



Association for
Co-operative Educa
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Learning

BC/Yukon



WIL EDI RESOURCE HUB: IDENTIFYING BARRIERS AND STRATEGIES FOR EQUITABLE WAYS FORWARD IN WIL

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Commentary:

While this project intended to understand the experiences of WIL students with marginalized identities, the scope did not include Indigenous students since another provincial project is examining the topic in depth. However, some Indigenous students' voices have been captured through the student survey carried out for this project.

Further, the majority of the scholars cited through the literature review are not racialized or from marginalized backgrounds. This may be viewed as a limitation and one that is important to note as this recognizes that research, just like any other human endeavor, is both shaped and limited by the perspectives, standpoints and biases of the scholars themselves.

Lastly, I would like to acknowledge my own positionality as an immigrant and settler doing this work on B.C.'s unceded lands. Acknowledging my positionality is important because as guests and settlers we benefit from being situated on unceded lands and the resources these lands have to offer.

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KEY TERMS

Association for Co-operative Education and Work-Integrated Learning (ACE-WIL) for British Columbia (B.C.) and Yukon (ACE-WIL B.C. / Yukon) is a non-profit association comprised of post-secondary and publicly funded institutions in the province. ACE-WIL aims to promote excellence in post-secondary experiential education through advancing WIL opportunities for students.


Co-operative Education and Work-Integrated Learning Canada (CEWIL Canada) is the lead organization for work-integrated learning in Canada. CEWIL Canada's mission is to build the capacity to develop future-ready students and graduates through quality work-integrated learning.

Work-Integrated Learning (WIL): CEWIL defines Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) as a form of curricular experiential education that formally integrates a student's academic studies with quality experiences within a workplace or practice setting. WIL experiences include an engaged partnership of at least: an academic institution, a host organization, and a student. WIL can occur at the course or program level and includes the development of student learning objectives and outcomes related to: employability, personal agency, knowledge and skill mobility, and life-long learning.


Equity: exists when there is fair opportunity, treatment, and access for all people. To be equitable means to strive to identify and eliminate barriers that have prevented the full participation of some groups of people.

 Putting equity into practice, WIL processes and resources recognize that there are existing structures of power, and strives to address the effects of historical and contemporary oppression as key to fostering equitable outcomes for all WIL students, staff, and employers.

Diversity: encompasses all the different characteristics that make one individual or group different from another. It includes all the ways in which people differ - age, national origin, religion, disability, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, immigration status, education, marital status, language, race, ethnicity, gender.

 The concept of diversity encompasses acceptance and respect, and this means moving beyond tolerance. Diversity is a reality created by individuals and groups from a broad spectrum of differences. Recognizing, respecting, and promoting a diversity of worldviews, perspectives, and experiences in WIL, as well as having the skills to work across differences, serves the work and the goals of various groups, including the interests of WIL students, staff, faculty, and the broader community.

Inclusion: is the act of creating environments in which any individual or group (especially those traditionally excluded) feel welcomed, respected, supported, and encouraged to fully participate.

 Within the WIL context, inclusive spaces are ones where there is a deep awareness of the value of diverse identities, opinions, and practices. Further, there is active promotion of equitable policies and processes, and a strong focus on actively dismantling the structures that create barriers and maintain oppressive practices.

Disability Disclosure: refers to telling an employer/host about your disability or chronic health condition. The most important factor in deciding whether or not to disclose to an employer is your ability to do the

job. If your disability will not affect your job, you are not required to disclose. If you will require accommodation to do the job, you must disclose.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) programs, including co-operative education, are designed to bridge students' academic studies with work experience for securing relevant employment. With amplified political impetus around equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) in contemporary literature, legislation, and policies, there is an onus for institutions and programs to examine the ways in which current practices are meeting institutional and national EDI goals. This research began in February 2020 to examine the kinds of barriers that students who experience marginalization face at any stage of their participation in a WIL program. This project defines 'students who are marginalized' as those belonging to the following equity-deserving groups: LGBTQ2S+ students, students with disabilities, international students, refugee students, and students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds. Indigenous students are not included within the scope of the literature review as there is another comprehensive project that is reporting on this topic.

This report presents the challenges and barriers that students who experience marginalization face in WIL programs. The report then outlines recommendations for interconnected challenges from an intersectional lens.

The primary themes that underpin the findings related to the barriers faced by students who experience marginalization in WIL programs are as follows:

1. Experience bias and discrimination from WIL employers and staff, which impact the student experience in WIL.
2. One-size-fits-all i.e., universal policies and strategies in WIL that aim to support all students in one way despite diversity.
3. The pathways for navigating WIL and its processes lack specialized supports.

Three recommendations to better support WIL students who experience marginalization are:

1. Ongoing professional development for WIL staff and employers.
2. An EDI review of WIL programs' policies and procedures.
3. Ensuring there are clearly articulated specialized resources and supports that reflect diverse students' intersectional needs.

The findings and recommendations have expectantly resulted in a contribution that fills a gap in the WIL literature related to understanding how WIL approaches diminish equity and inclusion-related barriers faced by students who experience marginalization. The findings from the literature review and student survey clearly articulate the need for specialized WIL student supports (for example, a dedicated WIL accessibility advisor for students with disabilities) in order to mitigate barriers related to equity, diversity and inclusion. The goal of examining several interconnected barriers helps to demonstrate how socially important problems can be addressed with a combination of research, understanding, and intentional customized resources, all of which will benefit the scholarly field, WIL practitioners, WIL employers, and most importantly WIL students - a win for all sides.

The report concludes with a list of resources curated to support WIL employers and staff working with today's increasingly diverse students. The resources are developed to fill the gap in a need for specialized supports, as identified by the findings from the literature review and student survey.

“

The full potential of WIL can only be realized if students have equitable access through an inclusive approach with both the social justice values which underpin [the country's] education system and the economic and social imperatives that drive the current social inclusion agenda.

”

(Macaway & Winchester-Seeto, 2018, p. 142).



