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WORK INTEGRATED LEARNING

IN THE WIL WORKPLACE

*A brief for Business students
undertaking Work Integrated
Learning in 2015*

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This document has been compiled by Work Integrated Learning staff, for the Centre for Work Integrated Learning, College of Business at Victoria University for students preparing to commence their Work Integrated Learning experience from late 2014 for enrolment in 2015.

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IN THE WIL WORKPLACE

A BRIEF FOR BUSINESS STUDENTS UNDERTAKING WORK INTEGRATED LEARNING IN 2015

A Work Integrated Learning (WIL) experience is a unique and exciting opportunity for every student.

Victoria University has a strategic commitment to Work Integrated Learning which is now a universal feature of virtually all degree courses; our mission is to emphasise engagement with industry and community for the benefit of all students. Essentially, we are committed to ensuring that each student's learning will draw from a variety of workplace experiences such as this one. Work Integrated Learning as practised in the College of Business is often considered the most rewarding and challenging form of WIL. In 2015 the College is co-ordinating the long established unit, **Co-operative Education ("Co-op")** which began in the early 1960's as Industrial Training and a newer form of Work Integrated Learning known as **Business Integrated Learning**.

Through your Work Integrated Learning experience you will be transformed in many ways. The experience will most assuredly help you progress well down the path of becoming a VU graduate who is **work ready, career ready** and **future ready** with the skills and knowledge that will enable you to manage your career and life in a changing world of work.

While on the job as a student you should also be aware of the responsibility that you carry as **an ambassador of Victoria University and of the College of Business**. Your host organisation (or employer), your WIL **Workplace** Co-ordinator and your WIL **Academic** tutor will monitor your progress keenly.

It is also important to recognise that many Australian employers utilise the Work Integrated Learning program to 'pre-screen' potential graduate employees and that through your position you are attempting to establish yourself as a business leader or professional of the future. Student-employees like yourself, will regularly be in touch with professionals in industry. As such you are also creating impressions about your own suitability for graduate employment and for a career in your chosen field.

Through these contacts either at your own firm, at a suppliers', competitors', clients' or through contacts at industry associations, doors may be opened for your future as well as for subsequent Victoria University Business students. Students in Work Integrated Learning positions, like you, often benefit from career pathways that open up in ways not necessarily foreseen at the time.

The continued success of the Work Integrated Learning Program rests with all VU students. Future WIL opportunities for Business students can often depend upon your performance in the workplace. We therefore encourage you to be the most confident, conscientious and positive ambassador you can be.

And ... good luck in your future Work Integrated Learning endeavours, and beyond.

1. COMMUNICATIONS WITH THE UNIVERSITY

Essential features of Work Integrated Learning are regular contact between the student, the employer and the appropriate University representative and a clear understanding of the Work Integrated Learning arrangements and requirements. These arrangements may be described within a variety of documents established at the outset of the recruitment process, such as job descriptions, offer letters, employment agreements, etc, but which are summarised within the **2015 Work Integrated Learning Schedule & Agreement**.

Please ensure that this document is reviewed by each party involved in the arrangements, then completed, signed and returned by the due date – that is, preferably no later than within 1 week of commencement or preferably prior to commencement.

1.1 The Workplace Component of Work Integrated Learning

It is critical that **any issues relating to the workplace component of your position in industry are addressed to your Work Integrated Learning Co-ordinator** in the Centre. Such discussions may relate to your employment status, duties and responsibilities on-the-job, the authorised dates of your Co-operative Education employment or BIL activities, your working hours, work location, leave, probation, salary (or any other terms and conditions of your employment) or any matters that relate to your training program while on the job as well as your professional relationship with your supervisor or manager.

Please be sure to immediately contact your Work Integrated Learning Co-ordinator to discuss any of these or other matters relating to your WIL position for Co-operative Education (“Co-op”) or Business Integrated Learning (“BIL”).

In addition, your WIL Co-ordinator will maintain contact during the year to discuss your progress and performance. Co-ordinator visits or calls enable you to discuss your experience and any problems encountered. To ensure that the objectives of the program are fully met, a WIL Co-ordinator will, when appropriate, visit each employment location during the employment period.

