

Work-Integrated Learning in Alberta: Discussion Document

Overview

Work-integrated learning merges the academic learning of post-secondary education with its practical application in the workplace. Work-integrated learning (WIL) is a model and process of curricular experiential education that formally and intentionally integrates a student's academic studies within a workplace or practice setting. WIL experiences include an engaged partnership of at least: an academic institution, a host organization/employer and a student.¹

According to Cooperative Education and Work-Integrated Learning (CEWIL) Canada, the types of work-integrated learning include several models, which already exist in Alberta:

- Apprenticeship;
- Co-operative Education;
- Internships;
- Entrepreneurship (e.g. development of business start-ups);
- Service Learning (e.g. partnerships with community organizations to identify and solve problems);
- Applied Research Projects;
- Mandatory Professional Practicum/Clinical Placement;
- Field Placement; and
- Work Experience.

Research on the Alberta system has indicated that post-secondary students who are given an opportunity to have work experiences while they learn tend to get a job sooner after they graduate, are more likely to get a job related to their interests and credentials, and have higher median incomes upon graduation. Work-integrated learning also helps build essential skills that employers are looking for, including professionalism, team communication, and emotional intelligence.

Discussion questions

1. Based on the definition above, does it align with your current understanding of work-integrated learning?
2. Have you or your company ever participated in a WIL program with a post-secondary partner?
 - a. For those who say yes, how has the experience gone? What types of WIL opportunities have been undertaken? Any challenges or further opportunities that could be explored?
 - b. For those who say no, what are the reasons for not doing so (e.g. lack of awareness, inability to manage, costs, etc.)? Would the definition above increase your likelihood of participating in a WIL program?
3. What is a reasonable length of time for a WIL student to participate on a job-site that is beneficial for both employer and student?
4. What can government do to enhance participation in WIL opportunities?
 - a. E.g. communications materials, information sessions, financial supports, facilitating connections to PSIs, etc.

¹ https://www.cewilcanada.ca/Library/Rebrand_CEWIL/WIL-Def-Final.pdf