INTRODUCTION

With funding from the British Columbia (B.C.) Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Training, this project is being carried out for the ACE-WIL B.C. Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Resource Hub. The project identifies the primary barriers that students who experience marginalization face when participating in WIL opportunities and makes recommendations for mitigating the barriers. The goals of this project are to increase participation and retention of students who experience marginalization within WIL programs. The research question guiding this project is: ***What are the barriers for the identified underrepresented student groups to access and succeed in WIL, and what are the recommended suggestions to minimize these?***

Canada's federal and provincial governments, industry associations, along with small and large employers across different sectors have championed work-integrated learning (WIL) as a mechanism to produce graduates with enhanced skill sets (Business Council of Canada, 2016; Conference Board of Canada, 2016), particularly as student diversity is ever-increasing in post-secondary institution (PSI). For example, the number of international students enrolled in Canadian PSIs has been on the rise for two decades and has increased 154% between 2010-2018 (CBIE, 2019), with international student numbers increasing at rates higher than that of Canadian students. Alongside this growth in diversity, the demand for WIL has also increased (CEWIL, 2020). However, in the review of the literature, there appears to be limited research related to diversity and inclusion issues, specifically within the WIL context (Cukier et al., 2018).

Past reports from the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) have confirmed that WIL programs rely on institutional resources to help deliver programs and support diverse students (2011; 2016). Further, as identified in the 2018 report by HEQCO, many WIL faculty and staff are implementing less resource intensive strategies to address WIL barriers, and this is mainly due to a lack of specialized resources (these could be in the form of people, such as specialized advisors in WIL, or appropriate education and resources for staff and employers). In addition, "one of the primary challenges reported in the literature is that delivering WIL programs requires considerable faculty [and staff] time and energy" (Peters, 2012 as cited in HEQCO, 2018, p. 2).

Marginalization is the process of pushing a particular group or groups of people to the edge of society by not allowing them an active voice, identity, or place in it (Syracuse University, 2018). Through both direct

and indirect processes, people who experience marginalization may be made to feel as if they are less important than those who hold more power and/or privilege in society (DiAngelo, 2012). For this project, the scope of 'students who are marginalized' are identified as belonging to the following equity-deserving groups such as: LGBTQ2S + students, students with disabilities, international students, refugee students, and students from low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds.

While each of the above noted social groups may face barriers that are different from one another, they also have considerable overlap. As such, this project has been approached with an intersectional lens. Intersectionality is a metaphor for the ways that multiple forms of inequality sometimes compound and create obstacles that are not understood through a singular lens of identity or analysis (Crenshaw, 2018). By way of example, self-identifying female students from international and racialized pathways are less likely to get a job in STEM fields and the trades (Cukier et al. 2018) - this statistic represents intersectionality as a compound of culture, language, and gender. Intersectional approaches account for how each of us have multiple group identities, such as our gender, being of a certain generation, class, and so on. Intersectionality accounts for how group identities are often interrelated, creating a system that reflects the 'intersection' of multiple forms of barriers one student may experience, as seen in the STEM example above (Crenshaw, 1989). Intersectionality reminds us of the complexity of EDI, and without this understanding, creating EDI resources through a single lens would be atomistic. As Lorde (1982) said, "there is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives (np)."

These multiple and intersecting aspects of identity are present in the growing understanding of diverse student populations (Runyan, 2018). As such, an intersectional lens will aid in the design of effective and wholistic approaches that promote equity, diversity, and inclusion in students' respective WIL journeys.

METHODOLOGY

The methods used in this project to answer the research question include a literature review and survey of WIL students from PSIs across BC. Both are detailed below.

Literature Review

The literature review is based on a total of 30 peer-reviewed articles and reports that met the scope of the project, namely: students who are marginalized are identified as belonging to the following equity-deserving groups: LGBTQ2S+ students, students with disabilities, international students, refugee students, and students from low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds. The appendix (found at the end of the report) provides information-at-a-glance regarding the articles and reports used in the literature review.

The following guiding questions were used to analyze each article or report:

- What does the contemporary research say about types of barriers faced by WIL students who experience marginalization?
- What are some evidence-based strategies and recommendations to overcome barriers and foster a more inclusive and equitable WIL environment?

The methodology used in the majority of the articles and reports reviewed were surveys and more often, interviews. Qualitative research methods such as interviews align with central EDI theories such Critical Race Theory (CRT), as it positions knowledge as being constructed, and as such, states that there is no single methodology that can generate knowledge. CRT theorists Solorzano and Yosso (2001) urge the cultivation of research using marginalized life experiences that can enhance our knowledge of existing structures and practices and how they land on us. They claim, "experiential knowledge...opens up possibilities of drawing on the strengths of our communities to continue the struggle for education by

incorporating silenced voices” and marginalized experiences (p. 486). This approach of capturing experiences through individuals’ own voice brings forth the knowledge and tools to understand lived experiences of the individual, institutions, and interpersonal planes. CRT is a constructivist methodology that maximizes the possibilities of engaging with the otherwise-overlooked experiences and knowledges of people who experience marginalization. It also ensures they are representatives of their own lived experiences; consequently providing updated information for decision-making from multiple contexts. The CRT approach is also intersectional and leads to gathering culturally relevant research that supports contextual meaning-making and understanding of the world (Connor, 2008).

Findings:

The primary themes in the literature that describe the WIL barriers faced by students who experience marginalization are:

1. Experience bias and discrimination from WIL employers and staff, which impact the overall student experience in WIL.
2. One-size-fits-all i.e., universal policies and strategies in WIL that aim to support all students in one way despite diversity.
3. The pathways for navigating WIL and its processes lacks specialized supports.

These are described in detail in the upcoming section.

Student Survey

Distributed through members of the EDI Advisory Committee, WIL students from a total of six PSIs participated in an online survey via SurveyMonkey. The PSI included: Simon Fraser University, Okanagan College, Selkirk College, University of Victoria, Royal Roads University, and University of Fraser Valley in British Columbia. The purpose of the survey was to understand from WIL students’ perspectives: “*What aspects of WIL programs do students (specifically those who experience marginalization) find as barriers to their participation or feeling a sense of inclusion?*” The primary aim of this survey was to better understand the experiences of students and design practices of WIL to improve the experiences of students who experience marginalization in WIL. The results of the survey were analyzed alongside the findings from the literature review.

