Eligibility requirements for work-integrated learning programs: Exploring the implications of using grade point averages for student participation

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Educational institutions often specify eligibility criteria for student participation in Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) programs including paid industry placement experiences designed to improve student learning and employability outcomes. The criteria may be based solely on the completion of a preliminary stage of course work or include additional academic quality performance measures. Although it is acknowledged that eligibility criteria are required to assist in determining student preparedness for the industry experience, this paper argues that imposing academic quality criteria such as credit or distinction grade averages, in addition to course work completion, may be at odds with the overall objectives of WIL. Using the example of a 12 month paid industry placement program within the health and science discipline areas, this paper examines the implications of adopting this type of quality criterion for the three key WIL stakeholder groups: the university, employers and students. *(Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education, 2016, 17(3), 295-308).*

Student preparedness for participation in work-integrated learning (WIL) programs is acknowledged as an important component of the learning experience, with an investment in student preparation considered a best practice strategy (Cooper, Orrell, & Bowden, 2010; Groenewald, 2004). Similarly, the effectiveness of a placement can be dependent on a successful match between a student's skill, needs and expectations and those of the host organization. These elements are considered critical for optimizing the success of a placement (Ferkins & Fleming, 2011; Patrick et al., 2008). The strategies recommended for student preparedness are discussed extensively in the literature. However, there is limited literature discussing eligibility criteria which includes an evidence base for their use. An eligibility criterion, for the purpose of this paper, refers to a measure used by universities to assess whether students are eligible to *participate* in the *process of WIL*, the initial step taken as part of the WIL journey.

Completion of a preliminary stage of course work (2 years of study) has been the usual basis for assessing eligibility for participation in a 12 month optional paid industry based learning (IBL) program for students in the health and science disciplines at Swinburne University of Technology. Once assessed eligible, students gain admission to the program. This enables the student to access a range of support services to prepare and apply for paid positions posted by host organizations, relevant to their discipline area. Host organizations then undertake a selection process which includes interviewing applicants. Not all students are successful in obtaining a paid position, but do have the opportunity to gain from *participation* in the process.

A recent proposal by the university to introduce an additional academic quality criterion of maintaining a specified grade point average (GPA) in order to be eligible for participation in this program has prompted this discussion paper. The authors were interested in exploring

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the implications of introducing such a requirement. This paper argues that imposing academic quality criteria such as maintaining a credit, distinction or a specified GPA, in addition to course work completion, requires careful consideration, including alignment with the overall vision of the WIL program.

The key ideas which frame this argument have been informed by consideration of recent changes to the higher education system in Australia, including their impact on WIL. The ideas have also been framed by the authors' collective experience in the strategic planning, academic and administrative management and participation in WIL over the last 25 years.

The specific research objective of this paper was to explore the implications and possible impact of using grade point averages (GPAs) as an eligibility criterion for participation in WIL. Existing literature involving the role and application of grade levels in a range of contexts were explored to inform this objective. This included the role of grade levels in predicting success in WIL and in post-graduation employment.

The broad structure of this paper begins with a brief examination of the current higher education context and WIL and the type and role of eligibility criterion used for student participation in WIL programs used amongst a small sample of Australian universities. The role of the student preparedness and the use of grade levels as a criterion for participation in WIL are then discussed. A WIL case study is used to illustrate the implications of using grade levels to assess student participation in WIL for the key stakeholder groups: the students, employers and university. Suggestions for addressing these implications, including the need for further research are canvassed.

This paper is of particular relevance to those considering the role and purpose of eligibility criteria in the context of WIL. More broadly, the paper aims to highlight the complex environment which requires consideration when making changes or developing approaches to WIL programs. It also aims to generate discussion regarding the role of selection criteria in fostering inclusion and student success in WIL participation.

THE HIGHER EDUCATION CONTEXT AND WIL

Increasing and broadening opportunities to attend universities is considered central to the restructuring of the Australian economy and contributing to a fairer society (Universities Australia, 2013). As such, universities are increasingly accountable to governments and society to improve student equity, address skill gaps, and improve professional practice and graduate employability (Cooper et al., 2010; Marginson & Van Der Wende, 2007). Interestingly, these principles echo those espoused by the George Swinburne's nation building vision on which the philosophy of Swinburne was founded in 1908 (Love, 2007).

