

# **A WIL and a way: Integrating authentic learning experiences to develop work-ready communication students**

**Janet Fulton, University of Newcastle, [janet.fulton@newcastle.edu.au](mailto:janet.fulton@newcastle.edu.au)**

**Paul Scott, University of Newcastle, [paul.scott@newcastle.edu.au](mailto:paul.scott@newcastle.edu.au)**

**Melanie James, University of Newcastle, [melanie.james@newcastle.edu.au](mailto:melanie.james@newcastle.edu.au)**

**Judith Sandner, University of Newcastle, [judith.sandner@newcastle.edu.au](mailto:judith.sandner@newcastle.edu.au)**

## **Abstract**

*Work-integrated learning (WIL) is playing a key role in the Australian higher education environment. Industry groups, education networks and tertiary institutions are collaborating to provide students with learning pathways during their undergraduate degrees with the aim of bridging the theory–practice divide and helping to ensure students are better prepared to enter the workforce. This article reports on how the Bachelor of Communication (BComn) program at the University of Newcastle (UON) in Australia embeds WIL throughout its program to ensure students are prepared for a rapidly changing and increasingly competitive work environment. The UON program offers majors in journalism, public relations, media production and media studies. It embeds authentic learning experiences throughout the degree while satisfying key learning outcomes, and achieves this by embedding innovative approaches in course design and assessment. While there is a formal placement course that undergraduate students can elect to undertake during their final year, academic staff have embedded assessable learning experiences where students, from their first to their final year, work on ‘real-world’ projects and engage with industry, community groups and government organisations. In-class activities are structured to simulate professional environments, and both learning activities and assessments attempt to focus student learning to realise the connections between theory and practice. This approach ensures that the students receive authentic learning experiences where they construct contextual meaning rather than simply receiving information. This approach to learning encourages students to engage with the processes, concepts and procedures of their chosen professions rather than isolated curriculum material. In this article, the authors are reporting on how UON’s BComn program includes integrated experiential learning to provide students with a learning experience that contains numerous innovative approaches aimed at preparing students for work beyond the university.*

**Keywords:** communication; media; Newcastle; work-integrated learning; WIL

## Introduction

Work-integrated learning (WIL) is not a newcomer to the Australian tertiary education environment, but the launch of a national WIL strategy in 2015 has shone a spotlight on the practice and encouraged engagement beyond disciplines that traditionally have embraced its approach. The Australian Collaborative Education Network (ACEN), Universities Australia, the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Australian Industry Group and the Business Council of Australia collaborated to develop the strategy. The strategy aims to enhance student learning, improve graduate employability and meet the skills needs of employers across the nation. In line with this strategy, Australian universities are including references to WIL as a core competency in student learning. The authors' university, the University of Newcastle (UON) in Australia, notes its commitment to innovative WIL experiences for students in its *NeW Futures Strategic Plan* (UON, 2016, p. 17).

Academics who teach in UON's BComn program have embraced innovative WIL experiences for students. The program employs an educational approach that embeds work-based projects throughout the degree, from first year to final year. These projects form an integrated and assessed part of the academic program, and include real and/or simulated work experiences that occur in the workplace, at the university, in a classroom and online, as well as work placements and internships. Research into the effectiveness of embedded work experience has shown that graduate employability is increased if the strategies are rooted in sound pedagogical design (Bates & Hayes, 2017). The design of the learning projects centre on the view shared by academics teaching in the BComn program that learning outcomes that result in the attainment of graduate attributes require the design and implementation of experiences that encourage and enable student learning (Lattuca, 2006). The program's WIL teaching focuses on providing learning opportunities for students to construct contextual meaning rather than being passive recipients of information that is imparted to them – a constructivist approach to learning (Anderson et al., 2001; Fleming & Haigh, 2017). Underpinning this approach is the philosophy that students should be encouraged to engage with 'concepts, disciplinary or professional processes of thinking, and their related evidence and procedures' (Ramsden, 1992, p. 191) rather than isolated curriculum material.

The program's approaches to WIL have resulted in academics and professional staff receiving teaching and learning awards in recognition of best practice. Dr Judith Sandner received a Faculty Staff of the Year award for her efforts in coordinating the third-year Professional Placement course and Paul Scott's innovative approach to embedding the needs of non-profit organisations into a third-year course on public affairs led to a University of Newcastle WIL Award. This article reports on how UON's BComn program has integrated experiential learning to provide students with a learning experience that contains numerous innovative approaches. While successful WIL programs include multi-party input from students, industry/employers and university academics (Henderson & Trede, 2017), this article is primarily describing WIL in UON's BComn from the perspective of academics who develop work-integrated opportunities for students.