In the case of students located interstate or overseas, alternative arrangements to monitor a student-employee’s progress will be made. Other University staff travelling to the student-employee’s location may visit on behalf of a WIL Co-ordinator. In these situations regular and reliable e-mail communications are essential. Refer to your Work Integrated Learning Co-ordinator for further details.

1.2 The Academic Component of Work Integrated Learning

You should also be aware that **all academic aspects of your WIL unit are co-ordinated by an Academic Unit Co-ordinator** and supported by a WIL tutor who will be allocated to you at the commencement of each Semester. Also, you should recognise that these units are official academic units and form part of your Bachelors degree requirements. They therefore require the same level of commitment as any other VU study unit.

As the academic semester approaches you will have access to the Unit of Study Guide for the Work Integrated Learning Unit in which you are enrolled. You will also have access to other materials via WebCT (also referred to as the Blackboard Learning System) through which all WIL unit assessment and related communications will take place. While there are no campus-based sessions to attend, as stated above, you will be allocated a WIL tutor at the commencement of each Semester. You should consider your tutor as your initial and primary contact point for all assessment related communications.

For other matters relating to the University you may wish to refer to the general “student tools” section of the Uni website at <http://www.vu.edu.au/student-tools> or contact the Student Administration Office.

2. EMPLOYEE, TRAINEE OR STUDENT?

Students undertaking work integrated learning are in an atypical situation with respect to their employment and student status. As WIL is formally integrated into your degree course and you are participating in an academic curriculum with associated assessment tasks, you are achieving significant and important learning outcomes and are always recognised as a VU student during this period.

2.1 Enrolment Status

Students should be aware that each individual Work Integrated Learning unit comprises a single 12 credit-point unit only. Therefore students **enrolled in only ONE Work Integrated Learning unit in a given semester (eg BBB 3001, Co-operative Education are considered part-time students.**

This is the case regardless of your employment status. For example, students in a full time paid year-long Co-op position are enrolled in only one VU academic unit each semester and are therefore considered part-time students for each of these semesters.

You should be sure to accurately advise any outside agencies that may require information relating to your enrolment status at University (eg Centrelink) of your current part-time status, as applicable.

If you have any queries about your enrolment status you can Ask a Question through ASKVU at the University's website available at http://www.vu.edu.au/current_students or phone (+61 3 or 03) 9919 6100 or visit a Student Service Centre at your nearest campus.

2.2 Employment Status

However, a student-employee's legal status is that of an employee with all of the rights and obligations associated with formal employment.

Please refer to the publication "***The Work Integrated Learning Experience: What You Need To Know As An Employee***" for detailed information and advice on key issues facing new employees in the workforce in Australia. This brochure updated in November 2013 by the Fair Work Ombudsman's office, includes a "fast facts" sheet and key telephone and internet help services' listings.

From time-to-time however, students may feel that a situation arises that may require an additional insight or point-of-view, or perhaps that an issue is not being dealt with in a constructive and professional manner.

In the first instance **student-employees are encouraged to deal with all work-place situations directly with their workplace supervisor**. However, you should also recognise that your Work Integrated Learning Co-ordinator may contact other sources for relevant information to assist in dealing with difficult workplace scenarios or may elect to refer you to other University service areas which possess the appropriate expertise.

In all cases you are best advised:

- **NOT TO LEAVE PROBLEMS UNRESOLVED!**
- to remember that work integrated learning is a co-operative relationship (a 3-way street) between employer, student **and** the University!
- that other peers, partners and/or colleagues may also be sought for valuable insights and opinions.

3. UNDERTAKING VOLUNTARY WORK? - INSURANCE ISSUES etc

Students may wish to consider a limited term of unpaid voluntary work with an organisation within their relevant industry sector or profession, as a means to gain a vital "foot in the door" or to satisfy a portion of their Work Integrated Learning activity (usually for BIL but this is also possible for Co-op in some cases.). You should always discuss this option with your WIL Co-ordinator in advance.