The increased recognition globally of these issues has placed pressure on universities to differentiate and develop a distinctive edge in order to maintain viability within an increasingly competitive market place, with graduate employability a key focus. WIL programs have become one of the key strategies in addressing these issues (Cooper et al., 2010).

Multiple factors impact on the WIL agenda, including the differing motivations, drivers and understandings of WIL programs. The programs also require processes which generate authentic learning experiences to engage theory and practice whilst developing employability skills. This must take place within a setting which enables the identification

and minimization of risks associated with the delivery of WIL programs. The resource intensive nature of WIL and the requirement to work within frameworks which recognize administrative and academic responsibilities adds to the complexity. Consideration must also be given to the impact on universities, students and industry partners as a result of the current higher education agenda (Cooper et al., 2010; Patrick et al., 2008; Weisz & Smith, 2005).

Given these complexities, it is argued that processes involved in the development and introduction of new WIL programs or changes to existing programs, such as imposing additional academic quality criteria, requires careful consideration. These considerations are explored further.

SPECIFYING ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA FOR STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN WIL

In order to inform this discussion paper, a preliminary web based search amongst a small sample of similar universities in Australia was undertaken to gain an indication of the eligibility criteria used for student participation in WIL programs, and the role of these criteria. This involved viewing the publicly available university policies and descriptions of WIL program offerings (Deakin University, 2015; Flinders University, 2015; Murdoch University, 2011; Queensland University of Technology, 2015; University of Tasmaina, 2015; Victoria University, 2015).

The search identified that for student participation in a WIL placement amongst these universities completion of a varying number of course work units was a general criterion. The other criterion commonly used was an additional academic quality criterion such as credit or distinction grade average for student participation. However this additional criterion was not a standard requirement for all WIL programs amongst all the universities sampled, with some universities using a mixture of both eligibility requirements. The role of eligibility criteria, particularly in relation to the use of additional quality measures, was not clear; and this requirement appeared to be related to, and different for, specific discipline areas.

A review of literature relating to eligibility criteria for student participation in WIL programs was also undertaken. It revealed that this topic was generally discussed in the context of student preparedness, as a means to optimize the success of a work placement. This included extensive accounts of the strategies which should be considered by universities, workplaces and students to assist in achieving this outcome. Strategies include an assessment of student readiness for the setting, resume and interview guidance, placement familiarization and consideration of practical issues impacting on student attendance, through to the development of learning contracts and consideration of student learning styles (Cooper et al., 2010; Dunn, 2006, June; Groenewald, 2004; Patrick et al., 2008; Smith et al., 2009). Discussion is also given to providing opportunities for students to participate in learning activities during their studies such as group work to enhance this preparation (Cooper et al., 2010; Fleming, Martin, Hughes, & Zinn, 2009).

What was less explicit is how the assessment of student readiness is determined, particularly for optional WIL programs. This includes the role of eligibility criteria (such as the number of completed or failed units or other academic quality measures) and the evidence base for its use. An account of the different modes of WIL and guidance regarding the student point of entry for the placement activity is generally provided (Eames & Coll, 2010; Groenewald,

2004). For example, Cooper et al. (2010) suggest that there is no right time for students to complete WIL activities. Decisions of this nature require reflection on the aims of the program. This includes whether the intent is to enable the incremental integration of theoretical knowledge, to suit a developmental approach to learning, or the consolidation and application of theoretical knowledge to enhance employability. The evidence base for the timing of student entry into WIL requires further research (Ferkins & Fleming, 2011).

ROLE OF GRADES AS PREDICTOR OF STUDENT PREPAREDNESS FOR THE WORKPLACE

The criterion of interest for this paper is the role of a student's grade level attainment, in addition to student point of entry requirement (e.g., the completion of a preliminary stage of course work) in the assessment of preparedness for participation in WIL. This includes whether academic quality criteria, such as grade levels are a reliable predictor of achieving an optimum workplace experience, and perhaps more importantly the appropriateness of such measures to either include or exclude students from the opportunity to participate in WIL programs.

