# Stories from the field...Media Public Relations

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<th>University/Institution:</th>
<th>Macquarie University</th>
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<td>Name/title of example of inclusive WIL practice</td>
<td>Media Public Relations</td>
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<td>Discipline:</td>
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## Overview of example of inclusive WIL practice (i.e. describe model, method of delivery, student and staff numbers involved, optional/compulsory, credit bearing; who is responsible for arranging placements - student or university/institution; if students are placed singly or in teams).

The objective of this credit bearing unit is to develop practical public relations (PR) skills, including: strategy writing, budgeting and professional presentation. Students work in groups, as small PR agencies, pitching for business of either commercial or non-profit organisations. The students are briefed by the client and work primarily on-campus to complete the client project. The unit offers real-life case studies as well as a possibility of the best proposed ideas to be taken up by client organisations. It is expected that students use the knowledge acquired in [MAS389](#) (public relations theories) and that all the assessments in this unit answer to the professional industry standards. The unit develops critical, analytical and creative thinking and further develops students’ effective communication capabilities, skills all valued by employers.

The student teams are organised by the academic, with the aim of forming groups which are diverse in their composition i.e., students from different disciplinary areas (Arts or Business and Economics), different backgrounds and with varying abilities and interests. This strategy is to help prepare students for working in teams with diverse skills and viewpoints. The university (one academic) is responsible for organising the placements and “matching” each student group to a partner/project. There are approximately 90 students enrolled in this unit. In most instances the academic has had the students in previous units and possesses prior knowledge of the students. Some administrative assistance is provided from a central team to help process partner agreements.

## 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).

There is no minimum GPA requirement for this unit, however it is a prerequisite for the Business and Marketing Media degree.

Specific strategies are made use of to cater for students from diverse backgrounds, these include:

- Location of the “placement” - this unit does not require students to be located at the partner’s worksite to conduct the project. This means students have some flexibility to determine team meeting location, frequency and medium (i.e., some work is done on-line). Thus, providing individuals with health, carer or employment commitments, mobility issues, etc to make arrangements to contribute to the project in a way that may better meet their individual needs. This approach can also help address some the time and financial pressures some students face when trying to undertake a placement at a client site.
- Student preparation - much of the success of this unit relies on students being able to work effectively in "mixed" teams. Early in the unit all students are required to attend a lecture and undertake some development activities in two tutorials which are directly related to building their capacity to work in teams.
- "Project matching" - is used by the lecturer as a way to align specific student needs, skills or circumstances with the project they will work on. For example, an international student may work on a community initiative related to their cultural background and experiences.
- Group task allocation – groups are actively encouraged to allocate tasks to individuals within the team based on skills, abilities and interests. This approach is particularly important in this unit where there is often a range of skills and capabilities amongst the students. It also helps reduce some of the stress for students which comes when asked to engage in assessable group work activities.
- Assessment modification - this occurs most frequently with respect to students who have disclosed a mental health issue, such as anxiety, and the final presentation component of the project.
- Self help – students are advised in the first lecture of on-campus services available to assist their learning and are encouraged to seek appropriate support early so that necessary adjustments can be accommodated.
- Pastoral care – this unit attracts many “first in family” students who require some additional advice and support in a range of areas, including: writing skills, critical thinking, time management. They sometimes also need some encouragement and to be reminded of the skills they possess which are attractive to an employer i.e., problem solving skills, creative thinking, etc. The unit provides these students, in fact all the students, with an opportunity to see what they are actually capable of. Nice!

3 benefits of this practice?

1) The model of WIL here allows students some degree of flexibility regarding when, where and how the project work will be conducted. The work practices are established and agreed to by the team and this approach can help accommodate individual needs, while still allowing the project to be completed.

2) Students often disclose early on to the lecturer their specific needs or circumstances. This provides an opportunity for the lecturer to accommodate these needs and to formulate alternate plans of action or interventions. This can be particularly important in a unit where students are working in teams, and the needs of individual students must be considered alongside the overall wellbeing of their team.

3) Many of the strategies employed in this unit help reduce the symptoms or sources of stress for students. Students have a better chance of being successful when their needs are met, they feel supported and they are happy.

3 challenges of this practice?

1) The lecturer relies on the prior knowledge she has about the students to help form groups and match students to projects. This approach may not be sustainable with a larger cohort or if a different lecturer became involved.

2) The mixed team approach can be difficult when students do not want to work with particular groups of students or when they want to work with students who are taking the same degree.

3) Students may choose not to disclose their specific needs to either the lecturer or their group. This can be problematic if/when their needs begin to negatively impact on the rest of their group.

How do you evaluate the effectiveness of this practice?

Students provide weekly “work-in-progress” updates. These provide an opportunity to assess the “health” of individuals and teams. Changes can be made if/when problems start to appear. At the end of the semester each student submits a peer review document whereby they provide feedback on their team members. This is used to inform the students’ individual participation marks. At the end of the semester the convenor reviews the results in terms of the quality of the final reports, the satisfaction of the clients, students’ feedback and discusses issues with Arts PACE to streamline processes and improve the learning experience for students and the benefits for partners.

What plans are there to improve/further develop and or extend this example of inclusive WIL practice?

The convenor convenes another PACE subject MAS350 Media Internships, where similar pastoral techniques are used with students. The convenor has raised the issues about student mental health at the departmental examination meeting and it is hoped that further investigation on the impact of students’ mental health will be undertaken by the Faculty.