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Introduction

Since 2006, the Waterloo Professional Development Program (WatPD) has helped University of Waterloo undergraduate co-op students develop their professional skills and improve their employability. Students who complete WatPD’s online courses are introduced to workplace best practices and reflect on their experiences and workplace performance. Because students complete professional development (PD) courses in tandem with their work terms or other experiences, they can draw connections between the course content, their experiences and their skill sets. The courses increase students’ knowledge in isolation, but their benefit is maximized when students apply their learning in the workplace and seek out guidance and feedback from mentors and supervisors.

WatPD courses

- PD1: Career Fundamentals
- PD3: Communication
- PD4: Teamwork
- PD5: Project Management
- PD6: Problem Solving
- PD7: Conflict Resolution
- PD8: Intercultural Skills
- PD9: Ethical Decision Making
- PD10: Professional Responsibility in Computing
- PD12: Reflection and Learning in the Workplace
- PD20: Engineering Workplace Skills I - Developing Reasoned Conclusions
- PD21: Engineering Workplace Skills II - Developing Effective Plans
- PD22: Professionalism and Ethics in Engineering Practice

This model is adapted from The Career Architect Development Planner (1st ed.) by Michael M. Lombardo and Robert Eichinger:

- WatPD provides theory and experience to succeed
- Mentors and supervisors offer guidance and feedback on their progress
- Students apply their knowledge and continue to grow
Undergraduate co-op students across all six faculties complete PD courses as part of their co-op degree requirements. 18,891 students enrolled in PD courses during the 2016-2017 academic year, setting a new record for the highest number of annual enrolments. WatPD and its students were supported by 16 full-time staff members, 14 course instructors, 59 co-op students and 101 part-time markers.

In addition to supporting co-op students, WatPD introduced the EDGE Experiential Education Certificate Program during the 2016-2017 academic year. EDGE is designed for undergraduate students in non-co-op programs who want to develop their professional skills, explore their career options and market themselves to employers. The certificate encourages skill development through courses, experiences and workshops, and places a framework around experiential learning that takes place within and outside the classroom. EDGE students also have the opportunity to pair their work and/or community experiences with PD courses.
WatPD's approach to operations and improvement is guided by the following four principles:

**Learning and reflection for workplace success**
When students actively engage in learning through WatPD, they discover best practices and develop their skills. These skills and practices complement work-integrated learning opportunities and align with the demands of the workplace.

**Highlighting the difference**
WatPD's courses differ from typical academic courses. It's important for the department to highlight the differences between PD courses and other academic courses so students can understand and take advantage of the unique opportunity WatPD represents.

**Compelling curriculum for work-integrated learning**
WatPD's courses are authored by University of Waterloo faculty and staff who are considered experts in their fields. The department is committed to continuous refinement so students enjoy the best possible learning experience.

**Supporting student success**
A peer support model is a foundational part of the assistance students receive in WatPD’s courses. Students are uniquely positioned to understand the successes and challenges other students face in the workplace. WatPD aims to provide clear, thorough feedback and quick, comprehensive solutions to student concerns.

The remainder of this report focuses on WatPD’s projects and accomplishments throughout the 2016-2017 academic year.
Learning and reflection for the workplace

WatPD’s core mission is helping students prepare for the workplace and its courses equip students with the foundational knowledge they need to understand desired workplace behaviours. Students completing PD courses are encouraged to reflect on their behaviour and apply their new knowledge to their experiences in the workplace.

**SKILLS IDENTIFICATION AND ARTICULATION WORKSHOP PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK**

“I feel that this workshop brought a better understanding on a personal level of how what I do in class is actually helpful in my career.”

Reflection is also a core component of the EDGE certificate program. In addition to completing the reflective elements within PD courses, EDGE students reflect on their experiential learning opportunities by completing reflection assignments to earn their work and community experience milestones. The capstone workshop at the end of the certificate facilitates further reflection as students develop a post-graduation plan aligned with their interests, skills and experiences.

Many co-op students reported that they paid attention to their soft skills because of their PD courses (33% and 54% of end of course survey respondents reported doing so often and sometimes, respectively) and felt more prepared to practice effective workplace behaviours in the future (26% much more, 49% somewhat more, 15% a little more, 11% just as prepared). This indicates WatPD courses are encouraging reflection throughout the work term and preparing students for future success.

**PD6 STUDENT FEEDBACK**

“The skills learned in this course could be used in real world situations. I was able to connect what I am currently working on at work with the problem solving strategies learned in this course.”
After completing their WatPD course:

› **96%** of PD7: Conflict Resolution students said they can describe their dominant approach to conflict;
› **94%** of PD5: Project Management students said they can develop a timeline for a project using a work breakdown structure;
› **94%** of PD20: Developing Reasoned Conclusions students said they can describe why being in a state of ignorance is not necessarily viewed as negative;
› **89%** of PD8: Intercultural Skills students said when interacting with people from different cultures they consider difference in time orientation;
› **91%** of PD1: Career Fundamentals students said they were confident in their ability to explain and provide evidence of their skillset in an interview.

Although the journey through the course is more important than the final grade, obtaining course credit is a requirement when completing PD courses. 95% of WatPD students earned their course credit during the 2016-2017 academic year, completing the courses with an average grade of 71%.

**PD1 STUDENT FEEDBACK**

“Overall, the course successfully prepared me for the interview and co-op process.”

**PD22 STUDENT FEEDBACK**

“The course was very informative and the assignments get the students to learn it well and actively participate.”

**PD7 STUDENT FEEDBACK**

“The relevance to real life was a real strength. Conflict will absolutely always arise in your life whether it be within a personal relationship or at work. This course has given me the tools to handle the conflict in a healthy way.”
Highlighting the difference

PD courses are unlike the traditional courses students are accustomed to taking as part of their academic study. While all courses have a professional skill component, this component is often secondary to the course content; professional skill development is the primary purpose of all PD courses. This purpose necessitates a different approach to teaching and learning. WatPD focused this year on highlighting why the department exists and how its courses help students enhance their professional skills.