Smith and colleagues (2009, p. 8) define work-integrated learning as learning that is embedded in the experience of work: which may [involve] work which is paid or unpaid; or full time or part time; or formally endorsed as part of a university course; or extra-curricular and complementary of studies; or totally independent of studies; in the past, present, or future; and which is made meaningful for a student when reflected upon in terms of personal learning and development occurring as part of a career development learning experience or course related process.

Prinsley and Baranyai (2015, p. 1) state further that:

Work-integrated learning (WIL) is widely understood to be a valuable tool in bridging the gap from study to work. WIL embeds meaningful and authentic industry placements and/or projects into an academic programme ... WIL is associated with skills of application of theory, teamwork, communication, self-management and critical thinking. It also encourages students to reflect on their learning, broaden their career horizons and connect with mentors in their chosen profession.

The BComn program at UON offers each of these forms of work-integrated learning throughout the duration of the course. Students undertake 240 units of study and the program's structure requires 80 units of core or compulsory units, 80 units of courses in a major and 80 units of elective studies. Students are offered four majors: journalism, public relations, media studies and media production. The media production major includes visual, audio and web design streams. For the past several years, the majors have specifically ensured that students have a structure of authentic learning experiences from first year through to third year. In addition, in third year the students can take a formal placement course as part of their program. The Communication Professional Placement course (CMNS3500) is offered either as a directed course or elective in each of the four majors. Students are encouraged to find a suitable host organisation – and there is assistance available for those students who cannot – and to work 80 hours with it over the final semester of their degree. Furthermore, throughout their degree, students are provided with the opportunity to partake in voluntary work experience to gain valuable practical skills that complement their formal academic studies. A dedicated site for UON Communication students, hosted on the university's course management software Blackboard, includes an area where opportunities for paid work, volunteer work, overseas placements and other industry experience opportunities are posted for the students' information. These opportunities are both national and international, and must comply with the *Fair Work Act 2009*. Students undertake these experiences to enhance their employment prospects in an increasingly competitive industry environment. While these opportunities could be considered 'bolt-on' (Rowe & Zegwaard, 2017) experiences, where they sit outside the formal program, opportunities to undertake WIL experiences with employers give students the chance to both work to learn, and learn to work (Cooper, Orrell & Bowden, 2010). This philosophy underpins the BComn program. The university supports and encourages students to undertake work experience from the early stages of their degree and has a

formal procedure in place to cover students with insurance and oversee other provisions while they are on work experience placement.

The authors have found, both anecdotally and via their experience in the Communication Professional Placement course, that the experiences and expectations of WIL stakeholders in the communication field are subject to widespread fluctuations, a finding that Fleming and Haigh (2017) discovered in their research on the alignment of views between students, employers and university stakeholders. In some quarters, unease remains between industry expectations of students being able to 'hit the ground running' and academic staff who see their role as educative rather than providing 'industry fodder'. With this in mind, weaving experiential learning throughout the program provides students with valuable authentic work experiences while also providing them with the critical thinking and research skills outlined in program learning outcomes and expected by host organisations. Thus, when BComn students go on their final year placements, the university can be confident that most students take with them skills and knowledge that are applicable in the workplace. Feedback from the placement supervisors invariably report that a clear majority of our students 'hit the ground running'.

Holloway, Green and Holloway (2013) argue that there should only be compulsory work placements in disciplines where accreditation to work in a profession requires a practical component. Such a view reflects the significant challenges faced by employers hosting students on placement – primarily to do with time and resources – and they recommend that alternatives to formal WIL be explored, including using students' current employment; providing workplace-type experiences; and employing group WIL experiences. However, findings from national research projects have reiterated and formalised the immense value of WIL in enhancing student work readiness through the implementation of coherent and coordinated approaches (Austin & Cokley, 2006; Ferguson & Wang, 2014; Ferns et al., 2015; Forbes, 2009; Smith et al., 2009). These approaches should include workplace placement opportunities and embedded content in other courses throughout a program. Embedded content provides students with an authentic learning environment, described by Radinsky and colleagues (1998) as a space where students can undertake and understand the actual work of a professional community by directly engaging with target communities. While Radinsky and colleagues are discussing students in a workplace, the same principles apply in a classroom environment. Students engaging in tasks and assessments where they interact with a professional community constitutes a core activity embedded throughout courses in the BComn.

