Bridging the gap of student WIL wellbeing

The impacts of unpaid practicum on students

Deanna Grant-Smith, QUT

Jenna Gillett-Swan & Renee Chapman, QUT

Ricky Tunny & Katie Theobald, QUT & NAFEA

NAFEA Conference, 2017, Adelaide
The cost of a thing is the amount of life which is required to be exchanged for it.

Henry David Thoreau
WiL Wellbeing
Exploring the impacts of unpaid practicum on student wellbeing

Deanna Grant-Smith, Jenna Gillett-Swan & Renee Chapman
Research Questions

1. How and to what extent do personal factors impact student experiences of WiL?
2. How and to what extent does WiL participation impact other life domains?
3. What personal strategies do students employ to manage WiL–life and life–WiL conflicts?
4. What forms of institutional and other supports could positively influence the wellbeing of students participating in a WiL experience?
Student survey

Student focus groups

Staff focus groups

nursing; education; health & social services study areas
Female 83%
Male 11%
Undisclosed 6%

Health & Social Services 39%
Education 31%
Nursing 30%

552 survey respondents
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practical, real work experience</th>
<th>n=320</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional development</td>
<td>n=171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applying learnt knowledge and skills</td>
<td>n=157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exposure to industry</td>
<td>n=132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Networking</td>
<td>n=33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff interactions and mentors</td>
<td>n=16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workplace immersion</td>
<td>n=16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receiving feedback</td>
<td>n=12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactions with students/clients/patients</td>
<td>n=7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employability enhancement</td>
<td>n=10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safe environment</td>
<td>n=9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal development</td>
<td>n=7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic direction</td>
<td>n=3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer connections</td>
<td>n=3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Student-identified **BEST** things about undertaking WiL placement
## Top five student-identified **BEST** things about undertaking WiL placement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Nursing</th>
<th>Health &amp; social sciences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Practical ‘real world’ experience (n=110)</td>
<td>Practical ‘real world’ experience (n=92)</td>
<td>Practical ‘real world’ experience (n=118)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Opportunity for professional development</td>
<td>Opportunity for professional development</td>
<td>Opportunity for professional development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(n=52)</td>
<td>(n=52)</td>
<td>(n=67)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Opportunity to apply learnt knowledge/skills</td>
<td>Opportunity to apply learnt knowledge/skills</td>
<td>Exposure to industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(n=43)</td>
<td>(n=50)</td>
<td>(n=66)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Exposure to industry</td>
<td>Exposure to industry</td>
<td>Opportunity to apply learnt knowledge/skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(n=30)</td>
<td>(n=36)</td>
<td>(n=64)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Opportunity to develop networks</td>
<td>Staff interactions and mentors</td>
<td>Opportunity to develop networks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(n=14)</td>
<td>(n=12)</td>
<td>(n=16)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Student-identified WORST things about undertaking WiL placement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Frequency (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student personal circumstances &amp; characteristics</td>
<td>Financial stress</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Study/Work/Life balance</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Academic Stress</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Physical stress</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Psychological stress</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Travelling and transport</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Paid employment conflict</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Childcare</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WiL workplace related</td>
<td>Learning outcomes</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unpaid Labour</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Placement experience</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University related</td>
<td>Placement structure</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mentor/Staff</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Top five student-identified **WORST** things about undertaking WiL placement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Nursing</th>
<th>Health &amp; social services</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1</strong></td>
<td>Financial stress (32%, n=53)</td>
<td>Mentor/Staff (45%, n=67)</td>
<td>Study/Work/Life balance (38%, n=75)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2</strong></td>
<td>Study/Work/Life balance (25%, n=41)</td>
<td>Financial stress (23%, n=35)</td>
<td>Financial stress (37%, n=75)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3</strong></td>
<td>Mentor/Staff (24%, n=40)</td>
<td>Study/Work/Life balance (19%, n=29)</td>
<td>Mentor/Staff (20%, n=40)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4</strong></td>
<td>Placement structure (20%, n=34)</td>
<td>Placement structure (17%, n=25)</td>
<td>Academic stress (19%, n=38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5</strong></td>
<td>Academic stress (16%, n=27)</td>
<td>Academic stress (17%, n=25)</td>
<td>Placement structure (19%, n=27)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Placement challenges identified in staff focus group

Student personal circumstances & characteristics
- Financial costs: 26
- Study/Work/Life balance: 24
- Travel & accommodation: 14
- Conflicting expectations: 14
- Professional Etiquette: 12
- Personal circumstances: 9
- Personal resilience: 6
- Placement satisfaction: 4
- Equity: 4

WiL workplace related
- Placement Quality: 14
- Relationships: 8
- Bullying/Harassment: 2
- Workplace power dynamics: 1

University related
- Placement management: 23
- Placement requirements: 9
- Supervision: 6
- Pastoral care: 1
Whether difficulties combining WiL placement with other responsibilities was experienced by gender
Average of reciprocal impacts of WiL placement and other responsibilities
(scale 0 – 100, where 0 = no impact and 100 = significant impact)
Respondent financial situation