A total of 317 responses were gathered through the survey. The data were analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), Version 25, and NVivo, Version 12, a mixed-method data analysis software. The methodology was inductive thematic analysis of the open-ended questions. The following five primary themes were identified as barriers reported by WIL students

1. Discrimination/ Exclusion based on identity characteristics such as gender, disability, race, religion, immigrant status, cultural background, and English fluency.
2. Not knowing how to access supports at different stages in the WIL lifecycle.
3. Difficulties in landing a job.
4. Navigating unclear expectations of the placement in WIL.
5. Difficulty and/or unfamiliarity navigating workplace dynamics during a work term.

The findings and recommendations have expectantly resulted in a contribution that fills a gap in the WIL literature related to understanding how WIL approaches break down equity and inclusion-related barriers faced by students who experience marginalization. The next section discusses the findings in more depth.

FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

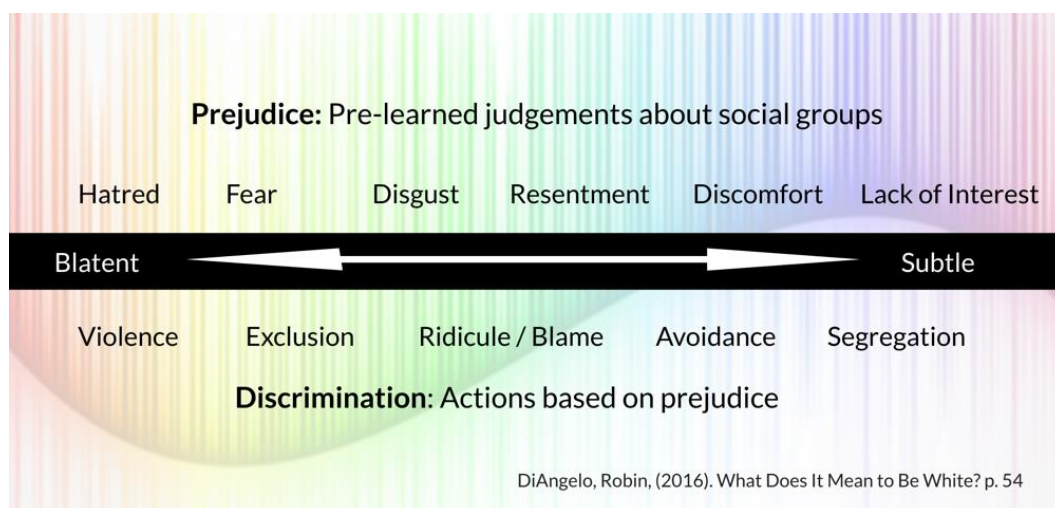
While the WIL experience is recognized as a period of learning and adaptation for students in a professional setting, there appears to be limited research that identifies issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) that are critical to the student experience in WIL. Further, there is limited literature that discusses EDI and the impact of participation in WIL on other life domains such as mental health, social isolation, and exposure to exploitative or discriminatory work environments, to name a few (Grant-Smith & Gillett-Swan, 2017; 2018).

Using an intersectional lens, the findings and recommendation presented below will report on the primary three themes that appear to impact the students who experience marginalization that were identified in the scope of this project. The findings and recommendations represent the data collected in the literature review and student survey.

BARRIERS: Bias and discrimination¹

One of the key findings identified in the literature (Hall et al., 2017; Wall, Tran & Soejatminah, 2017; Cukier et al., 2018; Scholl & Mooney, 2004; Messinger, 2004 as cited in Cukier et al., 2019; Newhook, 2016 as cited in Cukier et al., 2019; McPherson, 2019; Braun, 2019) and confirmed by 20.2% of students in the survey is that students who experience marginalization report facing bias and stereotype during the WIL experience. This suggests that discriminatory attitudes/ behaviours exist from either WIL employers and/or staff towards WIL students on the basis of personal identity markers, some of which include a disability, accent, race, gender and sexual orientation.

Discrimination is an unfair action towards a group of people based on prejudice of a social group; prejudice is a learned pre-judgement about a social group that is based on stereotypes (DiAngelo, 2012). DiAngelo (2012) states that all people have prejudice and act with discrimination, in that there is no way for human beings to be completely rid of biases and prejudices as it is a natural part of socialization. Discrimination is the amalgamation of prejudice and leads to discriminatory attitudes as detailed in the image below:



WIL Coordinators report that harassment is a potential risk to students on work terms, which included bullying, physical or emotional intimidation, neglect, and sexual harassment (Cukier et al., 2018). This is

¹ All literature relevant to this topic cited in Table 1 - Appendix

important to note as the survey respondents who self-identified as LGBTQ2S+ reported significantly higher average experiences of exclusion on the basis of gender, disability, and sexual orientation as compared to their heterosexual counterparts. As well, respondents who self-identified as non-binary reported significantly higher than average experiences of exclusion on the basis of gender, as compared to male-identifying respondents.

One study showed that employers had a bias towards hiring students that already possessed prior work experience, even though co-op is marketed to be a foot in the door to workplace experience (Cukier et al 2018). This point was confirmed by some qualitative findings in the student survey:

“Job postings indicate a high level of experience is required, but I don't have that experience - that's why I'm applying for the co-op job. It would be nice if there were more co-op positions that assumed little to no prior experience....that's what a co-op should be for after all, to get that experience.”

Stereotypes and biases affect the way we perceive, store and remember information, and therefore many WIL supervisors may be attending to stereotype-confirming behavior either consciously or unconsciously (Hall et al, 2017). Due to this, bias can cause supervisors to misjudge performance, by attributing good performance to luck rather than ability and thus underestimating a students' potential.