In 2008, a report to the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (Patrick et al., 2008) detailed the first large-scale scoping study of the WIL curriculum in contemporary Australian higher education. The researchers collected data from 35 universities and almost 600 participants. The study's main goals were to identify and map issues that were pertinent to expanding WIL initiatives in the sector, and to identify ways of enhancing student learning outcomes and experience relevant to WIL. While administrators, academics, students and employers have all found that the adequate resourcing of WIL provides a significant number of challenges, the study methodically outlined specific issues that were recurring throughout the sector and

could inhibit WIL strategies from achieving their aims. These issues included workload and time constraints for staff of both education providers and employers, the financial imposition of placements on employers and the inability of university timetabling to provide the necessary flexibility required to enable students to spend appropriate time in the workplace. These concerns have largely been ameliorated in UON's BComn program because the program has integrated a coordinated approach by embedding authentic learning experiences at all levels of student learning. Such an approach leads to an entry-level practitioner prepared to work in a role by the time a student undertakes the professional placement course in their final semester, so they are able, in the words commonly heard from host organisations, 'to hit the ground running'. The following discussion reports on how authentic learning practices are integrated throughout UON's BComn program by using our own understanding of the importance of WIL to students and employers, and the benefits of experiential learning.

## **Discussion**

UON has provided a purpose-built facility to house the BComn program, which provides students with state-of-the-art equipment including a full broadcast-quality digital television studio, radio studio, sound recording facilities, post-production video edit suites, audio edit suites and computer labs equipped with both Apple Macs and PCs, and the latest software. These facilities and equipment reflect the massive changes that new media and convergence technologies have introduced to media and communication professions. There is also a community radio station on the Callaghan campus, 2NURFM, where students write news bulletins, apply program production skills and techniques, and undertake news reading. Communication practitioners need to be adept in the entry-level technical skills of their specialisation, but must also be able to analyse how emerging technologies impact the wider field and be able to provide organisational decision-makers with strategic advice on these issues (James, 2007, 2007–08). To this end, the UON BComn degree program is based largely on a problem-based learning approach (Schwartz, Mennin & Webb, 2001), whereby graduates develop an understanding of the theory practice continuum that operates in communication. This approach aims to address the need for students to develop problem-solving abilities that are underpinned by a solid foundation of communication and major-specific theory, and a context that reflects both current professional practice and scope for enhancement to that practice. Assessment tasks often integrate professional skills that students will be able to take to the workplace on completion of their degree – for example, making a film, a television program or a radio broadcast, preparing a publication, establishing a blog, writing a speech or preparing a report, in addition to more traditional tasks that teach critical thinking and research skills such as essay writing. Within these types of professional-style assessment tasks, there are courses in the majors within the program where external bodies, such as non-government organisations (NGOs), government departments and media organisations are involved to provide students with an authentic learning environment. In other words, students are provided with authentic learning experiences throughout their program, which can then be employed within the final-year Communication Professional Placement course.

### ***Authentic learning experiences***

The media production major includes video, audio and online streams, where students learn about television and radio production, film and documentary making, and multimedia. In the media production major's capstone course, Media Projects (CMNS3450), students develop a media project, either individually or in a group, that assists in preparing them to work professionally in the media and communication industries. Students develop a video, sound, radio, web-based or multimedia production (or a combination of these) and develop the project from conception and development through to presentation. Students can also elect to work to briefs for educational or promotional productions provided from time to time by divisions and centres within the university, as well as external organisations such as not-for-profit entities.

Students are offered opportunities to work internationally, which can be used as a work placement, work experience, an internship or as part of a course. In 2000 and 2008, the Olympic News Service (ONS) accepted UON Communication students at the Sydney and Beijing Olympic Games and Paralympic Games. Forty UON students worked as ONS volunteers doing spot reporting at sporting venues in Beijing. Students received credit for this experience via a specially generated course, which counted towards their degree award. As well as the Olympic opportunity, over several years students have participated in the International Folklore Festival of Gannat film festival as part of the festival's media team. The International Folklore Festival of Gannat takes place each year in France, and UON students assist in filming the festival, maintaining a Facebook page and generating other forms of media and publicity. According to the UON website, 'Students will have the opportunity to work with the official media team to develop intensive media production skills through capturing live events and working at a highly skilled and fast paced level' (UON, 2015). Students have used this experience in the formal Communication Professional Placement course (CMNS3500) as their placement, or have developed the content they produced, in the form of a documentary, as part of the capstone third-year course in media production, Media Projects (CMNS3450).

In the journalism major, second-year radio journalism students produce a two- to four-minute radio story for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's (ABC) *Heywire* competition. *Heywire* is 'young regional Australians telling it like it is and making a difference' (ABC *Heywire*, 2017). *Heywire* invites 16- to 22-year-old Australians to submit a true story about themselves in either text, video, photo or audio format. Over the past four years, radio journalism students attending UON, but from different regional areas in New South Wales, have taken out prizes for their work. The prize includes a week in Canberra at an annual youth summit that sees them meet their prize-winning peers and federal politicians. However, the learning provided in this task goes beyond the opportunity to win a prize. Students have reported back in course evaluations that there is an added incentive to produce their best work because it is not being done only for academic assessment, but will be seen and heard by their peers and uploaded to an ABC-hosted website. Furthermore, across the courses in the

journalism strand, student work done for assessment is uploaded to an internal website where it can be viewed by all students enrolled in that course.