A grade is a representation of the level of academic achievement attained by a student, symbolized by alphanumeric characters or descriptors such as Distinction, Merit, Credit or Pass (Sadler, 2009). Grade point average (GPA) is also a measure of academic achievement which is commonly applied to assist in determining the suitability of applicants for a variety of opportunities including educational and employment opportunities (Palmer, Bexley, & James, 2011; Roth & Bobko, 2000; Sulastri, Handoko, & Janssens, 2015).

Empirical research investigating the use of grade levels as a reliable predictor of achieving an optimal or successful student workplace experience, in the area of WIL is lacking. Findings from studies investigating attainment of grade levels and the relationship to workplace success post-graduation are mixed and highly debated. This is due to the discourse regarding what grades represent, what influences grade attainment, how grades can be used to measure success and what defines a measurement of success. For example, when investigating the relationship between job performance and grade Wingard and Williamson (1973) found no relationship, Roth and Clarke (1998) a low positive relationship, Bretz (1989) mixed but tenuous relationship, McClelland (1973) a low positive but a modest correlation and Ferguson, James, and Madeley (2002) a good relationship, but not a perfect predictor of job performance. All studies highlight limitations with their findings, based on issues described earlier. Studies involving a comparison between high and low academic performers with respect to wages Donhardt (2004) and the use of grades to predicate competencies which underpin managerial effectiveness, such as leadership initiative Kass, Grandzol, and Bommer (2012) also indicated no significant difference between the two groups, and report similar limitations.

While this paper does not represent a systematic review of literature in the area, we argue that this evidence provides a sufficient basis to suggest that it should not be assumed grade levels alone are indicators of student preparedness, or assist in optimizing the success of a work placement. Other factors should be considered which may not be reflected in a grade level.

THE VALUE OF GRADE LEVEL ATTAINMENT

Sadler (2009) argues that making decisions based on grades places an extrinsic and intrinsic value on both the grading and the grading practice. From an extrinsic perspective it depends on the uses to which grades are put and the practical consequences of doing so. From an intrinsic perspective it is about how well a grade represents what it is supposed to represent and any associated philosophical implications that this brings. Sadler (2010) also highlights that decision made or conclusions drawn from grade levels can have significant consequences for a range of stakeholders, including students, academic institutions and employers. These perspectives are discussed further in the context of WIL.

Practical Applications and Advantages of Grade Levels in WIL

The use of grade levels in the context of WIL may have a useful practical application. For example, a host organization may consider that an assessment of grade levels is fit for their purpose when selecting applicants, or is representative of a certain level of academic competence deemed to be required for the workplace. Alternatively, an external professional body may consider a certain level of academic mastery is required in order to perform in the professional setting. In this context the student, university and host organization could be considered to be placed at risk if the student has not achieved the expected level of academic competency. To address this issue, a range of additional support strategies maybe required to be put in place by both the host organization and university to mitigate this risk. Such inclusive practices may present a range of challenges, for example an additional resource burden to the host organization (Peach et al., 2015).

The requirement to achieve a certain grade level for participation in WIL may also have the advantage of ensuring consistency and perceived fairness with the selection practices applied to the entry requirement levels set by universities for both undergraduate and post graduate programs. This may extend to graduate entry level position requirements set by employers and satisfy expectations of attracting the 'best students' for WIL opportunities. A correlation between high performance at secondary school and success at university, including increased retention and completion of academic studies has been consistently identified as the best predictor of future academic success (Palmer et al., 2011). In Australia and internationally, this has influenced selection criteria applied by universities for student entry into programs, such as the application of student ranking systems and a requirement to attain a certain level of academic achievement for entry in post graduate programs (Palmer et al., 2011). In cases where demand is high for a university program and student places are limited, this can invariably influence and increase the level of academic achievement required for entry. The level of academic achievement, as a criterion, may further be reflected in expectations for entry into graduate entry level positions programs, particularly if from the outset a discipline area has the expectation of a high level of academic achievement for entry into the undergraduate program.