Staff and instructors worked together to revise the introductions to some PD courses to better articulate the importance of professional skills. New introductions were recorded for PD3: Communication, PD4: Teamwork, PD9: Ethical Decision Making, and PD12: Reflection and Learning in the Workplace. New unit outcomes and assessment descriptions were revised in some courses, making it easier for students to understand how they can benefit from the courses and assessments. These outcomes and descriptions were revised in PD4: Teamwork, PD9: Ethical Decision Making and PD20: Developing Reasoned Conclusions.

The department’s communications team facilitated participation in campus events and connected with student groups to solicit feedback and share information about the program. The department participated in March Break Open House, You @ Waterloo Day, Faculty 101 Days, Super Services, the Campus Life Fair and assorted other faculty- and department-specific events. New working relationships were developed with the Co-op Student Council, Science Society (SciSoc), Environment Students’ Society (ESS), Applied Health Sciences Undergraduate Members (AHSUM) and Engineering Society (EngSoc).
Compelling curriculum for work-integrated learning

WatPD is committed to delivering high-quality courses that align with the needs of the workplace. The workplace is constantly evolving, so WatPD focuses on equipping students with the transferable skills that help them adapt amidst this constant evolution. Students report high overall satisfaction with their PD courses: 62% report their courses are good or very good, with an additional 27% rating their courses as satisfactory (on a five-point scale).

The department is committed to maintaining and updating PD courses on a regular basis, whether through small changes to content and assessments or routine, full-scale course redevelopment. WatPD embarked on five major program improvement projects during the 2016-2017 academic year:

1. **PD3: Communication**
   Workplace simulations were added to the course, giving students an opportunity to make decisions and observe their consequences in a risk-free online environment. Assessments were revised so students could reflect on their decisions and identify opportunities for improved communication-related decision making.

2. **PD4: Teamwork**
   The course’s assessment framework was revised to include workplace simulations and more reflective assessments. Students are encouraged to connect the course content to their experiences and identify opportunities for improvement.

3. **PD9: Ethical Decision Making**
   Three new modules were developed with the goal of improving the connection between the course content and the student experience. Diverse examples of ethical situations were added, and the complexity of decision making and professional morality was reinforced in the new content. The assessment framework was also revised to incorporate more reflective exercises.

**PD3 Student Feedback**

“Good course! Enjoyed how applicable the content was to the workplace.”

**PD4 Student Feedback**

“The course did a great job of making connections between what we were learning [sic] and how it could be applied in the real world.”
4. PD12: Reflection and Learning in the Workplace

A massive metacognition game (MMG) was added to the course. The MMG is designed to help students accurately assess what they do and do not know, allowing them to practice active self-awareness. WatPD completed this project in collaboration with the Centre for Extended Learning, whose technical expertise was essential in developing the game.

5. EDGE

The EDGE certificate includes four types of milestones: a skills identification and articulation workshop, a career development course, work and community experiences, and a capstone workshop. With support from the Centre for Career Action, the skills workshop was piloted and refined, and a modified version of PD1: Career Fundamentals was developed specifically for EDGE students. The evaluation and reflection components of the work and community experiences milestone were also developed.

Supporting student success

At WatPD, we believe students are a pivotal part of the support teams that help undergraduate students achieve success in their PD courses. Students report that the support from their Teaching Assistants (TAs) when responding to student emails was good or very good (80%) and provided in a timely manner (79%). Similarly, students (85%) report that the feedback they received on their assessments clearly articulated what they did well and how they could improve.

This year, WatPD also introduced a new support model for students in PD1: Career Fundamentals. Students in the co-op version of PD1 are navigating the co-op employment process for the first time and learning best practices for résumé writing and interview techniques. PD1 students now receive personalized, proactive one-on-one support from a dedicated TA. TAs offer face-to-face résumé critiques, provide feedback on assessments and reach out to their students to offer encouragement and resources throughout the term. Students are also invited to participate in a mock interview. This initiative has deepened WatPD’s collaboration with the Centre for Career Action and provides students with a strong support system.

A comparably strong support system is also being created for students completing the EDGE certificate program. The EDGE team is partnering with academic advisors within the University’s faculties to support students throughout their EDGE journey. As an example, students who enrol in EDGE are offered a one-on-one advising appointment with a member of the EDGE team who helps them design a program path that suits their interests and goals.
2017-18 initiatives

Course refinement

WatPD will focus on a variety of projects aimed at increasing student engagement, updating course content and delivering content in new ways. The following projects have already been planned:

- AODA-compliant and rich, engaging text-only versions of each course’s content will be developed, giving students another way to learn. This will also make it easier for students to access course materials offline and after their term is over.

- PD5: Project Management contains some optional content allowing students to satisfy the education requirement for the Certified Associate in Project Management (CAPM) exam. This content will be updated to reflect the current Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK) and will be presented in a new format.

- PD8: Intercultural skills will be updated with a new framework for the course content, improved learning objectives, improved assessments and new content about Indigenous world views.

New course development

A new course focused on research skills for the workplace will be developed as part of the new Research Co-op designation developed by Co-operative Education. A course author has already been selected, and a course description and content will be developed with the end of 2018 being the target completion date.

EDGE

Now that the EDGE certificate program is open to students, WatPD is focused on achieving its goal of 400 registrants across campus by August 31, 2018. Undergraduate EDGE ambassadors will be hired to help the EDGE team connect with students and promote the certificate. Further curricular development will also be completed, with a special focus on refining the capstone workshop students complete to finish their certificate.