There is now a culture of students being accustomed to seeing, comparing and discussing their work in a supportive environment. In an epoch where academic fraud is a significant concern for universities, academic staff teaching into the journalism strand have found that requiring students to place their work in an environment that can be viewed by other students has significantly reduced incidences of plagiarism and encourages students to do their best work, knowing that their work will be viewed and discussed.

Public Affairs and Communication (CMNS3520) is offered as a directed course for journalism students and a compulsory course for public relations students. The course is designed to ensure that students have a familiarity with the Australian political system and the role played by those trying to influence public policy frameworks. Third-year students work with not-for-profit and non-government organisations whose bailiwick includes advocacy for their organisational interests. With guidance and guidelines, students find a government or government agency inquiry and contact an organisation that may have an interest in expressing a view to an inquiry. In groups of three to four members, students write 'real-world' submissions in conjunction with these 'real-world' organisations to 'real-world' inquiries. In preparation to undertake these submissions, all students write essays to demonstrate individual familiarity with the background issues, events, processes, players and forces that have prompted the inquiry they are addressing.

In 2016, 21 groups of students wrote submissions to 10 different inquiries at federal, state and local government levels. (See Appendix for list of submissions, including the name of the inquiry, the client and the name of the committee or organisation.) The work included the preparation of submissions with groups including the Autism Advisory and Support Service to the Parliament of Victoria's Inquiry into Services for People with Autism Spectrum Disorder; Stop the Traffik Australia to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Law Enforcement's Inquiry into Human Trafficking; Lifeline Hunter Central Coast to the Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs' Inquiry into the Medical Complaints Process in Australia; Newcastle University Students Association to the Department of Education and Training's Inquiry into VET Fee HELP Scheme Redesign; Seniors Rights Service to the Australian Law Reform Commission's Inquiry into Elder Abuse: Protecting the Rights of Older Australians From Abuse; Whale and Dolphin Conservation to the Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications' Inquiry into Oil or Gas Production in the Great Australian Bight; Headspace Ballarat to the Parliament of Victoria's Inquiry into Lowering the Probationary Driving Age in Victoria to 17; the Australian Women's Health Network to the Australian Senate Finance and Public Administration Committee's Inquiry into Domestic Violence and Gender Inequality; Newcastle NOW to UrbanGrowth NSW/Transport for NSW's Review of Environmental Factors for Newcastle Light Rail; and the Newcastle University Student Association to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Employment's Inquiry into Innovation and Creativity for the New Economy. One of the chief benefits of this learning strategy is engagement with both community-based organisations and

government policy-makers. It was this approach to an authentic learning experience that led to the course coordinator receiving a University Teaching and Learning award for WIL.

The public relations major has been accredited by the Public Relations Institute of Australia (PRIA), the national industry organisation that sets minimum standards for degrees. The guidelines for accreditation include: theoretical engagement with communication, public relations and organisational theory designed to 'provide a balance of theory and practice' (PRIA, 2015); professional practice and responsibility, for students to develop professional skills in public relations practice; and 'experiential/work-integrated learning and industry engagement' (PRIA, 2015). The commitment to problem-based learning and working with 'real-world' clients from first year ensures that these accreditation requirements are embedded in all courses of the public relations major.

In first year, public relations students take Introduction to Public Relations (CMNS1290). As part of that course, they work on a public relations plan for an organisation in the local area of UON. The students are allocated the organisation and, under the guidance of the teaching staff, they undertake desk research to gain an understanding of the organisation. A representative from the organisation then briefs the students on the organisation's public relations needs. Students can ask the representative questions that will assist them formulate their plans, which they submit as part of the final assessment task. The best plans are forwarded to the organisation for their consideration at the end of the course. Public relations plans prepared for the Maitland Repertory Theatre were implemented and helped to deliver improved attendance at plays and attracted more volunteer members. The plans prepared for the University's Toastmasters club helped the club drive membership, thus ensuring it continued to operate to provide a valuable on-campus service.

The students' final year in public relations includes two courses specifically designed to balance the need to foster the development of academic skills with the development of specialist public relations skills that will enable graduates to work as entry-level practitioners. These courses are conducted using a problem-based learning approach, which 'empowers learners to conduct research, integrate theory and practice, and apply knowledge and skills to develop a viable solution to a defined problem' (Savery, 2006, p. 9). Teaching staff stress to students the importance of learning to work with other people and have designed learning experiences that reflect the structures found in professional practice, including group work and collaborative learning experiences. This approach supports a constructivist approach in which knowledge is constructed through discussion and consensus, and hence is built by the participants rather than transferred or acquired (Demetrious, 2004).

