Stories from the field...

International students learn to make wine in Margaret River

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<th>University/Institution: Curtin University</th>
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<td>Name/title of example of inclusive WIL practice: Wine-making WIL opportunity in Margaret River</td>
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<td>Key contact: Sonia Ferns and Linda Lilly</td>
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<td>Key Words: international students, authentic experience, wine-making</td>
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**General information:**
Fifteen international students enjoyed the opportunity to gain first-hand experience of the West Australian wine-making industry in February 2015, during a WIL opportunity at the **Centre for Wine Excellence** in Margaret River. Margaret River, 277 kilometres south-west of Perth, is at the centre of a thriving wine industry and is a popular tourist destination, noted for its surf breaks and beautiful coastal scenery.

The students were funded by the Brazilian Government’s **Science Without Borders** (SWB) initiative, that seeks to strengthen and expand science and technology, innovation and competitiveness through supporting international mobility of undergraduate and graduate students and researchers.

The SWB students were enrolled in a newly created WIL Unit at Curtin University designed to provide a curricular WIL experience to complement existing placement options within established courses. The placement at a wine-making facility provided the Brazilian students with a hands-on opportunity to learn about the production of wine, from hand-picking sauvignon blanc grapes, to operating crushing machines and presses to yield grape juice. Laboratory testing and chemical adjustment of the raw product followed, to optimise the taste and quality of the resulting wine. In addition to the practical activities, lectures and sensory evaluation classes were held to improve student knowledge about wine production.

The Chemical Engineering Students benefitted from this real-world experience, where the factors impacting wine quality and the efficiency of wine production in Australia were revealed. A cultural tour of the area revealed Aboriginal culture and history, bush lore and bush tucker, as well as European pioneer history, and included a visit to a couple of operating vineyards.

**Building staff capacity:**
Exposure to the cultural differences of international students attending the wine making opportunity was an important step in developing awareness and understanding of cultural diversity for staff involved.

“Inclusive” successes:
Placement opportunities for international students can be difficult to source, with some organisations only accepting Australian students. Internships are often viewed as ‘try before you buy’ situations, where organisations earmark prospective employees. International students may be perceived as offering no benefit to organisations seeking to hire new graduates, as visa restrictions often require their prompt return home following completion of their courses.

Collaboration with the Centre for Wine Excellence was pivotal to the success of this opportunity. Students processed their own harvest of grapes in an authentic Australian setting, learning about both their discipline and local workplace culture.

Students identified their own project topics, centred on wine production in Australia, which allowed each student to incorporate their own interests and experience into a research topic of their choice. Group sessions prior to the placement prepared students for the experience, and staff presence during the placement ensured that any concerns of either the partner or student body were handled promptly.

Room for improvement:
A longer duration placement would have enabled students to be involved until the wine was ready for bottling and storage, to experience the full process of wine production from vineyard to consumer.

Advice for those looking to facilitate an inclusive experience:
Collaborate with willing partners to shape placement opportunities for diverse student groups and provide support for both the partner and student group to ensure the success of the placement.