These approaches may influence expectations with respect to the student's ability to perform in the workplace, with employers requesting the 'best student' based on the correlation of success with academic studies and the selection practices of universities. Thus a grade level may be applied for WIL participation in order to promote consistency with other selection practices relevant to the discipline area and reflect the assumptions surrounding high academic performance and success at university as an indicator of the 'best student'.

Alternatively universities may use grades as a practical mechanism to manage high number of students competing for limited placements, or assist placement coordinators to manage student numbers if they are required to match students to organizations based on a perceived best fit or assist in the standardization of process. The increasing number of students seeking participation in WIL has been identified as an increasing stressor on Australian universities, including the resource implication associated with the administration of student placements (Patrick et al., 2008). It is acknowledged that standardization of processes are an important component of WIL activities. Standardization can contribute to equity and fairness through the provision of consistency and clarity of requirements amongst stakeholders. It can also result in the saving of costs associated with program administration for both the university and for the employer, particularly through the 'short listing' of preferred applicants for positions, based on a specified grade criteria.

The setting of a certain level of academic achievement for WIL participation may also motivate students to attain a high grade level or enhance commitment to their undergraduate studies, resulting in further retention and completion of studies within the university program.

Philosophical and Ethical Implications of the Application of Grade Levels in WIL

Notwithstanding these previous practical applications and advantages, we argue that there are implications associated with using grade levels as a means for excluding students from participating in the *process* of WIL. From a philosophical point of view, a greater appreciation of the factors which influence the attainment of a certain grade level is necessary to assist in decisions regarding a student's preparedness for the work placement experience. This includes an appreciation of the developmental nature of learning, such as the ways in which learning occurs, its qualities, the concepts of ethical and moral reasoning and considering the impact of diversity and life experiences on students learning (Cooper et al., 2010).

MacDonald, Cameron, Brimble, Freudenberg, and English (2014), highlight that students who are first in family attendees of universities have limited understanding of their chosen profession. The implications of this include reduced motivation towards study and a non-appreciation of the skills required to succeed in the workforce, with motivation a significant impact on grade attainment and student retention (Zimmerman, Bandura, & Martinez-Pons, 1992). Engagement of students in WIL activities has been shown to improve academic skills, assist in motivation, provide career clarification and promote the development of professional identify subsequently assisting in student retention in both the university and the occupational setting (Dressler & Keeling, 2004; Trede, 2012; Weisz & Smith, 2005). In this context, it is suggested the interpretation and intent of a 'successful work placement' or 'optimizing the work place experience' requires attention. It is argued that an optimal outcome or successful work placement for WIL is the ability to transform academically lower achieving students into productive and contributing members of the workforce, as well as enhancing program completion.

An exclusion policy based on grade level attainment could significantly impact on students of low socioeconomic status, who experience greater difficulties in achieving higher grade levels, particularly in the early stages of the higher education experience (Universities Australia, 2013).

This raises a range of ethical considerations, particularly those relating to equity, fairness and social inclusion. The need to improve graduate outcomes for all students including considering the needs of marginalized students has been identified as a key WIL challenge (Mackaway, Winchester-Seeto, & Carter, 2014; Patrick et al., 2008; Peach et al., 2015). In particular Mackaway et al. (2014) describe the 'wicked problems' which complicate access and equity in WIL, including a range of student centered factors such as low GPAs (p. 233). The complexities of these 'wicked problems' also present challenges in terms of 'the theoretical frameworks or perspectives required to address them' (Mackaway et al., 2014, p. 233). WIL practices lacking flexibility and not underpinned by principles of inclusive practice have also been identified to exacerbate disadvantage (Peach et al., 2015).

