

Co-op Research Matters is a monthly newsletter on what's happening in co-op research and WatCACE. We will profile published research, by us and others, and include a practitioner's viewpoint on the article. In addition, we will share updates on current WatCACE projects.

OCTOBER 2016

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Article #1: Discrepant stakeholder perspectives on graduate employability strategies

Authors: Kinash, S., Crane, L., Judd, M. M., & Knight, C. (2016)

Journal: Higher Education Research & Development, 1-17

Source: [Taylor & Francis Online](#) (log into the University of Waterloo Library site to access from off-campus)

Purpose: To determine what strategies are most effective in improving graduate employability from the perspectives of students, graduates, employers, and higher education professionals.

Design/Methodology: A survey was developed from a literature review and administered to students, graduates, employers, and higher education professionals (N = 821).

Key Findings: There are discrepancies between what students/graduates believe contribute to their employability and what employers/higher education professionals value. That being said, there is widespread support that graduate employability is heightened when students and graduates take advantage of WIL opportunities.

Practitioner's Thoughts by Tammy Kim-Newman

Q: What insights did you gain from reading this article that were useful to you?

A: This article helped me gain a deeper appreciation for all the great work our department and University has done to ensure that our graduates consistently reach a high employment rate. I feel our University has done a great job providing access to all 12 employability strategies, albeit within differing degrees of engagement in the various faculties and departments.

Q: How might the results of this study impact how you do your job?

A: As a Student Advisor, it's a good reminder to inquire and coach students on the importance of getting involved in extracurricular and volunteer activities and encouraging a well-balanced approach for future employability. We have the opportunity to help students reflect on which strategies they have already used and which ones they can still explore further to ensure they are employable upon graduation.

As an Account Manager, it would be interesting to note which employers promote extracurricular and volunteer activities in their organization and if this is reflected in the candidates they hire. This would also go a long way in "practicing what you preach" and demonstrating the importance directly to students that these additional skillsets increase employability. You could take it a step further and provide opportunities for employers to express this message to our students i.e. by sponsoring teams, clubs or awards for extracurricular/volunteer involvement.

Article #2: The impact of compensation, supervision and work design on internship efficacy: implications for educators, employers and prospective interns

Authors: McHugh, P. P (2016)

Journal: Journal of Education and Work, 1-16

Source: [Taylor & Francis Online](#) (log into the University of Waterloo Library site to access from off-campus)

UPDATES

If you're interested in seeing the research presented at the WACE research symposium from June, the proceedings have just been published on the [WACE website](#) (PDF).

Purpose: To examine the differences between paid and unpaid internships with respect to internship content and outcomes.

Design/Methodology: A quantitative survey was administered to students at an American university (N = 99).

Key Findings: Those on unpaid internships experienced less supervisor mentoring, developmental value in the internship, and were less likely to pursue a job with the employer following graduation. Supervisor support and mentoring were significantly predictors of internship efficacy.

Practitioner's Thoughts by Colleen Phillip-Davis

Q: Are these findings relevant for our stakeholders?

A: With respect to the issue of paid vs. unpaid, this research identified some information that may be relevant for employers (existing or new): (1) *Greater perceived value if a student is paid for the work they are hired to do vs not paid;* (2) *Potential for deeper commitment and engagement from both stakeholders (employer and student) if there is a monetary value attached to the employment contract;* (3) *Enhanced quality of work, expectations and job satisfaction for paid internships vs unpaid internships.*

Q: How are the key findings relevant for Waterloo Co-op?

A: It is important to track the student's learning beyond the compensation they receive. There are a number of methods that are utilized: (1) *e-Portfolio - allows students to track their work term experience from beginning to end, from first year to final year (a self-reflective continuum, captured in one area, which is easily accessible);* (2) *End-of-term presentations - a number of Waterloo employers including Co-operative Education and Career Action, have the co-op students present to staff the work/project they have been involved in and the insights they have gained from the overall experience. This provides a vehicle/platform to reflect on the work term, highlight their experience, and further engage themselves and the employers in the experiential learning process;* (3) *On campus debriefing - students discuss among themselves their learning and experience, both positive and negative. Some schools have formalized this process whereby the students share in a classroom setting their experience, what they have learned, the skills gained, and how it has benefited them.*

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