Observing further from an intersectional perspective, additional forms of discrimination that stem from harbouring biases and stereotypes surface. For example, the 2018 report by the Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) states that students with disabilities are more likely to have lower incomes than people without disabilities and that many of them live in chronic poverty. Therefore, a student's “experience with low income may be highly relevant to understanding the impact of discrimination on a student with a disability, and this may result in specific experiences of discrimination” (p. 8). Additionally, “LGBTQ+ identified students reported being subject to discriminatory attitudes and behaviours while on placement. The heterosexist climate of placement organizations meant that students felt pressure to hide their sexual orientation” (Messinger, 2004 and Newhook, 2016 as cited in Cukier et al., 2019, p. 9). In order to tackle the heterosexist climate, this same report recommends that placement supervisors (and we would argue, WIL staff as well) receive more education and information about sexual orientation issues in placements, as well as build on relationships with LGBTQ+ agencies.

In Canada, bias against job-seekers with ‘foreign-sounding’ names has also been documented through studies of hiring processes (Johnson et al., 2020; Oreopoulos, 2009; Oreopoulos & Dechief, 2012; Banerjee, Reitz & Oreopoulos, 2018 as cited in Cukier et al. 2018). Such forms of stigmatization are “prevalent and may lead to discrimination, unnecessary job loss, poor psychosocial and vocational outcomes, and decreased quality of life” (Wilson-Kovacs et al. as cited in Hall et al., 2018, p. 261) for WIL students. Research on students from international pathways within WIL indicates that this particular subgroup voiced feeling stereotyped and pigeonholed by employers and their schools based on accent, their age, or finding out where they are from (Charolette, 2019; Harrison & Felton, 2013 as cited in Cukier et al., 2018; Tran & Soejatminah, 2017; Wall et al., 2017). Due to this, many international students are subject to discrimination and are placed in roles that do not recognize their cultural competencies and underutilize their skills or talents (Cukier et al., 2018; Wall, Tran & Soejatminah, 2017). These findings were confirmed by the WIL student survey where respondents who self-identified as international students reported significantly higher average experiences of exclusion on the basis of race, English language fluency, and cultural background as compared with students who identified as Canadian citizens.

RECOMMENDATION: Ongoing professional development for WIL staff and employers

Braun (2019) highly recommends professional development for faculty and staff to learn about the lived experiences of equity-deserving groups. Austin (2019) speaks of how systemic forces are perpetuated through many forms, one of which is low awareness from staff who work with diverse student

populations. Macaway and Winchester-Seeto (2018) point to the power, influence, and control that certain PSI staff have over matters such as excluding or including candidates based on judgments of what they deem to be most important. This is why they state that WIL practitioners' awareness of diversity and inclusion matters from a professional, and personal standpoint, is crucial in many ways such as for their own increased level of familiarity with, and sensitivity to, the challenges facing students (Macaway & Winchester-Seeto, 2018). Hall et al. (2017) strongly emphasize the importance of knowledge, interaction, experience, familiarity, and expertise in changing attitudes and discriminatory behaviors, which is a top barrier common to students who experience marginalization. Employers are encouraged to offer flexibility for placements, for example, by offering flexible hours for cultural holidays, broadening the recruitment and selection processes to include a diverse range of applicants, and adopting clear policies and procedures to support inclusion, anti-discrimination, and harassment in their organizations. In terms of strategies to overcome socialized attitudes and discrimination, Hall et al. (2017) and Turcotte et al. (2016) suggest intentional implementation of professional development for staff and employers on topics such as:

- socialization,
- intercultural communication,
- bias-mitigation,
- common barriers experienced during placements,
- examples of universal design practices that can make a workplace accessible, and
- the process for disclosure and negotiating specific accommodations.

Gillet-Swan and Grant-Smith's (2018) review, also similarly emphasized by Wall et al. (2017) states "the importance of incorporating effective and appropriate strategies into pedagogical and institutional practice to support the rich diversity of the student cohort participating in work-integrated learning" (pg. 132).

BARRIERS: WIL strategies and policies²

While the labour market benefits of WIL have been sufficiently documented over the years (Dunn et al., 2016; Macaway & Winchester-Seeto, 2018; Cukier et al., 2019), some of the structures and policies of WIL programming act as barriers to diverse students. For example, Cukier et al. (2018) highlight that "given that WIL provides access to employer experience and professional development, it has the potential to produce social inequality if social groups are systematically excluded from it" (pg. 6). In other words, because WIL programming is often modelled after employment structures and policies, it has the tendency to reproduce the power and privilege imbalances seen in the professional world. One way this might occur would be through the presence of multiple PSI and employer-level 'sorting mechanisms,' which may unintentionally, but systematically, exclude students of certain social groups (Cukier et al., 2018; Wall et al., 2017). For example, a high GPA is often used as a criterion for WIL participation. However, studies have indicated that low socioeconomic status (SES) students are more likely to have lower academic achievement levels due to a lack of access to educational materials, such as computers at home, internet, and are often caregivers to family members. GPA is one example of criterion that proves to be a barrier into WIL (Dunn et al., 2016; Gillett-Swan & Grant-Smith, 2018). It is crucial to consider that this is only one example of one barrier and that the magnitude of the impact is pervasive for one student subgroup (i.e., students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds). However, through an intersectional approach we come to understand the complexity. Consider for example, a student from a low SES background who may also face compounding barriers, such as a disability or belonging to the LGBTQ2+ community. This intersectionality would amplify and compound as additional barriers. In the student survey, 21.2% of students indicated that qualifications to enter WIL programs (such as the GPA requirement) are a barrier for them.

^{2 2} All literature relevant to this topic cited in Table 2 - Appendix

WIL is often described as a valuable way to prepare students with relevant work experience prior to graduation (Kramer & Usher, 2011). However, “when organizations [give] preference [to] particular students over others to host on placement, the full individual and collective potential of WIL is not realized” (Mackaway & Winchester-Seeto; 2018, p. 141). Strekalova-Hughes (2017) states that teachers and staff tend to view mainstream culture and their own practices as the norm and interpret the behaviours of students who experience marginalization accordingly, thus greatly affecting international, refugee, and racialized students. As mentioned, GPA as a criterion affects students who experience marginalization and is one example of the one-size-fits-all approach from WIL.