Given these issues, questions arise with respect to the appropriateness of practices which facilitate, either intentionally or unintentionally, more opportunities for participation in WIL by academically higher achieving students. It is acknowledged that the adoption of such practices can be influenced by a range of factors. This may include an expectation that more favorable outcomes will result i.e. contribute to the reputation of the university, lessen the risk of problematic placements, maintain industry relationship built on a significant investment of time, goodwill and effort. In today's climate, the importance of achieving these outcomes is not underestimated. However, we consider greater thought should be given to these decisions. This may involve developing a collective understanding by all stakeholders what the overall vision of the WIL program is, including consideration of the evidence base available to inform such decisions.

Further consideration should also be given to the potential impact of a university imposed eligibility criteria on employers' recruitment strategies. For example, recent media reports indicated that two of the largest global corporate employers of student graduates have recently removed academic performance screening processes. Key reasons for this included: the organization's own internal research which found no correlation between academic performance and subsequent professional success; and, concerns regarding the potential of missing out on key talent by excluding students from disadvantaged backgrounds who may not have performed as well at school (Sheriff, 2015). Additionally, reasons for participating in WIL by employers vary, including a desire to give back to the industry or profession, identify and recruit talented students, refresh an organization, or fulfill corporate citizenship obligations (DeDlou, Peters, & Sattler, 2013; Edwards, Perkins, Pearce, & Hong, 2015; Peach et al., 2015). A grade level criterion, which excludes a cohort of students from participation in WIL, may hinder these motivations.

Similarly, recognition has been given to the impact on the reliance on grade level attainment on the selection of students for studies such as medicine (Ferguson et al., 2002). Palmer et al. (2011) highlight that an academic high score alone is not indicative of the characteristics required to be a well- rounded or specialized medical practitioner. The use of a range of other selection criteria to assist in identifying student characteristics which facilitate success at university and professional practice are now common practice in Australia and internationally (Palmer et al., 2011). Roth and Bobko (2000) also highlight the potential adverse impacts on ethnic groups through the application of GPA in personnel selection. The success of finding a job has also been associated with prior work-experiences, irrespective of GPA, suggesting an additional disadvantage to students when seeking future employment opportunities who have been excluded from WIL based on a grade criterion (Sulastri et al., 2015).

If the overall objective of WIL is to improve student learning and employability for all students, then a minimum grade level inclusion criterion may not be the most appropriate way to achieve this aim. We also consider WIL programs should be supported by an investment in mechanisms built on honest and open relationships, fairness and equity, enabling the identification of challenges and risks which promote the successful building of skills to contribute to the authentic outcomes for WIL for all stakeholders (Patrick et al., 2008; Peach et al., 2015).

The implications of imposing such prerequisites are explored further using a case study involving an optional 12 month paid industry based learning program.

A CASE STUDY

Industry based learning (IBL) at Swinburne in the health and science discipline areas has been a key strategic focus of the university. It was instigated to support the founding philosophy of the university in 1963, involving connecting technical education with industry (Love, 2007). The program has been highly regarded amongst the community, with Swinburne IBL graduates recognized as highly employable (Lawrence, 2014). IBL is also offered in a range of other discipline areas within the university, and has been shown to improve academic achievement upon return to study and enhance employment prospects (McPhee & Mouzakis, Mouzakis & McPhee, 2006). The program continues to remain a key reason for students selecting to study at Swinburne (Lawrence, 2014).

Increased competition from other universities in the WIL arena, constraints associated with the economic climate, fluctuating numbers of students and employers participating in IBL, have increased the complexities involved in program delivery (Dunn & Pocknee, 2007, McKernan, 2003). The inclusion of an additional academic quality criterion of a credit or distinction grade for participation in this program was instigated in order to assist in dealing with these complexities by standardizing IBL eligibility requirements across the university. This approach had already been adopted by other discipline areas. The key implications of this proposal for stakeholders involved in health and science area are considered in the following section.

KEY IMPLICATIONS FOR STUDENTS, HOST ORGANISATIONS AND THE UNIVERSITY
Students

Student recruitment and retention in tertiary education are key requirements of a knowledge based society and thus are key performance goals of universities. Potential university attendees, students who lack confidence and/or those who experience difficulties with academic preparedness could be discouraged from commencing, or continuing with, a tertiary education if WIL, and subsequent employment opportunities, are presented as being only attainable by credit or distinction students. Students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, non-traditional students, and 'family first' attendees are particularly vulnerable. High achieving students who find the transition to university difficult may also be impacted.

