picked up along the way. I believe that it is time that institutions better

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# AS A DRIVING FORCE FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

recognized the value of ECA for students and remain aware of their impact when developing strategies for professional development across their campuses.

While academic courses provide many skills necessary for employment in a related field, many “soft” or transferable professional skills are not distinguished and honed in the classroom. One study conducted out of the University of Melbourne proposes the notion that ECA strongly develop professional skills and that universities should strive to integrate these opportunities into institutional strategies for professional skill development, rather than provide them adjunctly to academics. Currently, institutions often leave it to their student unions to support student ECAs, while some extracurricular groups are left to operate without any support at all. Due to an often “hands-off” approach to ECA on campus, university administrators and staff oftentimes remain unengaged with ECA and the supports required from students to better pursue these activities. As a student engaging in several ECA, I have found it personally difficult to find accommodation and support from university staff such as academic counselling and my professors regarding conflicts that have come up due to my involvement with ECA; there appears to be less of an appreciation for these activities compared to how students view their involvement outside of the classroom.

Now, I’m not saying that “being involved” means that anyone should be able to miss whatever exams they would like or receive academic accommodation left and right, but I do believe that there should be a higher value associated to ECA by university administrators and staff to establish better dialogue when dealing with student issues, issues which often go beyond just the stresses of a student’s academic career. Hopefully, institutions shift to recognize the value of ECA for professional development, just as employers have shifted in recent years.



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# IN PURSUIT OF WORK INTEGRATED LEARNING:

## LEVERAGING BEST PRACTICES FROM THE CANADIAN CO-OP MODEL

There's a certain fervor about work-integrated learning (WIL) as of late. From the Business Higher Education Roundtable's call for 100% of Canadian students to have a WIL experience to Employment and Social Development's Student Work Integrated Learning Program (SWILP) to the numerous conversations at the provincial levels about expanding WIL within post-secondary, work-integrated learning is being touted for its potential to address a number of key challenges in the Canadian labour market. Students who participate in WIL not only gain practical experience and a pre-established network of contacts, they also graduate with a better sense of their skills and increased career clarity. Employers of work-integrated learning students tap into an incredible talent pipeline. They benefit from the energy and new perspectives of student talent in the work term and are able to identify those students who would be the best fit for permanent employment.

For those of us who work in WIL and see its myriad of benefits on a daily basis, it's encouraging that so much attention and so many resources are being invested in the expansion of WIL. At the same time, the success of these fledgling initiatives will depend on their ability to overcome a few common barriers including challenges of terminology, quality, and sustainability.

In addressing these issues, it's valuable to recognize that Canada has a rich history of work-integrated learning and that many well-established WIL practices can be leveraged to address current challenges. One well established WIL model in Canada is co-operative education. Even in the international context, the Canadian co-op model stands out as particularly robust. Canada is the only nation in the world to have a common definition of co-op and to have an active accreditation process for co-op programs – a mechanism designed to address key questions of terminology, quality, and sustainability.

Co-op accreditation is administered by the Canadian Association for Co-operative Education (CAFCE), a consortium of 85 universities and colleges engaged in advocacy for and support of co-operative education. CAFCE was established in 1973 to promote and strengthen the practice of co-operative education in Canada and to extend it to more students and employers. During the 1970s, when CAFCE was founded, co-op participation was indeed on the rise, particularly in the United States where federal grant funding under the



# ANNE-MARIE FANNON & JUDENE PRETTI

College Work-Study Program provided an injection of funds for the establishment of new co-op programs (Sovilla & Varty, 2011). Conversations about similar federal grant programs were beginning to happen in Canada. While CAFCE was in support of expanding co-op, it was wary that external funding programs would lead to a proliferation of new co-op programs merely because funding was available – a trend happening in the United States (Crichton, 2009). Further, in the US, colleges had also lobbied the government to expand its definition of co-operative education such that, by the end of the federal funding years, any college program with a work component qualified for the grant program (Sovilla & Varty, 2011). During this time of increased attention on co-op, the newly established CAFCE organization was wrestling with some big questions – including how to ensure consistent definitions and criteria for co-op programs, how to maintain standards of quality, and how to develop programs that would outlive short-term federal grant funds.

CAFCE's response to these questions was to establish an accreditation service for its members in 1978. This newly established accreditation program detailed the criteria for co-operative education programs in Canada, serving the dual purpose of establishing a clear definition of co-op in Canada and establishing measures of quality. While the accreditation criteria have evolved over the years, their key components have remained consistent and have been instrumental in ensuring quality outcomes for students, employers, and post-secondary institutions for the past forty years. Furthermore, since the criteria are developed and evolved by practitioners, there is significant interest and even passion from within the membership to ensure that standards are upheld and that the accreditation criteria reflect best practices. While some of

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the CAFCE accreditation criteria are specific to co-op, there are others which lend themselves more broadly to work-integrated learning and should be considered carefully as quality measures and best practices in the development of new programs.

Accreditation criterion i: “Each work term is developed in partnership with the employer and approved by the co-operative education program as a suitable learning environment” (Co-operative Education Definition, 2016).

Accreditation criterion iv: “The student's performance in the workplace is supervised and evaluated by the student's employer” (Co-operative Education Definition, 2016).

Accreditation criterion v: “The student's progress during their work term is monitored by the co-operative education program” (Co-operative Education Definition, 2016)

The student engaged in a WIL experience occupies a unique space as both learner and employee. While the involvement of both the school and the employer

in job design and student support makes the process more complicated, it also ensures better outcomes. Schools can assist employers in understanding the skill sets that their students bring to the workplace and can work with the employer to advise on the types of tasks and projects that can be realistically completed within the duration of the work period. With this type of collaborative job design, employers are more likely to have a positive experience with student employees and to see the value of WIL programs.