The Public Relations Strategy (CMNS3530) course is offered at both the Newcastle and Singapore campuses. Organisations – typically NGOs or other non-profit organisations – respond to calls from the course coordinator for student teams to conduct a comprehensive communication audit of the organisation. As a result, some four to six organisations participate each year. Each team prepares a report for their allocated organisation and presents the report to the organisation at the end of the

course via a group presentation. The UON's Coal River Working Party implemented suggestions made by the students, including a focused social media strategy, an internship program and a comprehensive online presence. Several organisations have returned a few years down the track and asked for a repeat audit as they found the initial audits useful. Problem-based learning workshops are conducted in the tutorial sessions, where the students work in their teams with the tutor acting in the role of account director and facilitator. Professional processes are put in place, including weekly work-in-progress meetings and the preparation of weekly action plans. In addition, each team establishes working group rules and members peer-evaluate each other at the end of the semester, thus providing students with insights into working with key performance indicators and performance-appraisal structures.

In the final semester of their program, students in the public relations major undertake Public Relations Campaigns (CMNS3540) where again student teams work under the direction of their tutors in meeting a brief from a real organisation. In 2015, students developed campaign plans for the Lions Club Youth of the Year Program, the Coal River Working Party, the Newcastle Startups Group #Newystartups and the Singaporean youth campaign 'I am ONE Generation'. Briefed by organisational representatives, students develop, refine and pitch a public relations campaign. Following an immersive assessment task analysing campaign case studies, students undertake and apply research to inform their campaign plans; develop and apply methods for the evaluation of campaigns; justify the decisions and direction taken in the plan using academic evidence; ensure plan writing and formatting are of a professional standard; and develop creative concepts and design examples of creative work to support the public relations plan and pitch. Students' journals reflected a breadth of reflection upon their learning.

Throughout the public relations major, the WIL principles apply across all courses. Students are encouraged from their first year to become student members of the PRIA or Institute of PR Singapore and, in Newcastle, the local Professional Communicators Network, to develop their networks with communication professionals and enhance their understanding of the industry. In the second-year course, PR Writing (CMNS2710), the students are writing LinkedIn profiles and critiquing companies' websites. In Advanced PR Studies (CMNS3510), students present their group presentations as media conference events and their social media strategy critiques as mock professional client feedback sessions.

### ***Professional placement***

The integrated 'real-world' learning that occurs throughout the program, as well as the work experience opportunities available to students, means that students are well prepared for the dedicated professional placement course, Communication Professional Placement (CMNS3500). This course is an example of cooperative education, where students integrate 'academic knowledge with knowledge accessed or constructed through experiences in workplaces' (Fleming & Haigh, 2017). CMNS3500 is offered to students in the final semester of the Communication program and is offered as either a directed or elective course in all the majors. Students undertake an 80-hour internship

in organisations to apply the skills, principles and theories acquired during the formal education program. The internship is designed so that students can further develop communication skills appropriate to their chosen profession and to experience organisations, their dynamics, discourses, practices and realities in a professional environment.

Direction is provided onsite by a student supervisor, who is nominated by the host organisation offering the placement. The fact that the student is supervised by someone with experience in their field, who can guide their work and provide appropriate direction, is the key difference to a student simply undertaking a work experience placement. A professional placement course such as this contributes to the development of the student's critical and creative thinking, and their professional communication practice. It requires the student to undertake work experience in a field that the student has been learning about within the degree program. It also contributes to the student's general communication skills through developing skills and experience in a range of tasks found in the communication and cultural industries, and through the forming of relationships with communication professionals.

There are several reasons why the placement course is offered at this final stage in a student's program. First, students should be able to offer an appropriate level of professional practice skills to the placement organisation. Students need to be well prepared for their placement in terms of having a solid foundation in theoretical studies and entry-level practitioner skills relevant to their area of interest. This includes research and writing skills. Lubbers, Bourland-Davis and Rawlins (2007–08) discuss how students should have sufficient emotional intelligence and understanding of ethical issues before undertaking an internship. Students undertaking the course have often had previous work experience and have often worked on 'real client' projects as part of their coursework, which provides insight into the world of professional practice. Second, students who perform well in placement are frequently offered ongoing employment. Anecdotal feedback from placement organisations indicates some frustration when a student has been offered a full-time job only to find out that the student is not able to undertake full-time work due to ongoing course commitments – that is, the placement was not done in the final semester of their program. Even if the employing organisation cannot offer this opportunity, the supervisor of the placement is often more than happy to provide a very positive reference to a potential employer. This is of great assistance to a student who is applying for full-time work at the completion of their degree. Many students secure ongoing paid casual employment and a significant number are offered full-time positions. Students often complete their placement with projects they can add to their portfolios.