Future employability of 'pass only' students may also be impacted. This is particularly pertinent for students seeking government or hospital appointments in the environmental health and biomedical science disciplines. Graduates who have completed an IBL year are highly sought after by employers. This is partly due to the historical inclusion of a work-placement as a component of the required qualification to practice, particularly in the

environmental health discipline (Dunn, 2006,). It could also be implied that a pass in course work and the subsequent university award is not sufficient in preparing students for their chosen profession, which further discourages students who do not gain a position.

Employers

Key implications for employers relate to the ability to recruit students for positions which meet their needs. A descriptive study undertaken in 2003, amongst 31 employers indicated a selection process which 'came up with the right person for the job', was important, with a quarter of the participants disagreeing with grades being an indicator of a successful placement (McKernan, 2003, p. 20). It also identified that graduate attributes were valued by some employers as more important in promoting successful outcomes than student grades or skills. Employers also strongly supported the importance of the 'cultural fit' with three quarters agreeing that it promoted successful outcomes and a powerful aspect of the likely success of the program. This was expressed as 'they have to fit in or they would unsettle the rest of the team' or the 'ability to cope with an open work environment' or described as a 'good feel' about the student (McKernan, 2003, p. 20).

A descriptive study undertaken by Lawrence (2014), exploring future university employability strategies identified a range of student qualities desired by employers. These qualities commonly included strong academic results, any work experience and evidence of strong communication skills. The report does not make reference to recruitment criteria for IBL students. Nevertheless, when selecting for graduate positions, several former IBL employers noted that a high performing IBL student may be viewed as a priority irrespective of academic results. Evidence of academic achievement related to whether students had applied a consistent level of effort in their studies. For international IBL placements in the science field the importance of selecting students, not just on academic performance, but on gaining an understanding of the applicant's personal background, ambitions and ability to cope with being away from family and friends was considered important (Ward & Laslett, 2004).

Direct experience by the authors with employers from the health and science areas has indicated strong support for engaging students who have not been academically strong as a way to contribute to their development within the professional area. Anecdotally, the selection of such students by employers has also commonly resulted in favorable outcomes including the improvement of students' academic abilities upon return to study and ongoing employment with the organization post-graduation, consistent with findings in other discipline areas (McPhee & Mouzakis, 2004, Mouzakis & McPhee, 2006). Altruism has also identified as a motivator for participation in the IBL program by stakeholders (Levin, Bok, & Evans, 2010). The implications of adopting a gatekeeper approach to students participating in the IBL program could potentially result in unsatisfactory organizational matches, perceived to be imposed by the university. In some cases, the inability to find a suitable match jeopardizes the availability of future placements, particularly in specialist biomedical and environmental health areas. This may lead to the organization readvertizing the position external to the WIL process of which students apply and participate independently to the university.

University

Implications for the university include the potential impact on its founding philosophy, current strategic plan and wider community perception. George Swinburne's vision was

premised on increasing educational outcomes for population groups who were not so fortunate (Love, 2007). Technical education connected to industry was considered fundamental in order to prepare people with broad, adaptable skills for the modern world (Love, 2007). Swinburne University's 2020 plan importantly acknowledges evidence-based decision making, social inclusion, diversity, fostering strong connections with industry and the ability to contribute to national economic and social objectives. A policy involving exclusion of a population group, from a WIL program which was founded based on these objectives, appears incongruent with these ideals.

It is acknowledged that the provision of a range of alternate WIL activities can also contribute to a student's employability, and may present a solution to these concerns (Peach et al., 2015). However, consideration should also be given to whether the outcomes of these alternative WIL activities are likely to equate with those gained from a 12 month salaried WIL experience, which has a strong reputation for enhancing graduate employability.

