

Curriculum Design Pattern

Global Learning by Design

Name of Pattern

Documenting and improving WIL using online technologies

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Abstract

This pattern outlines an approach to work-integrated learning (WIL) within the 'Applied Industry Practice' course of the MBA program, which provides the opportunity for students to gain work-relevant skills such as how to conduct quality applied industry research, while developing relevant 'soft skills' such as communication and presentation skills, and how to work collaboratively in teams.

The major assessment of the online mode is **virtual collaborative learning network (CLN) groups** working with a real client to fulfil a project brief, which then requires the team to research, pitch, present, and produce a final report.

Over the years, the course has been continuously adapted to the student cohort and client needs, and improved, such as including issues such as critical thinking, design principles, project management, working in a virtual team, and including more effective feedback to students.

Feedback from both students and clients has been very positive, and a number of students have also been employed by companies involved in the course as a client.

Rationale

This project was initiated:

- To capture the learning, process, methodology, technology, and presentation of the technology-enabled WIL component of the Applied Industry Practice course to be shared broadly within RMIT as a case study of 'better practice'. This sharing is aimed at increasing RMIT staff capability to more effectively include WIL into appropriate courses using digital technologies.
- To discuss how the course has evolved and been tailored to meet the needs of students and companies involved as clients and potential employers.
- To review the course against the principles of the pillars of Global Learning by Design and RMIT's WIL policy, and improve and adapt the course further to be even more effective.

Learners

The course has been presented to MBA students for a number of years to different cohorts of students:

- RMIT Melbourne, full-time with the majority being young international students mainly from Asia, and most having none or limited work experience;
- RMIT Melbourne, part-time evening with the majority being Australian, older, working students;
- RMIT Ho Chi Minh City, full time, young Vietnamese students, with none or limited work experience.

From 2013, the course has also been presented virtually to online students who tend to be older, studying part-time around work commitments, and based in a number of countries.

The online student cohort consists of working older students based in a number of countries- in 2013 students were based in Russia, USA, Germany, and rural Australia among others. Although the online WIL project has the same assessment and content as the face-to-face project, the teaching mode and technology used is different.

The pattern for online students is most applicable in the following circumstances:

- **Class size:** the class size ideally should be below 50 students which will allow for the pitch and presentation by CLN groups to be completed in the time allocated for a lecture (maximum 8 CLNs with 20 minutes per CLN).
- **Level:** most suited to final year students, as the client project requires broad knowledge of business obtained through the MBA (finance, marketing, strategy etc). The course is also aimed at providing students with work-ready skills.
- **Mode:** although the course was initially developed for face-to-face delivery, it has been adapted for fully online with sufficient tutor support. Students and staff will need access to reliable broadband internet connection and may need to arrange Skype hook ups outside of normal University hours (i.e. potentially from home at night). Technologies and methodologies used are those most commonly used in industry such as Skype and Google Docs.

Although this project focuses on the WIL aspects of the online mode, the approaches can also be adapted to a face-to-face mode.

Related patterns

- **Virtual Global WIL;** Virtual Merchandising
- **Virtual WIL;** Clinical Coding—Virtual WIL; Designing a Global WIL for Capstone Programming Projects for CS&IT programs; 21st Century WIL for Laboratory Medicine; Virtual WIL and Employability for the Creative Industries.

Category

Virtual WIL, WIL, Global business communications, Cultural awareness, Team development, global industry engagement.

Outcome/impact

Students will develop skills in:

- Business communications, written and oral, individual and team based. This includes report writing and presenting to a client as part of a 'consulting team'.
- Working to a client brief, clarifying requirements, producing a report, and meeting client expectations under tight deadlines and uncertainty.
- Time management.
- Problem-solving, decision making, critical thinking.
- Working collaboratively in a 'high performing' virtual team, and gaining a deeper understanding of cultural and work differences and how these influence communication and team work.
- Negotiation, influence, persuasion, self-advocacy.
- Reflective practice.

Staff involved with this WIL activity will gain increased skills in:

- Finding, negotiating with industry clients and developing an industry network.
- Motivating, supporting, and guiding students working in virtual teams.

Alignment

The technology-enabled WIL activity provides students with the opportunity to apply the theory components of the course (as well as of the broader MBA) curriculum to a real-world client problem/opportunity.

The WIL activity needs to align with the course learning outcomes and assessment during the curriculum design stage.

Challenges

Successful implementation of a technology-enabled WIL activity requires careful consideration of many challenges, including:

- An appropriate client for the student cohort. The client needs to provide a challenging, realistic, and appropriate learning brief to the students and be available to interact with the students and lecturer as needed.
- Multiple time zones (difficulties in scheduling meetings and discussions, for both staff and student teams).

- Cultural nuances/differences (potentially language difficulties).
- Reliance on technology to engage with students.
- Need for lecturer support (commitment, skills, motivation).
- Student cohort capability, relevance and interest.
- Student understanding of complex course content.

