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Work Integrated Learning: Engaging Academia and Practice

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This presentation showcases the development, implementation and outcomes to date of a work integrated learning (WIL) program for undergraduate students in a multidisciplinary built environment faculty. The disciplines represented include: architecture, interior design, industrial design, landscape architecture, urban and regional planning, construction management, property economics, quantity surveying, spatial science, civil engineering, electrical engineering, mechanical engineering and aerospace avionics. In this faculty context, the work integrated learning program situates academic learning and professional learning together within a work environment as a formal component of the student's course.

As will be outlined, the program was developed to be consistent in terms of curriculum and implementation across these various disciplines, acknowledging discipline uniqueness as well as variation with respect to the duration and nature of the work placement. Depending on their discipline and course accreditation requirements, students can take from one to eight WIL units. For some students, the first unit is compulsory; others have the choice to undertake additional units as a minor area of study in their course. The presentation will describe the theoretical framework developed to provide discipline relevance as well as cohesion and academic integrity across the individual units in an environment where it is possible for specific groups of students to elect to undertake two WIL units concurrently while others choose a more sequential approach.

Underpinning the framework is a contemporary holistic model based on the scholarship of integration. It is this model that provides an original and innovative way of redefining and capitalising on the potential of learning in the workplace, and of making the relationship between practitioners and educators more synergistic and mutually rewarding than it currently tends to be. In all, the model responds to the need to: "...provide a pedagogically sustainable framework in relation to authentic learning for the built environment disciplines; improve the capacity of the work environment to provide contemporary relevant learning experiences for students along with more effective outcomes for employers and other stakeholders; and, in conjunction, improve the status and purpose of work experience in the eyes of educators, practitioners, and students" (Franz, 2007, p. 3).

In line with the spirit of Boyer's scholarship of integration, the model brings together discovery, application and teaching in the one learning environment. As the presentation will highlight, practice-led research and research-led practice are central aspects of this.

In addition to the pedagogical characteristics of the WIL program, the presentation will also outline the infrastructure established to support the development, implementation and evaluation of the program and the issues and challenges emerging after one year of implementation.

References

Boyer Commission. (1999). *Reinventing undergraduate education: A blueprint for America's research universities*. Stony Brook, NY: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

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