The implication of proposing a quality criterion, which potentially exceeds the requirements for initial entry into the undergraduate program, is also a consideration. As eligibility for IBL is assessed in the early stages of program progression, the ability to meet a quality criterion which exceeds the normal entry requirements, may not yet be attainable for a significant portion of students. This may lessen the pool of applicants available for positions. It is also acknowledged that a quality criterion may serve as a motivator for higher academic achievement or attract higher achieving students into the degree, enhancing the promotion of IBL as a premium program. Improved academic achievement is a positive outcome, as are improvements to the reputation of any program. Nevertheless, the assumption that students are not sufficiently prepared for the workplace experience as they have not met a grade criterion could create a negative perception of the program, particularly if there is no evidence base to support this. Additionally, there is a danger of marginalizing students from lower socio economic backgrounds from program participation or from the initial engagement with tertiary education, which may also generate a negative perception of the provision of work placement experiences.

An alternative view is that a program which is not only available to all students who reach a certain stage of course completion, but has the ability to increase the employability of a diverse range of students, whilst meeting the needs of all stakeholders, is a premium program.

THE WAY FORWARD

This paper has raised issues with respect to the use of academic grade levels as a means for excluding students from participating in the process of WIL. In doing so, it also acknowledges that different circumstances provide universities with varying challenges and a range of complexities which impact on such decisions. These challenges and complexities may be driven by employer demands and discipline specific expectations, resource constraints, market demand, perception or experience with respect to the alignment of previous student academic achievement and success in WIL. This is further complicated by the limited empirical evidence to support alternate approaches in assessing student eligibility for participation in WIL.

To address these challenges and complexities the examination of selection strategies applied in other university and workplace contexts to address issues of equity and diversity have

been explored. Selection strategies for university entrance which rely on a sole measure of academic achievement have been identified as potentially working 'against efforts to promote diversity of participating over time' (Palmer et al., 2011). To overcome this, application of alternate criteria such as tests of aptitude and preparedness and other measures of motivation and achievement have been suggested. This may include psychometric assessment, the use of interviews, portfolios, application essays, referee reports and evidence of extra-curricular activities or the addition of bonus points to improve student ranking to recognize disadvantage. Some of these strategies have been echoed in the application for post graduate studies and graduate entry level positions (Palmer et al., 2011). For example Kuncel, Hezlett, and Ones (2004) argue that cognitive ability instruments are generalisable valid predictors of academic and vocational criteria as well as career potential and creatively.

In doing so, it also highlighted that alternate strategies, which predict the likelihood of success, may require further research with respect to which strategies provide the best validity and in what context, including the impacts associated with their use amongst marginalized groups. For example, many shortcomings have been associated with the use of interviews, personal statements and psychometric tests for selection of applicants for undergraduate studies, graduate, post graduate and graduate entry programs. These shortcomings are related to factors such as subjectivity, costs of administration, lack of reliability in predicting success whilst improving diversity and the adequacy of measures which reflect the needs of the discipline area (Kuncel, Hezlett, & Ones, 2001; Palmer et al., 2011; Roth & Bobko, 2000).

As a way forward, it is suggested universities investigate alternative mechanisms appropriate to the *discipline context* to engage students in the process of WIL rather than relying solely on a grade level criterion as a means of exclusion.   This may involve the development or further examination of institutional WIL policies which aim to guide and support inclusive practice (Peach et al., 2015). It may also require an examination of what 'success' is in the context of WIL, e.g., is success value adding to the educational experience of all students , increasing the outputs of the employing company, increasing the reputation of the university .

For example, based on the arguments presented in this paper, standardization of the WIL process for IBL could be achieved through removing, rather than adding, quality criteria as an eligibility requirement for participation in IBL in all discipline programs. Removal or the non-introduction of this additional eligibility requirement provides an opportunity for all students who have passed the required stage of their program to participate and potentially be successful in the process of IBL. It also enables employers to make their own assessment of the suitability of the student for the workplace experience based on their own value judgments. Alternatively, for students who did not achieve the academic grade level deemed necessary for the particular discipline area, an opportunity to submit supplementary material could be provided. An investment in the process itself is a unique opportunity for students to participate in an *authentic* WIL opportunity. The beginning of this journey is rich with the opportunity to improve job application skills, commence career clarification, professional identity formation and build resilience.