Students experience better outcomes with collaborative job development and supervision as well. The post-secondary institution helps to prepare them for their workplace experiences and is available for guidance and support to students if they experience challenges they don't feel equipped to handle. They are more likely to experience tasks that align with their skill sets. The WIL curriculum also helps the students make meaning of the work experience by encouraging them to make connections between their academic studies and their workplace experience, challenging them to self-assess areas of strength and development and helping them to understand and articulate their skills.

In our efforts to expand WIL programs, we must not lose sight of the fact that WIL is more than just connecting students and employers. For programs to achieve the desired outcomes for all stakeholders, support needs to be provided to students and employers before, during, and after the WIL experience.

Accreditation criterion ii: "The student is engaged in productive work for which the student receives remuneration." (Co-operative Education Definition, 2016).

In Canada, we take for granted that co-op students receive pay for their work. In many other countries, co-op work terms are commonly unpaid. Yet, paying students for their work creates numerous obvious benefits. In the original accreditation criteria, remuneration for student work was seen as a priority for its ability to increase access to education by providing a means for students to fund their studies. Beyond the economic benefits, studies indicate that the quality of the experience for both the student and the employer is improved when students are remunerated for their work (Chatzky & McGrath, 2011; Bailey, Hughes & Barr, 2000).

This accreditation criterion has had a powerful impact on the development of co-op in Canada. Canada has established a standard of pay for student work which is simply not seen in many other countries. The fact that paid work terms is tied to accreditation also ensures that institutions maintain this standard even during difficult economic times or in industries where students are typically unpaid.

To the fullest extent possible, as we seek to expand WIL in Canada, we should look for models that provide remuneration to students for their work. Government grant programs or incentives should also be used to address issues of unpaid internships, particularly in industries where they are quite prevalent.

Accreditation criterion viii "The student completing multiple work terms is normally exposed to the work environment during more than one season of the year." (Co-operative Education Definition, 2016).

While this criterion is often questioned by newcomers to co-op, it addresses issues of both quality and sustainability. Significant post-secondary institutional commitment to WIL is required in order to design programming which allows students to work during all seasons of the year as it often means faculty are required to teach year round as well. This criterion ensures that institutions engaged in WIL are fully committed to WIL and not just using the pre-established summer break to "tack on" WIL programming. From very early days, CAFCE recognized that quality WIL programming requires senior level institutional support and strong backing from the academic faculty and wanted to ensure that accredited programs would have the required support (Crichton, 2009).

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While this criterion demands significant resources from post-secondary institutions, it has powerful implications for the sustainability of WIL programs. Once student talent is available year round, industry is able to respond by building student labour into their workforce strategy rather than simply viewing students as “summer help”. They are able to create positions and tasks which are designed specifically for students and to develop routines of hiring, training and supporting student staff.

As we expand WIL programming in Canada, we must be mindful of both the substantial resources required for quality programming and the benefits of coordinating the rhythms of both post-secondary institutions and industry. By creating WIL programs that provide a consistent stream of student talent to industry, all parties are better able to build eco systems where students are viewed as a key component of the Canadian labour market.

Beyond the role of an accreditation process, associations like CAFCE can play a key role in supporting the development and expansion of WIL programs through the creation of strong community of practice. New practitioners and administrators gain access to a wealth of expertise including resources to assist in the development of their programs, best practices, and a network of peers. These associations are critical for the sustainability of work-integrated learning programs, reducing the resources required to launch new programs and providing an important forum to learn and evolve the pedagogy and best practices of WIL.

Associations like CAFCE can also facilitate research projects and initiatives to help demonstrate the impact of WIL programming on a national level. One such example is CAFCE’s recently developed national statistics database which collects work term data from institutions across the country including number of work terms, locations, industry, and salary. This kind of data is rarely collected on a national level and yet is an extremely powerful source of information for analyzing the extent of WIL activity and its impact in Canada.

WIL for all is a lofty but important goal. As we work together across sectors to achieve this goal, we need to keep in mind the elements of program design and operations, as well as the communities of practice that have led to quality outcomes for students and employer through well-established WIL programs. Of course, not all co-op practices translate to all forms of WIL and there’s much to be learned as we explore the development of new forms of work-integrated learning but let’s make sure that we too are learning from experience.



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*OUS A represents the interests of approximately 150,000 professional and undergraduate, full-time and part-time university students at eight student associations across Ontario. Our vision is for an accessible, affordable, accountable and high quality post-secondary education in Ontario. To achieve this vision we've come together to develop solutions to challenges facing higher education, build broad consensus for our policy options, and lobby government to implement them.*

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# *2016-2017 advocacy milestones*

## FRONTLINE MENTAL HEALTH CARE FUNDING

The 2016-17 provincial budget saw an additional \$6 million per year (totalling \$9 million) allocated to frontline mental health care workers on campus.

## REGISTERED EDUCATION SAVINGS PLANS

Advocacy from OUSA resulted in ensuring that savings from Registered Education Savings Plans (RESPs) will not reduce the amount of OSAP a student is eligible for.

## INVESTMENT INTO EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

During consultations, OUSA met with the Premier's Highly Skilled Workforce Expert Panel to discuss the needs of students. This resulted in Ontario investing \$190 million dollars into the Career Kick-Start Strategy, providing more experiential learning opportunities to students across the province.

## REPAYMENT THRESHOLD FOR THE ONTARIO STUDENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

OUSA advocated for an increase in the minimum salary an individual needs to earn before they start repaying the provincial portion of their OSAP loans. This resulted in the province increasing the threshold from \$25,000 to \$35,000.

## PUBLICLY FUNDED PSYCHOTHERAPY

Last year the province of Ontario invested \$73 million over three years to provide publicly funded psychotherapy to individuals over the age of 18.

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