Assessments within the course are designed to provide students with employment skills, feedback from the placement workplace and critical thinking skills. Besides a mandatory work, health and safety lecture and checklist that seeks to heighten student awareness of obligation and compliance matters, students are initially required to provide a professional level letter of application for work placement to the host organisation, an updated CV, contact details and a formal agreement from the host organisation. Second, the placement supervisor provides an assessment of the student and answers questions about the student's attitude, compatibility with the professional

work environment and suitability for the profession. A comprehensive assessment guide is provided to supervisors and students and supervisors are given a choice of completing the assessment online/via email or through a discussion with the course coordinator. Finally, students write a report that includes two parts: a log of the work undertaken in the placement and regular reflections on the placement experiences; and, an academic report which analyses the modes of communication and discourses within the host organisation. This final assessment requires the students to think critically and reflectively about their placement.

Course arrangements are reviewed and revised as part of a continuous quality improvement process. From 2009, in recognition of the growth in the student numbers and breadth of the course coordination task, the university agreed to fund administrative assistance for the course. This initiative has freed up more expensive academic hours that have been applied to teaching in other courses. The provision of this administrative assistance has proven invaluable to the smooth running of the course in terms of staying across employment agreement status and student assessment status. It has also enhanced the ability of academic staff to foster relationships with the employing organisations. This has led to ongoing placement arrangements and has fostered further confidence in our students that has resulted in paid employment offers in some cases. It has further ensured compliance with university policies on professional placements and has benefits in terms of better ensuring student safety and increasing placement supervisor knowledge of assessment requirements.

## **Conclusion**

The efforts of academic staff in designing and implementing work-integrated learning in UON's BComn cannot be understated. Embedding authentic experiences to enhance learning throughout the program underpins the pedagogical approach to the program. Positive experiences at UON have not occurred without a deep commitment to excellence in course development and assessment design. 'Tacking on' a work placement to a degree program is not WIL: 'Good assessment begins with good program and course design. It is not simply added on when program and course design are completed, but is integral to the processes that generate them' (University of Newcastle, 2007). The emphasis must be on the learning that comes from WIL experiences, so ensuring that those experiences are mutually beneficial to the student and the host organisation requires ongoing discourse and development. Success of work placement outcomes for students and their employers/supervisors is not different from other courses in that it is dependent on sound curriculum (Rowe & Zegwaard, 2017) and assessment design. Boud's work (e.g. 1995, 2009, 2013) shows us that assessment is a central feature of teaching and the curriculum, in that it powerfully frames how students learn and what students achieve. The authors are guided by Boud's (2013) assertion that the nature and type of assessment design drive student engagement with courses, and we have found this to be particularly true with those that have WIL components as a central platform.

Mapping of how placements and in-class work-integrated learning activities map to the overall curriculum requirements and graduate attributes is paramount. With

many staff involved in these processes coming into academia from media and cultural industries, there is a deep commitment to ensure connections between theory and practice. As stated by Hansen (2005, p. 134), 'the cultures of journalism and mass communication education and the media professions can be deeply enriched by interactions built on mutual respect', and this attitude has underpinned the work in making WIL within our program a success. Furthermore, one of the strengths of the academic staff within the UON Communication discipline is that many staff remain practitioners in their field. Most belong to the relevant professional organisations as well as academic associations. The relationship between academics within the Communication discipline and those working in industry, who take some 100 third-year Communications student annually into their organisations for work placements and work with students on their in-class projects, continues to strengthen. Further research will investigate the triad of relationships that make this WIL program successful: students, industry/employers and the university.

## References

- ABC Heywire (2017). *Heywire*, <http://www.abc.net.au/heywire>.
- Anderson, L., Krathwohl, D., Airasian, P., Cruikshank, K., Mayer, R. & Pintrich, P. (2001). *A Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching, and Assessing: A Revision of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives* (abridged ed.). New York: Longman.
- Austin, J. & Cokley, J. (2006). The key hiring criteria used by journalism employers. *Australian Studies in Journalism*, 17, 74–89.
- Bates, L. & Hayes, H. (2017). Using the student lifecycle approach to enhance employability: An example from criminology and criminal justice. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education*, 18(2), 141–51.
- Boud, D. (1995). Assessment and learning: Complementary or contradictory? In P. Knight (ed.), *Assessment for Learning in Higher Education*. London: Kogan Page, pp. 35–48.
- (2009). *Assessment 2020: Seven Propositions for Assessment Reform in Higher Education*. Canberra: Australian Learning and Teaching Council.
- (2013). *Enhancing Learning Through Self-assessment*. Routledge: London.
- Cooper, L., Orrell, J. & Bowden, M. (2010). *Work-integrated Learning: A Guide to Effective Practice*. London: Routledge.
- Demetrious, K. (2004). Finding voices: Authentic learning online in the field of public communication and citizenship. *Prism*, 2(1), 1–13.
- Ferguson S. & Wang, S. (2014). *Graduating in Canada: Profile, Labour Market Outcomes and Student Debt of the Class of 2009-2010*. Ottawa: Statistics Canada, <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/141114/dq141114b-eng.htm>.
- Ferns, S., Russell, L., Smith, C. & Cretchley, P. (2014). *The Impact of Work Integrated Learning on Student Work-Readiness*. Canberra: Office of Learning and Teaching, <http://www.olt.gov.au/resource-impact-work-integrated-learning-student-work-readiness>.