Another example is seen in offering a wealth of services for students and how it does not necessarily mean that all students can access these services, or that the services offered include an understanding of the strengths and challenges that, for example, LGBTQ2S+ and gender non-conforming people of color identity might face (Austin, 2019). This brings up considerations of what kinds of supports are offered, and begs the question – are these supports inclusive of *all* students’ needs? According to McPherson (2019), there has always been a lack of a social justice focus in minority/youth related policies, which is likely due to the lack of acknowledgement of young people (described as 18-25 year olds) as a vulnerable, oppressed group. McBeath et al.’s, (2018) study on WIL students’ well-being and sense of belonging indicated that the predominant reason for students not seeking formal support was attributed to the barriers in access and understanding of the rules, their rights, and policies. For serious issues, they concluded it was too challenging (i.e., “red tape” and “hoops to jump through”) to find the right kind of support (McBeath et al, 2018). McBeath et al. (2018) also found that students feel that the available supports are predominantly catered towards the needs of first year students (e.g., transition supports), with not enough supports for students past their first work term. It was concluded that a sense of belonging plays a key role in students’ mental health, their performance at the worksite, and the ability to cope with barriers– especially when students are away from campus and during school-to-work transitions (McBeath et al, 2018). These findings are confirmed by the WIL student survey as 20.8% of students indicated that a barrier they often experience is confusion on where to find WIL related information and supports. As well, 26% of students indicated feeling uncertain about who (employer or staff) to reach out to for concerns or requests. Other barriers voiced by students include:



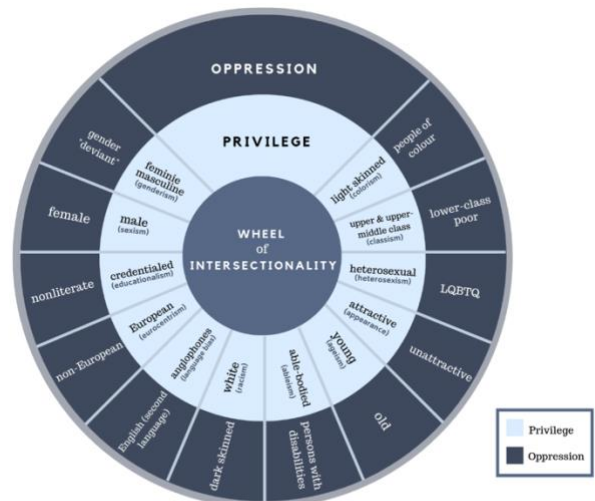
“I was experiencing barriers trying to understand how to access resources during my work placement. Especially with regard to mental health support.”

“I think understanding what tasks I needed to complete before entering my work search was a bit confusing; I know that there is a lot of components to complete and it was often gone over but I still felt very confused because it was only mentioned once or twice at the beginning of my co-op program.”

“The barrier I have faced is knowing when and where to get help when I have questions about the coop.”

ACE WIL BC-YUKON EDI RESOURCE HUB PROVINCIAL PROJECT

The above noted findings bring to light important reasons why there is a need for updated policies, resources, and strategies that give consideration for countless intersectional student needs; all of which begin with the recognition that we must move away from the one-size-fits-all approach to make room for updated intersectional approaches. The image here provides a reference for the many intersectional aspects of an individual's identity, further highlighting the need for more well-rounded and contextual approaches.



RECOMMENDATION: An EDI Review of WIL Programs Policy and Procedures

The presence of multiple PSIs and employer-level “sorting mechanisms” unintentionally, but systematically, excludes students of certain equity-deserving groups from WIL (Cukier et al., 2018; Wall et al., 2017). Turcotte et al. (2016) report that there is a temptation for WIL programs to take a hands-off approach with placement hosts (employers/ preceptors) rather than communicating proactively about the needs of diverse students in workplace and practice settings. Further, Hall et al. (2017) point out that key challenges are often addressed in isolation from other challenges, and this is problematic because one individual student might face a combination of challenges due to the intersectional and complex nature of identity. They also state that organizational literature has failed to offer a more comprehensive model that take into account the additive (or multiplicative) effects of multiple barriers that today's students face when seeking employment (Hall et al, 2017) and that these barriers may indeed have a compounding effect. Three independent articles suggest that collaboration with HR professionals, who can mediate between educational institutions, employers, and government agencies is needed to support effective transitions from education to the workplace (Dhawal et al., 2018; Hall et al, 2017, Valencia-Forrester et al., 2019). The recommendation that stems from this is that WIL needs to connect with HR professionals as they might be better resourced, or have access for the development of necessary resources, and are practiced in forming meaningful partnerships for inclusive WIL (Dhawal et al., 2018; Hall et al, 2017, Valencia-Forrester et al., 2019).

There are a number of other factors that show evidence in mitigating discriminatory outcomes. These include greater exposure to and familiarity of students with diverse background experiences and skills (Hall et al, 2017). Individualized responses to students' particular circumstances have also been linked to more expansive learning opportunities and learning achievement. For example, pedagogical practices such as connecting with (and validating) specific prior experiences and practices of students across cultures and reciprocating knowledge creates a mutual learning development journey where the student and teacher become learning companions (Gillet-Swan & Grant-Smith, 2018). In other words, support processes need to be more closely examined within each learning environment in order to tailor reasonable accommodations for each individual student. This is comparable to a trauma-informed contextualized approach, which realizes the widespread impacts of trauma, recognizes the signs and symptoms, and responds by fully integrating this knowledge into policies, procedures, practices and the wider system. The recommendation is to keep in mind that it is not a one-size-fits-all, or singular approach. “To obtain success in WIL for students, we have to have multiple strategies and multiple approaches and multiple failsafes and support mechanisms, one approach isn't going to work” (HEQCO, 2018, p. 68). Some scholars state that innovative strategies need to be developed that are affiliated with

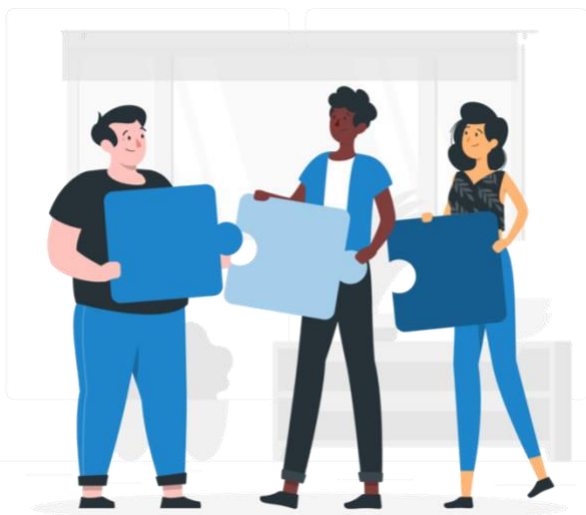
the distinctive characteristics of each generation rather than the existing “one size fits all” approach to WIL policies and strategies (Dhakal et al., 2018; Hall et al., 2017).

