

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.

March 2017

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Article #1: Using learning environments to create meaningful work for co-op students (2016)

Author: Nevison, C., Drewery, D., Pretti, J., & Cormier, L.

Journal: Higher Education Research & Development (1-16)

Source: [Taylor & Francis](#)

Purpose: To evaluate the relationship between co-op students' perceptions of a learning environment, perceived relatedness of the work experience, and self-reported meaningfulness of work.

Methodology: Undergraduate co-op students completed an online survey.

Key Findings: The relatedness of the work experience mediated the influence of learning environments on self-reported meaningfulness in a co-op work term.

Practitioner's Thoughts by Margaret Johnston (Business Developer, CECA, University of Waterloo)

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

A: When working with new employers we discuss such things as their role in developing meaningful work experiences for their students and how they play an active role in helping the term to be a successful learning experience for our students. Many employers ask us about our expectations for them as employers. New employers typically are very interested in how they can shape the term to be most relevant and helpful to our students, weighing in at the same time the need for them to receive good productivity from our students. I will be using this article in my conversations with new employers. I appreciate our employers who are striving to create with us good, meaningful work for our co-op students and I welcome the questions we get from them around employer expectations. I can provide them with tangible evidence about the role they play as supervisors in shaping the meaning and relevance of the co-op experience for our students.

Q: Does this study raise questions for you that require further research/investigation?

A: I would like to see if there is correlation between students who described their work term as meaningful because their work was authentic and whether this resulted in students attaining better end-of-term ratings from their employers. I believe that a student who would describe their work term as meaningful and relevant would also have scored highly in their employer ratings, so it would be an interesting question to explore.

Article #2: Eligibility requirements for work-integrated learning programs: Exploring the implications of using grade point averages for student participation (2016)

Authors: Dunn, L. A., Schier, M. A., Hiller, J. E., & Harding, I.

Journal: Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education, 17(3), 295-308

Source: [Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education](#) (PDF)

UPDATES

Stay tuned for the preliminary results of our project on “Universities as a Talent Pipeline” sponsored by the Ministry of Advanced Skills and Education!

Purpose: To examine whether eligibility for student participation in work-integrated learning (WIL) based on grade point average is the best criteria for determining student preparedness for WIL.

Methodology: A literature review was conducted and a case study of a WIL program was used to examine the implications of using different eligibility criteria for enrolling students in WIL programs.

Key Findings: Using grades as criteria for students to engage in WIL may have an impact upon student participation, employers recruiting the right students, and the ability for the university to reach its goals but the researchers acknowledge the challenges in disregarding academics in the engagement of students in WIL.

Practitioner’s Thoughts by Montse Sanzsole (Account Manager, CECA, University of Waterloo)

Q: In what ways do these findings have the potential to change practice for us at Waterloo?

A: This article really opens up one’s thinking on how the selection of eligibility criteria, specifically grade point average for participation in WIL, can affect students, employers and the University. At Waterloo we are always looking for better ways to assist all of our stakeholders. In programs where co-op is optional, we base the eligibility criteria solely on academic standings (Kinesiology is a good example). As Waterloo continues to put focus on student success, maybe we need to reconsider this. 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 identity subsequently assisting in student retention in both the university and occupational setting (Dressler & Keeling, 2004; Trede, 2012; Weisz & Smith, 2005). Programs like Co-op 2.0 at the University of Waterloo may lead to a new framework on how we design eligibility requirements for our co-op programs. This will once again give Waterloo the opportunity to be a leader in best practices for work-integrated learning.

Q: Does this study raise questions for you that require further research/investigation?

A: It would be curious to see if at Waterloo, there was a correlation between higher academic marks and work term success. Looking at a student’s marks at the end of the term prior to a work term and success based on performance evaluation rating, do students with higher academic marks receive better overall performance evaluations?

HOW CAN YOU BE INVOLVED?

Contribute

If you have suggestions for articles that we should profile or would like to contribute to the practitioner viewpoint to any future issues, we’d love to hear from you at watcace@uwaterloo.ca.

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