If it is agreed that such an activity may form part of your Work Integrated Learning program, then students are covered by a range of insurance products by the University (ie for Personal Accident insurance, and Public and Product Liability). When this situation arises, students must obtain the appropriate documentation from their Work Integrated Learning Co-ordinator prior to commencing this voluntary activity, and present it upon demand to their representative at the Host Organisation.

It is important to note that if you are unsure of the basis on which you are engaged in such a voluntary arrangement that you contact the Fair Work Ombudsman's office for further advice (*phone 131394*).

4. INDUSTRIAL/EMPLOYEE RELATIONS

Whilst you are employed in industry, there may be a time your workplace is experiencing some industrial unrest.

The relationship between the host organisation/employer, the University and the student-in-training is unique. It is therefore recommended that you avoid acting in a way that may have an affect on the University's relationship with your host organisation. If you do have any queries as a result of an issue of an industrial nature, please seek advice from your WIL Co-ordinator who is available for consultation and/or referral to an appropriate VU office.

You may also find yourself in a situation where your host organisation is involved in an industrial dispute. In such situations, you are advised to first contact your WIL Co-ordinator who may refer you to a suitable University representative to discuss the situation. As a student-in-training, you may be approached to join a trade union. Although the decision to join or not to join is yours, it should be realised that to take a stand against joining the union in an establishment where there is an expectation to become a member, may create difficulties.

As a member of a union, you are also entitled to seek official status within that union. Whilst such leadership may be seen as commendable in itself, it may conflict with the special relationship in which the program places you within the organisation.

5. JOB SURVIVAL TIPS

Work Integrated Learning is about more than obtaining relevant work experience. This experience will offer you the opportunity to learn more about the industry or profession you have chosen for your career and to develop specific essential skills in that endeavour; just as importantly, it will expose you to a range of life experiences that you may encounter for the first time.

As already stated, it is very much a partnership, a three-way relationship between you, your employer, often referred to as your "Host Organisation" and your university representatives. Understanding that each party has certain responsibilities to each other, and is reliant on this three-way communication, will allow you to better handle a range of workplace situations, as well as your own expectations and will ultimately enhance the learning outcomes of your experience.

This open communication is also shown as a key requirement for each of the three parties in the **2015 Work Integrated Learning Schedule and Agreement** which is also contained in your Commencement Kit.

The following tips should prove useful in adjusting to your employment:

- Be prepared for the change in lifestyle that comes with full-time Co-op work. Students may not be able to continue the same level and variety of social activity whilst working full-time and would presumably need to give up other part-time jobs.
- Some organisations will provide extensive scheduled training whilst others may only provide on-the-job training. In either case, **don't be afraid to ask lots of questions (but not the same one twice!)**.
- Employers will have certain broad expectations of students as employees. It is advisable to observe how other employees dress, act, speak, answer the phone and address each other and their clients. Try to develop your own professional business manner and style.
- Queries and concerns should always, in the first instance, be directed to your Supervisor/Team leader.
- Check which decisions need authorisation and which may be made autonomously.
- Be part of the organisation's team building activities – both formal as well as informal social activities.
- Be aware that office politics almost always exist in a work place. But be cautious about adding to it!
- Most employers have a "Probationary Period" (typically for three months) as part of their formal contract of employment.
- Students should keep in touch with other students as well as their WIL Co-ordinator. They can all be helpful and supportive.

COMMENTS FROM PAST STUDENTS ABOUT THEIR WIL EXPERIENCE:

Settling in to the job

- *It took me at least 4 weeks to feel comfortable.*
- *Spend time reading background information and company profiles to help you work out the bigger picture and where you fit in.*
- *I went for a walk around the buildings to orientate myself. I also explored the surrounding area, to make me feel more comfortable with my surroundings.*
- *On the first day, I couldn't remember people's names, and everything felt so new. I now realise that no one expects you to know everything and it takes time to settle in.*
- *Make sure you attend an induction or orientation day for new staff if your company has one.*
- *Try to remember at least one person's name and their job.*