CONCLUSION

This paper has highlighted the complex environment which surrounds WIL, requiring consideration when making decisions involving changes to programs such as those involving eligibility criteria. This paper has highlighted that a stakeholder approach is required to identify the implications of such changes. Importantly, developing a collective understanding of the objectives of WIL program, including consideration of the foundations of which they have been built and alignment to the current universities vision is an important part of this process. In doing so, it enhances the ability of WIL programs to not only optimize successful work placements, but contribute to improving student equity, address skill gaps, graduate employability and professional practice.

The paper has also highlighted the opportunities for further research in a number of areas relating to student preparedness. This includes the link between grade level achievement and student preparedness for participation in WIL, the appropriate timing for a WIL experience within a student's course of study and greater identification of employers views of the role of grade level achievement in contributing to student selection processes for WIL programs.

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The Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education publishes peer-reviewed original research, topical issues, and best practice articles from throughout the world dealing with Cooperative Education (Co-op) and Work-Integrated Learning/Education (WIL).

In this Journal, Co-op/WIL is defined as an educational approach that uses relevant work-based projects that form an integrated and assessed part of an academic program of study (e.g., work placements, internships, practicum). These programs should have clear linkages with, or add to, the knowledge and skill base of the academic program. These programs can be described by a variety of names, such as cooperative and work-integrated education, work-based learning, workplace learning, professional training, industry-based learning, engaged industry learning, career and technical education, internships, experiential education, experiential learning, vocational education and training, fieldwork education, and service learning.

The Journal's main aim is to allow specialists working in these areas to disseminate their findings and share their knowledge for the benefit of institutions, co-op/WIL practitioners, and researchers. The Journal desires to encourage quality research and explorative critical discussion that will lead to the advancement of effective practices, development of further understanding of co-op/WIL, and promote further research.

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Before submitting a manuscript, please unsure that the 'instructions for authors' has been followed (www.apjce.org/instructions-for-authors). All manuscripts are to be submitted for blind review directly to the Editor-in-Chief (editor@apjce.org) by way of email attachment. All submissions of manuscripts must be in Microsoft Word format, with manuscript word counts between 3,000 and 5,000 words (excluding references).

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Typically, authors receive the reviewers' comments about 1.5 months after the submission of the manuscript. The Journal uses a constructive process for review and preparation of the manuscript, and encourages its reviewers to give supportive and extensive feedback on the requirements for improving the manuscript as well as guidance on how to make the amendments.

If the manuscript is deemed acceptable for publication, and reviewers' comments have been satisfactorily addressed, the manuscript is prepared for publication by the Copy Editor. The Copy Editor may correspond with the authors to check details, if required. Final publication is by discretion of the Editor-in-Chief. Final published form of the manuscript is via the Journal website (www.apjce.org), authors will be notified and sent a PDF copy of the final manuscript. There is no charge for publishing in APJCE and the Journal allows free open access for its readers.

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Types of manuscripts the Journal accepts are primarily of two forms; *research reports* describing research into aspects of Cooperative Education and Work Integrated Learning/Education, and *topical discussion* articles that review relevant literature and give critical explorative discussion around a topical issue.

The Journal does also accept *best practice* papers but only if it present a unique or innovative practice of a Co-op/WIL program that is likely to be of interest to the broader Co-op/WIL community. The Journal also accepts a limited number of *Book Reviews* of relevant and recently published books.

Research reports should contain; an introduction that describes relevant literature and sets the context of the inquiry, a description and justification for the methodology employed, a description of the research findings-tabulated as appropriate, a discussion of the importance of the findings including their significance for practitioners, and a conclusion preferably incorporating suggestions for further research.

Topical discussion articles should contain a clear statement of the topic or issue under discussion, reference to relevant literature, critical discussion of the importance of the issues, and implications for other researchers and practitioners.