Actions to minimise these challenges include:

- Developing a network of appropriate clients by the lecturer as well as using RMIT colleagues and capacity to suggest potential clients.
- Providing students with support resources (e.g. how to work effectively in virtual teams).
- Understanding the difficulties that international students face, and providing support resources.
- Active involvement from the lecturer to motivate and follow up with students on weekly tasks such as discussion board, and creating videos as introductions to each topic that also provide explanations of more complex topics and examples.
- Using technologies that students are familiar with, and that are frequently used in industry (e.g. Skype).

Instructions/process

	Before semester					Teaching period			After semester
Process	Examine curriculum: map WIL to learning outcomes and assessment	Identify opportunities: locate client/s who can facilitate WIL	Design activity, identify assessment outcomes	Establish protocols, roles, responsibilities	Complete WIL legal agreements	Student preparation	Conduct WIL activity to achieve outcomes	Delivery/ completion of outcomes	Reflective practice and debriefing
Lecturer / Teacher	<p> Identify course outcomes suitable for WIL experience.</p> <p> Select WIL approaches that may not involve physical co-location.</p>	<p> Select a suitable client depending on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • student cohort • availability • willingness to take part • presence of 'champion' in organisation • can operate flexibly • can take steps to assist distributed students and online WIL projects • can communicate with students via Skype; etc. 	<p> Design activities to keep students engaged and motivated. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • students provide feedback on weekly progress • respond to questions • encouraged to participate in discussion board. <p> Establish communications schedule with students, and build this into the assessment requirements. Negotiate a project with the client, and prepare a 'project brief'.</p>	<p> Brief client on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • course objectives and process • commitment required • benefits to client, students and RMIT. <p>Understand client objectives and needs and obtain commitment to participate.</p> <p>Agree with client dates and purpose for formal meetings with students.</p>	<p> Ensure adherence with the Fair Work Act and Higher Education Support Act.</p> <p> Meet University's requirements regarding:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • insurance protection • OH&S requirements • IP considerations • WIL procedure. 	<p> Explain assessment tasks and set-up student</p> <p>Discuss how to prepare for contact with the client, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reading the project brief • formulating questions to ask the client in Week 2. <p> Provide video for weekly topic, include relevant comments related to the WIL project.</p> <p> Place project brief and videos on Blackboard.</p>	<p> Respond to groups weekly progress reports via email.</p> <p>Brief students on weekly task.</p>	<p> Assemble panel to conduct assessment of the presentation.</p>	<p> Obtain feedback (formal and informal) from the client, students, and other RMIT staff who attend the presentations.</p> <p> Assess project and evaluate the quality of work.</p>
Student					<p> Sign WIL agreements.</p>	<p> W 1 Read project briefs and watch videos prior to Week 1.</p> <p> W 6-8 Preparation and delivery of 10-minute Skype 'Pitch' to the client.</p> <p> W 9-11 Preparation of group final presentation.</p>	<p>Weekly group meetings, report progress to lecturer.</p> <p> W 12 Student group final presentations (via Skype):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • present for 15 minutes • 10 minutes for questions. <p>Rate each other member of their group which is taken into account in the final assessment.</p>	<p> Provide feedback via Course Experience Survey (CES).</p>	
Client		<p> Consider how WIL projects might aid the business.</p>	<p> Negotiate activity and desired outcomes.</p>	<p> Negotiate a project brief and dates with the lecturer. Commit to supporting students.</p>		<p> Prepare video providing background, clarifies informal communication and allocates different aspects of the project brief.</p>		<p> Attend final presentation to ask questions and/or make comments.</p>	<p> Provide feedback on students, projects and process.</p>

Conditions

The critical success factors for this pattern include:

- Identifying and selecting client organisations.
- Coordinating/negotiating curriculum, assessment, instructions, expectations.
- Selecting the most appropriate communications technology and supporting teaching staff and students in its use.
- Ensuring motivation and commitment from teaching staff (out-of-hours communication, heavier workload etc).
- Providing strong teacher support for students in all cohorts.
- Providing support resources, such as working in virtual teams, delivering a business presentation.

Resources

Support resources can be accessed via the Google site:
<https://sites.google.com/a/rmit.edu.au/virtual-wil-applied-industry-practice/>

They include:

- Assignment details
- Client research brief
- Assignment feedback rubric
- Exemplar student reports
- Video of exemplar student pitch and presentation
- Marking criteria
- Peer rating form
- Working in team document.

A Library Subject Guide was also created, incorporating support resources from the Study and Learning Centre, and the Career Development and Employment Office (<http://rmit.libguides.com/appliedindustrypractice>).

Reflection

Documenting the design and reviewing the course against the principles of the pillars of Global Learning by Design and RMIT's WIL policy, has improved and adapted AIP to be even more effective for the following reasons:

- Challenges and gaps were identified and addressed in a way that has improved the course; an example is how the needs of international students can better be met in a complex and challenging WIL environment.
- This project has also provided the opportunity to access and network with a range of knowledgeable and enthusiastic RMIT staff and incorporate their expertise and input into the pattern and the improved course.

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