- Fleming, J. & Haigh, N.J. (2017). Examining and challenging the intentions of work-integrated learning. *Higher Education, Skills and Work-based Learning*, 7(2), 198–210.
- Forbes, A. (2009). Utilizing mentoring feedback in journalism work placements: Producing work-ready graduates for the 21st century newsroom. In R.K. Coll & K. Zegwaard (eds), *Proceedings of the New Zealand Association for Cooperative Education Annual Conference*. Hamilton: Waiheke Island, pp. 38–41, [http://www.nzace.ac.nz/wp-content/files/conferences/proceedings\\_collection/2009%2C%20Waiheke.pdf](http://www.nzace.ac.nz/wp-content/files/conferences/proceedings_collection/2009%2C%20Waiheke.pdf).
- Hansen, K.A. (2005). Values and competencies from the clash of professional and academic cultures. *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator*, 60(2), 130–4.
- Henderson, A. & Trede, F. (2017). Strengthening attainment of student learning outcomes during work-integrated learning: A collaborative governance framework across academia, industry and students. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education*, 18(1), 73–80.
- Holloway, D., Green, L. & Holloway, D. (2013). Communications and work-integrated learning: Policies and practices in Western Australia. Conference presentation at Australian and New Zealand Communication Association conference: Global Networks-Global Divides: Bridging New and Traditional Communication Challenges.
- James, M. (2007). A review of the impact of new media on public relations: Challenges for terrain, practice and education. *Asia Pacific Journal of Public Relations*, 8, 137–48.
- (2007–08). The reading journal blog assessment task: Public relations students' perceptions. *PRism*, 5(1&2), [http://praxis.massey.ac.nz/prism\\_online\\_journ.html](http://praxis.massey.ac.nz/prism_online_journ.html).
- Lattuca, L. (2006). The constructivist pedagogy we're looking for. *Journalism and Mass Communication Educator*, 60, 354–8.
- Lubbers, C., Bourland-Davis, P. & Rawlins, B. (2007–08). Public relations interns and ethical issues at work: Perceptions of student interns from three different universities. *PRism*, 5(1&2), [http://praxis.massey.ac.nz/prism\\_on-line\\_journ.html](http://praxis.massey.ac.nz/prism_on-line_journ.html)
- Patrick, C.-J., Peach, D., Pocknee, C., Webb, F., Fletcher, M. & Pretto, G. (2008). *The WIL (Work-Integrated Learning) Report: A National Scoping Study (Final Report)*. Brisbane: Queensland University of Technology, <http://eprints.qut.edu.au/44065/1/WIL-Report-grants-project-jan09.pdf>.
- Public Relations Institute of Australian (PRIA) (2015). *Guidelines for the Accreditation of Degrees in Public Relations at Australian Tertiary Institutions*. Sydney: PRIA, <http://www.pria.com.au/documents/item/4390>.
- Prinsley, R. & Baranyai, K. (2015). *STEM-trained and Job Ready*. Canberra: Office of the Chief Scientist, [http://www.chiefscientist.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/OPS12-WIL\\_web.pdf](http://www.chiefscientist.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/OPS12-WIL_web.pdf).
- Radinsky, J., Bouillion, L., Hanson, K., Gomez, L., Vermeer, D. & Fishman, B. (1998). A framework for authenticity: Mutual benefits partnerships. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Diego.
- Ramsden, P. (1992). *Teaching in Higher Education*. London: Routledge.

