Stories from the field...Information Systems and Information Technology

University/Institution: Macquarie University

Name/title of example of inclusive WIL practice: Information Systems Project and Information Technology Project

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Key Words: Computing, Information Technology, Professional and Community Engagement (PACE)

Discipline: Information and Communications Technology (ICT)

Overview of example of inclusive WIL practice:

Two teams each comprising five students work on an industry-based project to deliver a software product and/or artefacts such as feasibility study, requirements document, design and testing specifications, user manual/installation guide. As part of the process, students learn to work in a team, communicate with a client, develop and follow a project plan in a professional and ethical manner. The units are currently also the capstone for their respective degrees in the Bachelor of Information Technology (BIT) as the units require students to draw upon the knowledge and skills they have gained in their prior studies and identify and supplement their knowledge to solve a real world problem for their client, thus giving them experience and providing them with the skills to pursue life long learning which is essential for a career in ICT.

The unit is compulsory, credit bearing and undertaken in their final year. Students indicate project preferences from a set of industry sponsors arranged by the unit convenors and university/faculty PACE team. Two academics are involved with managing approximately 14-28 teams each semester.

How are students from diverse backgrounds catered for in this example of inclusive WIL practice? (e.g. special consideration; adjustments; financial assistance; flexibility in assessment; etc)

These units are inclusive in that it is open and compulsory for all students in the Computing programs. Arrangements regarding meeting location, frequency and medium are determined by the team, in consultation with the industry sponsor. Thus, individuals with carer or employment commitments, mobility issues, etc. are able to make arrangements to contribute to the project according to their specific needs and circumstances. The teams are usually a combination of students from different majors to prepare students for working in teams with diverse skills and viewpoints.

A final presentation (8%), final report (8%), sponsor mark (8%) and exam worth 25% are further used to ensure that students reflect on the project and process and achieve the learning outcomes.
### 3 benefits of this practice?
The flexibility of the work practices established by the team, which are negotiated and agreed upon by all parties allow the varying needs of the parties to be accommodated while achieving the goals of the project.

### 3 challenges of this practice?
Ensuring that all needs are identified and accommodated requires good communication and respect.

### How do you evaluate the effectiveness of this practice?
Teams report each week on how they are travelling. Deliverables are required about every two weeks. Mechanisms to ensure feedback from the client and to and from students and staff are built into the unit schedule and assessment structure. Student liaison meetings held three times a semester. Review of the unit at the end of each semester.

### What plans are there to improve/further develop and or extend this example of inclusive WIL practice?
We are continuously reviewing the processes and outcomes for students and sponsors. Each year we see some change to improve aspects that are not working well anymore or which allow better management or which improve the experience. For example, this year is the first time students can put in project preferences via an online system, provide a weekly team report and time log with each deliverable.