A final recommendation involves practice - that is practicing inclusive environments that includes non-gendered and, curricula, policies, and activities within WIL that accentuate the benefits of diverse workplaces (Braun, 2019). The ability to reach this recommendation requires that there is professional development of educators, policy makers, HR professionals, students, and the public about bias and stereotype threat as well as appropriate hiring and training on specialized EDI topics (as noted in the previous section). Braun (2019)’s top recommendation to minimize barriers for students from underserved populations was to design campus environments, initiatives, policies, and supports with an equity-oriented lens committed to individualized needs. This recommendation of a more inclusive campus environments also paves a path for the same to be done within WIL, as it includes intentionally creating space for diversity within programs and connecting students to suitable supports and networks (Braun, 2019). In many ways organizational policies and practices have the potential to alleviate bias and discrimination, should the appropriate individualized supports be put in place through policies and formalized procedures.

BARRIERS: Unclear pathways in WIL³

Key informants from HEQCO’s 2018 study on mitigating WIL barriers for post-secondary students note that a large part of students being successful in their respective WIL opportunities involves setting or managing student expectations of what is involved in a particular WIL experience early and often. However, one of the difficulties students seem to be facing is the lack of awareness of what to expect from the program and/or in the workplace itself (Tran, 2013 a, b as cited in Wall et al., 2017; Wall, Tran & Soejatminah, 2017).

A respondent to the student survey stated that:



“I think understanding what tasks I needed to complete before entering my work search was a bit confusing; I know that there is a lot of components to complete and it was often gone over but I still felt very confused because it was only mentioned once or twice at the beginning of my co-op program.”

This became even more prominent as an issue during the Covid-19 pandemic, as indicated by a student’s response:

“It’s been difficult to understand what is expected during the pandemic in terms of online learning and navigating the workplace with so many new practices put into place.”

In particular, international students face a significant barrier due to the lack of localized resources (Arthur & Popadiuk, 2013; Wall, Tran & Soejatminah, 2017). For example, international students may lack unfamiliarity with the local labour market, workplace culture, local job seeking procedures and related supports (Wall, Tran & Soejatminah, 2017). Indeed, racialized students often feel hindered in their ability to seek out information about WIL activities (Braun, 2019; Arthur & Popadiuk, 2013). This can be exacerbated by the fact that WIL stakeholders often work in isolation, as opposed to working together to

³ All literature relevant to this topic cited in Table 3 - Appendix

combat barriers making it more difficult for students to reach out, ask questions, and build awareness to have appropriate expectations (Dhakal et al., 2018). Students reported their perspectives, asking for and stating:



“More clear notice for workshops/other assistance. Sometimes I’m confused what I can and can’t get help for”

“Very little outreach to students who mostly don’t know where to look.”

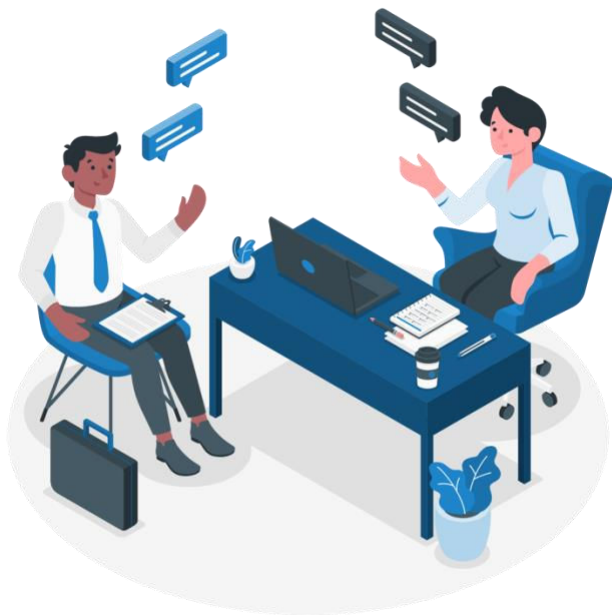
Navigating disclosure is another barrier that impacts the experiences of students who experience marginalization (Cukier et al., 2018; Braun, 2019). For example, LGBTQ2+ students as well as students with disabilities both may need disclose sensitive information while in a workplace setting for reasons of accommodation (Cukier et al., 2018). The heterosexist climate of placement organizations means that students feel pressure to hide their sexual orientation (Messinger, 2004; Newhook, 2016 as cited in Cukier et al., 2018). 23.7% ($n = 75$) of WIL student survey respondents self-identified as someone who has to navigate disclosure processes related to an aspect of their identity (i.e., disability, gender, sexuality). 12.6% ($n = 40$) of WIL student survey respondents self-identified as someone who has to ask for employment accommodations (for example, assistive technology services, flexible hours etc.).

Amongst respondents who self-identified as someone who has to navigate disclosure processes related to an aspect of their identity (i.e., disability, gender, sexuality), 29% also self-identified as someone who has to ask for employment accommodations (for example, assistive technology services, flexible hours etc.), as compared to 8% of those who self-identified as someone who does not have to navigate disclosure processes related to an aspect of their identity. These findings are indicative of the interconnected nature of marginalized identity markers and barriers that students experience, and also highlight the crucial need of these supports to be identified and clearly communicated in *all* WIL programs. One student shares:

“I have had a hard time getting accommodations with my work due to lack of understanding from my supervisor, not knowing who else to go to in my organization, lack of support from my university due to COVID prioritization (have not received any help from the accommodations department despite being registered and asking for help, as they mostly only help with exams and course work), also barriers from not having a regular doctor and needing lots of administrative paperwork for my accommodations. I have been told I need to go into a walk-in clinic to get forms filled out to prove my disability, but there is no standard form the work requires. When I approached a walk-in clinic for it, they refused because they both did not know what specific form to fill and did not have a long history with me. Supervisor asked for details of my disability (I did not feel I had the choice to refuse to disclose personal details) and since my disclosure has been awkward [I] feel she thinks me no longer capable or competitive when compared to non-disabled co-op students. It feels like there is a “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy when it comes to disabilities and that I blacklisted myself by asking for help.”

