Work-Integrated Learning: Community and Student Engagement Through Informed Educational Technology Choices

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Work-integrated learning (WIL) continues to be an essential topic of conversation among governments, educators, employers, and students. By various names and definitions, WIL attempts to inject the realism of workplace employment tasks into the post-secondary learning environment. The COVID-19 pandemic has forced stakeholders to innovate in the WIL space often using the advances in information and communications technologies (ICT) to build further bridges between learners and real work experiences. The chapter provides an overview of WIL followed by three specifics cases from marketing faculty at the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology (SAIT). In each of the three cases, faculty used different ICT to provide engaging learning environments linking business, industry, consumers, and the learners.

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INTRODUCTION

The preparation of learners for careers through work experience and the advancement of educational technologies, including video conferencing, were well-established trends before the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the pandemic forced post-secondary educators to transition classroom-mediated learning into distance or online learning immediately. The change resulted in post-secondary learning transitioning without sufficient preparation, without the benefits of instructional design, regardless of the preferences of faculty and learners, and regardless of the subject matter. Further, the learning was now taking place in a world where social isolation, reduced social opportunities, and limited employment opportunities were impacting the environment for the learners. There have been innovative efforts to use information and communication technology (ICT) to expand the range and format of Work Integrated Learning (WIL) (Zeewaard & Rowe, 2019; BHER, 2016; Dean et al., 2020). Learning is a social activity enhanced with higher engagement and socialization. In this socially isolated environmental context, how can technological solutions facilitate faculty's efforts to continue to provide engaging, valued learning experiences for students? How can post-secondary educators continue to provide meaningful, relevant learning experiences that help prepare students for the world of work post-graduation? Through the case experiences of three Southern Alberta Institute of Technology (SAIT) marketing faculty, this chapter provides an overview of various technology-enhanced work-integrated learning and how course content, information and communications technologies, and faculty can provide enhanced WIL experience for the learners.

BACKGROUND

Within the Canadian landscape for WIL, provinces, who have the constitutional responsibility for education, are continuing to focus on WIL. For example, the Government of Alberta in the Alberta 2030: Building Skills for Jobs strategy summary set out a goal of becoming "the first province in Canada to offer every undergraduate student access to a work-integrated learning opportunity" (2021, p.2). As one of the long established post-secondary institutions in the province of Alberta, SAIT is enhancing the capacity for WIL with innovative experiences for learners.

In 1916, the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology (SAIT) doors opened in Calgary, Alberta, Canada with 11 students and a mandate to train veterans returning from the First World War. Over the years, SAIT matched community needs — as a hospital during the Spanish Flu pandemic and as a Royal Canadian Air Force Wireless Training School during the Second World War. Fast forward to today and