Tips for doing the job well

- *Don't be afraid to ask questions, even the silly ones.*
- *Use your initiative – offer to get involved.*
- *Watch and listen to those people around you – particularly your supervisor.*
- *Be prepared to be “thrown in the deep end” and for some extra hours.*
- *If you don't get feedback – ask someone if you have done a good job.*

Fitting into the team

- *Take time to get to know your team members – go to social functions that will give you this opportunity eg. Friday night drinks.*
- *Don't be afraid of your supervisor – communicate with them.*
- *Don't get involved in office politics – it's not worth it.*
- *You may have high marks but people skills are just as important.*

How Work Integrated Learning /Co-op fits in with University

- *Everything I learned at Uni I have used so far.*
- *Co-op gave me a chance to have a break from study.*
- *I have finally realised where all this study is taking me.*

Some of the negative aspects

- *I tried to keep up with my social life during the week, but you just can't do it and work full time.*
- *It can be hard if your friends are still at Uni and living the Uni lifestyle.*
- *Sometimes company procedures / policies make getting a job done difficult.*

On the boring tasks that everyone has to do

- *Try to find the positive aspects of the job.*
- *Show that you are interested in everything – even if sometimes you're not.*

The return to Uni

- *Having returned to Uni, I feel refreshed.*
- *My subjects are now more relevant.*
- *Compared to some of the things I dealt with – Uni is a piece of cake.*
- *You may be offered ongoing employment after Co-op and finish Uni part time – this is worth thinking about so you are prepared if it happens.*

6. COMPLETION DOCUMENTATION

In addition to the prescribed on-line assessment tasks that you will need to complete for your WIL academic tutor, students must also submit appropriate documentation from their host organisation/ employer demonstrating successful completion of the workplace based activities. This documentation is also considered a "Workplace Hurdle Requirement" and would normally be undertaken with a WIL 2015 Employer (Performance) Appraisal Form, as a performance management tool each semester. That is, at the end of each 5 month period for the units Co-op 1 **and** Co-op 2, or after 150 hours for Business Integrated Learning.

This document is distributed by your Work Integrated Learning Co-ordinator as part of your Commencement Kit, and is usually provided by the student to their workplace supervisor at the appropriate time each semester. A completed WIL Log of Authorised Hours form must also be submitted for all part-time, casual or voluntary positions.

All Work Integrated Learning forms are also available on the Centre's website at the following url:

<http://business.vu.edu.au/wil/wil.asp> (using the appropriate user name and password).

Please contact your WIL Co-ordinator asap if you have any questions about these requirements.

7. PUBLICITY

Students are often involved in newsworthy activities ... newsworthy to other students, to their University colleagues, and occasionally newsworthy to the general public!

You are encouraged to submit written reports about your experiences to your WIL Co-ordinator for publication via a range of University electronic and/or printed publications such as *Connections* published by the University's central marketing department. Be sure to include a photograph!

8. REFERRALS

While you may have the benefit of a wonderfully challenging and rewarding WIL position, these are often extremely difficult to find. The Centre requests that, where appropriate and not in conflict with existing employment practices, you pass on the names and contact details of prospective employers that you may come into contact with to your Work Integrated Learning Co-ordinator.

9. AWARDS

Each year the Centre for Work Integrated Learning and College present a variety of awards to students who have successfully completed their Work Integrated Learning program and are judged to be worthy of recognition by the presentation of a formal award and gift.

There are often awards for the best student from each individual specialisation (eg Accounting, Hospitality Management, International Trade etc). These are judged on the basis of a student's overall performance throughout their work integrated learning experience and may require a written submission to qualify.

Previous winners have received awards for the clearly identifiable extra effort and contributions that they have made. In some cases this will be by promoting Work Integrated Learning programs by participating in activities like Careers' Panels/ Expos, the Victoria University Open Day, by providing an article for University publications and/or by demonstrating to their employer and the Centre that they have contributed over and above the customary requirements of a WIL employment experience.

These awards are usually presented at a College Awards ceremony in the year following the WIL period.

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