

# REMOTE WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING EXPERIENCES: STUDENT PERCEPTIONS

## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

The COVID-19 pandemic required students to work remotely (e.g., from home) during their work-integrated learning (WIL)<sup>1</sup> experiences. This research examines what students thought about their remote working experience and how their employers could best support them. Students noted the importance of communication, motivation, getting work done, and doing meaningful work.

## WHAT IS THE RESEARCH ABOUT?

This paper examines what students thought about their experience working remotely during work-integrated learning experiences. At the time of publication, little was known about how students were impacted by working from home. This included what skills they needed to be successful in the transition to remote work, what challenges they encountered, and recommendations for future remote WIL experiences.

## WHAT DID THE RESEARCHERS DO?

The researchers interviewed students over video conferencing software. The researchers asked questions about the students' experiences switching to remote work during their work term. Participants in the study were co-operative education students (a type of work-integrated learning program where students alternate between academic and paid work terms) that had a work term during January-April 2020. The researchers identified key themes from the interview answers.

### <sup>1</sup> **Work-integrated learning (WIL):**

an education model that combines academic studies with a workplace or practice setting. Work-integrated learning includes a partnership of an academic institution, a host organization, and a student.

## WHAT DID THE RESEARCHERS FIND?

The benefits of remote work that students described included:

- flexibility in their schedule
- comfort of working from home and relaxed dress code
- no commute (reduced time and cost)
- increased independence
- new skill development in the remote setting

Challenges of remote work included:

- lack of in-person interaction with the student's supervisor and colleagues
- the impact on productivity due to technology problems or lag in response time from supervisor
- anxiety around performance evaluation in remote settings
- decrease in meaningful work assigned due to a decrease in supervisors' knowledge of student capabilities
- blurring of home and workspace

Skills needed to adapt to remote work included:

- formal and informal communication skills
- maintaining and building professional networks
- remaining flexible in the face of ongoing changes
- emphasis on organization and time management
- independence and initiative while supervisors navigate their own schedule changes

The researchers then discussed these findings under three main themes of importance: socialization, productivity, and meaningful work.

## HOW CAN YOU USE THIS RESEARCH?

Employers can use this research to consider the impacts of remote work and improve students' experiences during their remote WIL experiences. Work-integrated learning practitioners can use this research to inform students and employers on how to maintain a successful WIL relationship with remote work during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

## KEYWORDS

COVID-19, work-integrated learning, co-operative education, remote work, student perceptions

## CITATION

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## ABOUT THE RESEARCHERS

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*The Work-Learn Institute at the University of Waterloo is the only institute in the world dedicated to research on co-operative education and other forms of work-integrated learning.*