Aligned with the students' sentiments, Braun (2019) notes that current disclosure and accommodation models for students with disabilities create more barriers than they minimize due to lack of clarity on when they may disclose what, and to whom (WIL staff or the employer).

Wall et al. (2017) state that international racialized students were often aware of a conflict between their own personal expectations and WIL experiences and accept it as a normal way of participating in the WIL field. Bourdieu (1997) states that individuals internalize the norms and practices of particular social classes or groups, and this shapes how they should think, feel, and act in fields such as a workplace or WIL setting (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977 as cited in Wall et al., 2017). These norms include, for example, how people should relate to one another (for example, power distance and power dynamics), and therefore provides a framework to understand how some groups can exert power over other groups in ways that can exclude or exploit other groups from certain activities or positions within the field. In a study by Turcotte et al. (2016), students were described as vulnerable and reluctant to complain about problems because they fear the loss or failure of their placement, do not want to jeopardize their chances of graduating, or fear alienating an employer who may provide future references or job opportunities. McBeath et al. (2018) did a study on WIL students and their sense of belonging and found that "the most commonly cited barriers were lack of awareness (e.g., not knowing where to find suitable support)...and stigma around seeking support for issues related to mental health or interpersonal problems" (p. 49). This same thread of stigma around seeking support surfaced in the WIL student survey in relation to navigating disclosure:



"Explicit preparation for how to navigate disclosing/handling gender/sexuality issues regarding the workplace really needed."

"Provide instructions of who to reach out to OUTSIDE of employer-involved worksheets. My bosses watched over our shoulders as we filled out the questionnaires and surveys about our work term which maybe us both feel pressured to answer in ways that showed them in a positive light, even if it wasn't true."

"Help students disclose their disabilities and other marginalized identities to their employers in a safe place, and vet the employers you are placing students with to ensure the student will have an equitable and good experience."

RECOMMENDATION: Clearly Articulated Resources and Supports for diverse WIL Student Lifecycles

While participating in WIL may be stressful for some students for varied reasons, for others the pressures associated with placement, when combined with other commitments, can further exacerbate the level of stress experienced (Gardner, 2010). Acknowledging the potential impact of students' other commitments (such as part-time jobs, care giving responsibilities, or other personal factors) and providing focused support that helps students connect-the-dots is important for supporting student well-being and increasing the potential for successful placements (Grant-Smith & Gillett-Swan, 2018; McRae

&Ramji, 2011). Aligned with this, one student shares their experience that highlights how institutions must help connect-the-dots for employers to better support them during their work placement:



If you're going to involve an employer in WIL, ensure that their staff are ready to take in co-op students. My first work placement proved incapable of handling me in an effective way. Align placements with the career pursuit of the candidates when possible. I did not get the placements I would've liked that specialized in the skills I was looking to improve and felt I missed out on a lot because of this. Provide clearer resources for LGBTQ2S+ people and other marginalized communities. And back it up my getting the employer to do a better job providing an explicitly inclusive workplace. Ensure that WIL program staff do not "talk down" to students, but instead listen to them and make suggestions and create advice based on these conversations. Universities already feel too bureaucratic and unfeeling to many students - try to reverse this trend by providing personal 1-on-1 service. Provide consistency and follow-up to students. Provide opportunities for students to better connect with each other during their WIL placements. Placements can be isolating for some students.

An example to model how institutions can help connect-the-dots and build clearly articulated resources of support has been offered by Browne and Cooke (2011) who recommend developing a “co-op languages” (p.252) course (or similar) that unpacks employment focused language, prepares students for cross cultural communication with other relevant workplace information, offers to bridge the gap in expectations, and contributes to success in the workplace. Another example of the same has been provided by Thakur (2021) who did an environmental scan of existing WIL supports across Canadian PSI’s and found that having available supports clearly articulated on WIL websites as well as preparatory curriculum are crucial for transparency and aid in connecting the dots for students from various touch points. Thakur (2021) also suggests curating specialized WIL staffing opportunities, similar to the Harassment Advisor position at University of Waterloo’s WIL office. “It is exactly these types of structural supports and outlined procedures that are lacking in most WIL programs, and this systemic reality works against building a diverse, equitable and inclusive work integrated educational environment for marginalized WIL students” (p. 19). Other examples of specialized staffing might include – accessibility advisors who support WIL students with diverse accessibility needs and EDI Coordinators, who support the external outreach and provide EDI recruitment guidance and training to WIL employers.

The HEQCO (2018) study on mitigating WIL barriers for post-secondary students also found that no one approach can be relied upon to address the myriad of student challenges; rather PSIs should employ a suite of supports and strategies to help ensure students are fully prepared to successfully secure and complete a WIL experience; further advocating for an intersectional understanding to combat the multiple barriers students face. The same HEQCO (2018) study notes that WIL coordinators state that they refer students to resources mostly only when students self-identify that they require the support. While this may appear to be an efficient use of resources, it relies on the premise that students will self-identify. Gillett-Swan and Grant-Smith (2018) recommend that supports may extend beyond the learning context and support all kinds of students to develop a range of skills and coping strategies that can be applied in their employment as well as skills and strategies that can be drawn upon post-graduation.