- Rowe, A. & Zegwaard, K.E. (2017). Using the student lifecycle approach to enhance employability: An example from criminology and criminal justice. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education*, 18(2), 87–99.
- Savery, J.R. (2006). Overview of problem-based learning: Definitions and distinctions. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Problem-Based Learning*, 1(1), 9–27.
- Smith, M., Brooks, S., Lichtenberg, A., McIlveen, P., Torjul, P. and Tyler, J. (2009). *Career Development Learning: Maximising the Contribution of Work-Integrated Learning to the Student Experience: Australian Learning & Teaching Council Final Project Report*. Wollongong: University of Wollongong.
- Schwartz, P., Mennin, S. & Webb, G. (eds) (2001). *Problem-based Learning: Case Studies, Experience and Practice*. London: Kogan Page.
- University of Newcastle (UON) (2007). *A Guide to the Assessment Policies and Procedures of the University of Newcastle – Guideline 000779*, <http://www.newcastle.edu.au/about-uon/governance-and-leadership/policy-library/resource-record?RecordNumber=D13/39162>.
- (2016). *NeW Futures Strategic Plan 2016–2025*, [https://www.newcastle.edu.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0005/225680/2015-1050-NeW-Futures-A4Program\\_06\\_Print\\_WEB.pdf](https://www.newcastle.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0005/225680/2015-1050-NeW-Futures-A4Program_06_Print_WEB.pdf).
- (2015). International Folklore Festival Internship, <http://www.newcastle.edu.au/about-uon/governance-and-leadership/faculties-and-schools/faculty-of-science-and-information-technology/about-us/international-partnerships/international-folklore-festival-internship>.

## **Appendix: Student submissions for Public Affairs (CMNS3520) course, 2016**

*Submission to:* Parliament of Victoria: Joint Investigatory Committee: Family and Community Development

*Inquiry:* Inquiry into services for people with autism spectrum disorder

*Client:* Association for Children with a Disability

*Submission to:* Parliamentary Joint Committee on Law Enforcement

*Inquiry:* Inquiry into Human Trafficking

*Client:* Stop the Traffik Australia

*Submission to:* Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs

*Inquiry:* Medical Complaints Process in Australia

*Client:* Lifeline Hunter Central Coast

*Submission to:* UrbanGrowth NSW/Transport for NSW

*Inquiry:* The Review of Environmental Factors for Newcastle Light Rail

*Client:* Save Our Rail

*Submission to:* Department of Education and Training

*Inquiry:* VET Fee HELP Scheme Redesign

*Client:* Newcastle University Students Association

*Submission to:* Australian Law Reform Commission

*Inquiry:* Inquiry into Elder Abuse: Protecting the Rights of Older Australians from Abuse

*Client:* Mercy Services

*Submission to:* UrbanGrowth NSW/Transport for NSW

*Inquiry:* The Review of Environmental Factors for Newcastle Light Rail

*Client:* Renew Newcastle

*Submission to:* Australian Law Reform Commission

*Inquiry:* Inquiry into elder abuse: Protecting the rights of older Australians from abuse

*Client:* Advocare Incorporated

*Submission to:* Australian Law Reform Commission

*Inquiry:* Inquiry into elder abuse: Protecting the rights of older Australians from abuse

*Client:* Seniors Rights Service

*Submission to:* The Senate Community Affairs References Committee

*Inquiry:* Medical Complaints Process in Australia

*Client:* The Australian Medical Students Association

*Submission to:* Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications

*Inquiry:* Oil or Gas Production in the Great Australian Bight

*Client:* Whale and Dolphin Conservation

*Submission to:* House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and  
Employment

*Inquiry:* Innovation and creativity for the new economy

*Client:* Newcastle University Student Association

*Submission to:* The Senate Community Affairs References Committee

*Inquiry:* Medical Complaints Process in Australia

*Client:* University of Newcastle Medical Society

*Submission to:* UrbanGrowth NSW/Transport for NSW

*Inquiry:* The Review of Environmental Factors for Newcastle Light Rail

*Client:* Newcastle NOW

*Submission to:* Australian Law Reform Commission

*Inquiry:* Inquiry into Elder Abuse: Protecting the Rights of Older Australians from Abuse

*Client:* NSW Elder Abuse and Helpline and Resource Unit

*Submission to:* Parliament of Victoria's Law Reform, Road and Community Safety  
Committee

*Inquiry:* Inquiry into Lowering the Probationary Driving Age in Victoria to 17

*Client:* Headspace Ballarat

*Submission to:* Parliament of Victoria: Joint Investigatory Committee: Family and  
Community Development

*Inquiry:* Inquiry into Services for People with Autism Spectrum Disorder

*Client:* Autism Advisory and Support Service

*Submission to:* Australian Senate Finance and Public Administration Committee

*Inquiry:* Domestic violence and gender inequality

*Client:* Australian Women's Health Network

*Submission to:* Australian Senate Finance and Public Administration Committee

*Inquiry:* Domestic violence and gender inequality

*Client:* Women's Electoral Lobby

*Submission to:* UrbanGrowth NSW/Transport for NSW

*Inquiry:* The Review of Environmental Factors for Newcastle Light Rail

*Client:* Rail Futures Victoria

*Submission to:* UrbanGrowth NSW/Transport for NSW

*Inquiry:* The Review of Environmental Factors for Newcastle Light Rail

*Client:* Foodworks Newcastle East.