- Outside of semester:
  - Financially secure: 292
  - Financially adequate: 224
  - Financially struggling: 21

- During semester:
  - Financially secure: 126
  - Financially adequate: 377
  - Financially struggling: 39

- During placement:
  - Financially secure: 49
  - Financially adequate: 189
  - Financially struggling: 305
Additional costs and financial losses incurred as a result of WiL participation
Top five respondent-identified additional costs incurred as a result of WiL placement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Nursing</th>
<th>Health &amp; social services</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Loss of income (41%, n=59)</td>
<td>Transport (66%, n=89)</td>
<td>Transport (54%, n=98)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Transport (40%, n=57)</td>
<td>Loss of income (42%, n=42)</td>
<td>Loss of income (38%, n=68)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Resources &amp; materials (31%, n=45)</td>
<td>Food and meals (25%, n=34)</td>
<td>Work appropriate clothing (18%, n=33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Work appropriate clothing (20%, n=28)</td>
<td>Work appropriate clothing (21%, n=28)</td>
<td>Food and meals (17%, n=31)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Childcare (10%, n=14)</td>
<td>Childcare (10%, n=14)</td>
<td>Accommodation (12%, n=21)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Personal strategies for managing the impacts of WiL
### Personal strategies for managing the financial impact of WiL participation

#### Changing Financial Practices
- **Saving**: 176
- **Budgeting**: 38
- **Reduce spending to necessities**: 51
- **Reduce spending on food**: 41
- **Reduce spending on social activities**: 51

#### Changing Paid Employment Arrangements
- **Work more hours outside placement**: 72
- **Work during placement**: 62
- **Take paid leave from work**: 15

#### Seeking Financial Assistance
- **Scholarship**: 14
- **Government support**: 11
- **Borrow from family**: 61

#### Other Strategies
- **No strategies**: 39
Support accessed during WiL placement

- Support from family and friends: 280
- Financial support from university: 89
- Other support from university: 63
- Other support: 57
- I did not access any support: 196
Types of university support accessed during WiL placement

- **Food bank**: 32 (aware), 14 (aware but not accessed), 50 (unknown)
- **Counselling services**: 70 (aware), 7 (aware but not accessed), 13 (unknown)
- **Welfare officer**: 36 (aware), 12 (aware but not accessed), 48 (unknown)
- **Equity scholarships**: 24 (aware), 45 (aware but not accessed), 19 (unknown)
- **WiL bursaries**: 22 (aware), 33 (aware but not accessed), 38 (unknown)
- **Faculty equity support**: 17 (aware), 20 (aware but not accessed), 60 (unknown)
Strategies to support WiL rated by order of importance in staff focus group

Student focused
- Financial Support  n=0
- Peer Support  n=1

Workplace focused
- Pre-placement preparation & training  n=8

University focused
- Redesign/Restructure WiL  n=2
- Support systems  n=1
- Faculty support systems  n=1
Key finding 1
WiL participants experience considerable levels of financial stress
Key finding 1
WiL participants experience considerable levels of financial stress

- Caused by a combination of the intensive unpaid nature of placements, additional costs incurred as a result of placement, relational stressors, and the financial impacts of lost wages.
- Financial stress experienced as a result of WiL is not discriminatory
- A concerning number of participants reported forgoing necessities, including food, when undertaking WiL due to financial reasons.
- Many WiL participants, particularly those with paid employment and/or caring responsibilities, experience significant role conflict as a result of WiL participation are faced with additional challenges and complexities when faced with WiL.
- Regardless of familial or employment circumstances additional financial assistance and support is required by many WiL participants to support their participation.
Key finding 2

WiL workplaces need better preparation & support to positively contribute to participant wellbeing & learning outcomes
Key finding 2

WiL workplaces need better preparation and support to positively contribute to participant wellbeing and learning outcomes

• Both WiL administrator and student participants identified the impact of attitudes and behaviours of supervisors, co-workers and clients within the WiL workplace on student wellbeing.

• Better training, support and vetting of potential WiL workplaces and supervisors is required.

• An improved triadic relationship between university–WiL workplace–student is required which centres student learning and is cognisant of the needs of and challenges faced by students in an equitable way that still allows them to develop their experience and understandings of their intended profession.
Key finding 3

Greater levels of institutional & community support are required to support WiL participant wellbeing
Key finding 3

Greater levels of institutional and community support are required to support WiL participant wellbeing

- More supportive supervisory relationships within the WiL workplace
- WiL participants are seeking greater levels of pastoral care, staff support and empathy from universities.
- Both WiL administrator and student participants proposed that universities and registration/accreditation bodies need to consider alternatives to unpaid WiL placements or structural changes to placement requirements which limit extended unpaid placements.
- Combined, peer, family, community and university support make an important contribution to a successful WiL experience, however, available institutional support and eligibility requirements need to be better communicated to students, particularly those that may not have existing support networks.
WiL wellbeing is achieved through a combination of institutional and community support and personal coping strategies.
If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put the foundations under them.

Henry David Thoreau

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