CONCLUSION

WIL represents an increasingly prevalent part of the tertiary education landscape, yet there are limited explorations of the student experiences through an equity, inclusion, belonging and well-being lens (Gillet-Swan & Grant-Smith, 2018). For WIL practitioners, beginning with an awareness that problems exist across the full spectrum of employees from high-skill to low-skill, could shift the approach to policies, procedures, and education for WIL practitioners to a more inclusive mindset (Hall et al., 2017). Additionally, centering the experiences of multiple marginalized groups gives voice to the students themselves, drawing upon not just the experiences that stem from the intersectionality of identities, which is also a Critical Race Theory methodology known as *counter-storytelling* - the centering of voices of those who's experiences are not often told (Connor, 2006).

This research and the resources developed from this project were made possible with the generous support the provided by the provincial advisory committee, comprised of WIL practitioners and community partners from across BC. The EDI Advisory Committee has guided this project through iterative feedback and bringing together considerations and advice from a broad spectrum of professional and lived experiences. The list of legacy WIL EDI resources can be found at the end of this report and the full resources are on the ACE-WIL Resource Hub. The findings from this project lead to the conclusion that student-centered approaches that are grounded in infrastructural support and resources that acknowledge a student's complex journey from admission to employment in WIL is the only equitable way forward. The above noted findings from the literature, alongside the WIL student survey offer indications that a lack of understanding and resourcing affect students' mental health, well-being, and ability to perform in the workplace. This stresses the need for more resources for students and WIL staff, and more research on how best to prepare students for their respective WIL journeys. The findings from this project argue for a need for specialized WIL student supports (for example, a dedicated WIL Accessibility Advisor for students with disabilities) to mitigate student barriers using intersectional equity, diversity, and inclusion lenses. The goal in examining several interconnected sets of barriers helps to demonstrate how socially important problems can be addressed with a combination of research, understanding and customized resources, and that engaging in real-life social problems can benefit the scholarly field, WIL practitioners, WIL employers, and most importantly WIL students - a win for all sides.

APPENDIX

This appendix provides information-at-a-glance regarding the articles and reports used in the literature review.

Table 1: Discrimination in the Workplace

| Author | Article; Journal |
|--|--|
| Braun, 2019 | Accessibility and Experiential Learning Literature Review for the FUSION Network. |
| McPherson, 2019 | Economically, Culturally and Politically Disadvantaged: Perspectives on, and Experiences of, Social Justice amongst Working-class Youth in Mainland Scotland's Smallest Council Area through the Lens of Nancy Fraser. In Human Rights for Children and Youth. Emerald Publishing Limited. |
| Cukier et al., 2018 | Ensuring Equitable Access to Work-Integrated Learning in Ontario. |
| Hall et al., 2017 | Barriers to Employment: Individual and Organizational Perspectives; In Research in Personnel and Human Resources Management. Emerald Publishing Limited. |
| Ontario Human Rights Commission Report, 2018 | Policy on accessible education for students with disabilities. Retrieved February 23, 2019, from http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/policyaccessible-education-students-disabilities |
| Wall, Tran & Soejatminah, 2017 | Inequalities and Agencies in Workplace Learning Experiences: International Student Perspectives; Vocations and Learning. |
| Scholl & Mooney, 2004 | Youth with Disabilities in Work-Based Learning Programs: Factors that Influence Success; Journal for Vocational Special Needs Education. |

Table 2: Homogenous WIL Strategies & Policies

| Author | Article; Journal |
|------------------------------------|---|
| Austin, 2019 | Representative Library Collections as a Response to the Institutional Oppression of LGBTQ Youth of Color; The International Journal of Information, Diversity, & Inclusion. |
| Braun, 2019 | Accessibility and Experiential Learning Literature Review for the FUSION Network. |
| Cukier et al., 2018 | Ensuring Equitable Access to Work-Integrated Learning in Ontario. |
| Dhakar et al., 2018 | Inclusion and work: addressing the global challenges for youth employment; Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal. |
| Gillett-Swan and Grant-Smith, 2018 | A framework for managing the impacts of work-integrated learning on student quality of life; International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning. |
| Hall et al., 2017 | Barriers to Employment: Individual and Organizational Perspectives; In Research in Personnel and Human Resources Management. Emerald Publishing Limited. |

| | |
|--|--|
| Kramer & Usher, 2012 | Work-integrated learning and career-ready students: Examining the evidence; Higher Education Strategy Associates. |
| McBeath et al., 2018 | Pathways to Mental Health and Wellbeing: Understanding and Supporting Students During Critical School-to-Work Transitions. |
| Murray et al. 2012 as cited in Wall et al., 2017 | Inequalities and Agencies in Workplace Learning Experiences: International Student Perspectives. |

Table 3: Need for Clear Pathways and Access to Supports for WIL Student Lifecycle

| Author | Article; Journal |
|--------------------------------|---|
| Arthur and Popadiuk, 2013 | International students' views of relationship influences on career transitions; Journal of Educational and Social Research. |
| Braun, 2019 | Accessibility and Experiential Learning Literature Review for the FUSION Network. |
| Cukier et al., 2018 | Ensuring Equitable Access to Work-Integrated Learning in Ontario. |
| Dhakal et al., 2018 | Inclusion and work: addressing the global challenges for youth employment; Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal. |
| Hall et al., 2017 | Hall, A., Hickox, S., Kuan, J., & Sung, C. (2017). Barriers to Employment: Individual and Organizational Perspectives. In Research in Personnel and Human Resources Management. Emerald Publishing Limited. |
| McBeath et al., 2018 | Work-integrated learning and the importance of peer support and sense of belonging; Education+ Training. |
| Wall, Tran & Soejatminah, 2017 | Wall, T., Tran, L. T., & Soejatminah, S. (2017). Inequalities and agencies in workplace learning experiences: international student perspectives. Vocations and Learning. |

RESOURCES

The following categories reflect the resources that are available on the ACE-WIL [EDI Resource Hub project page](#).

- Understanding Diverse Needs of Diverse Students
- Supporting Diverse Needs of Diverse Students
- Recognizing Discrimination: Examples of Discrimination in Action
- Understanding Power Dynamics, Cross-Cultural Communication, Biases and Assumptions
- Expanding WIL Opportunities with an Accessibility Lens
- Advancing Justice, Equity, Diversity & Inclusion in WIL – A Toolkit for WIL Employers and Community Partners

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“There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live in single-issue lives.”

- Audrey Lorde

