

The “virtuous circle”: A case study examining the case for the better embedding of Work Integrated Learning approaches into university journalism curriculums.

Abstract

This paper explores the potential to focus and develop the approach of Work Integrated Learning (WIL) in those journalism courses where this method is seen as a core principal of the program.

It argues, that, in many cases, such approaches are ill defined and underdeveloped, a fact that weakens the possibility for strong course outcomes.

It then examines the particular case of QUT coverage of the 2014 G20 Leaders’ Summit to illustrate how an all-of-course WIL approach to G20 coverage - coupled with a tailored interaction with the library - might provide an enhanced student experience as well as unlock the potential for greater knowledge transfer between university journalism courses and industry partners.

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Introduction

The trend to integrate university journalism courses with the world of work is an intensifying one as universities strengthen their focus on providing job ready graduates. Globalisation, economic uncertainty and the possibility of university deregulation in Australia (and consequently more competition and higher student debt) means that graduates need to be adaptable, resilient and reflective in order to thrive in the workforce (Helyer and Lee 2014). Work Integrated Learning (WIL), which integrates “theory with the practice of work within a purposefully designed curriculum” (Patrick in Harrison, Bromley and Frangi 2012, p.103) is a learning opportunity that can allow these skills to flourish and help students grasp the realities of journalism. However, in many cases, WIL is not, necessarily, situated in a “purposefully designed curriculum” and is the purview of a few specially tailored work placement units that act to add on to a curriculum driven through a range of other logics. In such cases, these work placement units provide the most tentative of bridges between the world of work and academic life.

The literature that examines WIL, therefore, tends to concentrate on the outcomes of specific aspects of the approach from: student engagement with or student views of a particular industry employer (Hanusch 2013; Harrison, Bromley and Frangi 2012); the outcome of a particular field trip or experience, such as specially-designed WIL experiences designed to enhance cross-cultural awareness and reporting skills regarding Indigenous affairs (Stewart, Meadows, Bowman et al 2010; Stewart, Williams, Cullen et al 2012); undertaking practical journalism field work overseas for course credit (Duffield 2008a), or; a comparison between particular field trips in a certain field of journalism reporting (Duffield 2007; Duffield 2008b;) (Forbes in Harrison, Bromley and Frangi 2012). Such a focus in the literature and the observations of Cushion (in Harrison, Bromley and Frangi 2012) indicates that the relationship between journalism courses and WIL approaches is not well understood but there is consensus that courses that foster WIL approaches present a good opportunity to build relationships with industry and to build a more well-rounded and realistic curriculum that makes the enrolled students job ready (Helyer and Lee 2014). Such an understanding calls up a program of research and curriculum evaluation that can provide courses where the notion of WIL is central to the course direction.

With a view to making a contribution to this discussion, the paper examines the successful QUT journalism coverage of the 2014 G20 Leaders’ Summit that was conducted in Brisbane over a weekend in mid-November. However, to situate this project, it is first necessary to examine the particular relationship between WIL principles and the balance of the QUT curriculum.

The QUT Course Experience

In seeking to develop a curriculum aspiring to reflect and support such an approach, the journalism course at QUT has sought to extend the understanding of WIL to take into account those course units which are part of a “newsroom” approach dedicated to the production and dissemination of industry standard material prepared for print, online, television and radio. In the QUT curriculum, these particular news organizational structures are designed, managed and equipped to facilitate the sorts of work practices that the student journalists will encounter in industry placements and on the international and national field trips that are also integrated into the course. In this mode, staff with strong industry backgrounds guide students as they work with the same stories alongside the same people that they will encounter in industry placements or in the workforce. Such an initial platform sets in train a “virtuous circle” where: the curriculum serves as a platform that allows for further enrichment of the industry experience that students gain from work placements ;the industry experience, in turn, validates and strengthens the understandings developed, progressively, through a course that is taught across three years(single degree)or up to five years(journalism combined with business or law); in some cases the industry placements feed back into internally-run special extension projects offered to select students at QUT. The explication of this system by Bowman and Lund (2007), however, tends to concentrate on the broadcast portion of a course that also includes tuition in the print and online forms and that includes practice in the various genres of journalism. These broadcast subjects, along with aligned online and print offerings, are offered later in the course, and the analysis of these subjects cannot capture the particular contribution to a WIL approach that units in the first half of the course might offer. In particular, how such units might form part of a holistic curriculum approach; an approach that might move coherently from the first days

within the course to specific WIL approaches and to those other opportunities that fuse external knowledge back into the course.

In this regard, the QUT journalism discipline, has always considered each course level as a preparation for later subjects where a deeper(cognitive) as well as broader(media platform, specific journalism genres) approach is developed through each of the three levels of the course where initial course material, and outcomes, importantly inform the more structured newsroom approach of later years. Such an integrated approach to teaching the various journalism skills and competencies provides the impetus necessary to a more seamless “transition out” to various work placement opportunities with industry partners and, ultimately, to employment, sometimes with these same partners. Such a course focus and approach is informed through the writings of Miriam Hutton (Hutton 1989, p.50). In Learning from action: a conceptual framework she says her focus is on “knowledge for use and learning from doing”. The design of the course, therefore, is in providing a stable replicable process that can allow a seamless transition into industry placements; to provide a background which makes these environments familiar, rather than alien, and that makes easily replicable the particular stance that all journalists share. Such a stance as recognized by QUT as typical of journalism approaches in relevant fields includes shared attitudes, values, beliefs, expectations and assumptions (Hutton, 1989, p.53) informed through a range of professional and ethical understandings.

WIL strategy development - the background

The formalization of industry placements that formed a central part of a “learning from doing” strategy had existed at QUT for several years but the formalization of such arrangements and their integration into a meaningful WIL strategy only began in the late 1990s.

At QUT in the year 2000, work placements were formalized with a range of industry partners, including the major television and radio networks, the major print outlets and online entities, where advanced level students could build on their course experiences. We were gratified to find that the background that students gained through exposure in QUT newsrooms meant that they could immediately make a tangible contribution to the

workplace, and were more equipped to take advantage of the “new knowledge” that the industry partner could provide. Such an understanding supported our contention that our course, did, in fact, provide the first stage of a virtuous circle and that industry could, in fact, build upon a platform already presented through the students placed with them.

The following feedback from then Unit Manager at Channel 7 Brisbane is typical of the feedback received from participants in the program.

Just wanted to drop you a line and tell you how wonderful Emily has been in her first week .We’re looking forward to having her back next week. From feedback around the newsroom, everybody has been impressed with Emily’s attitude, work ethic and abilities and I’m sure she will be welcome in the newsroom as an ongoing member of the team. (Shona Mackenzie, 10/08/07).

Such domestic experiences were augmented through international field trips that encompassed major events, such the 2008 Beijing Olympics where students were part of an intranet service that provided material for use by media outlets, and the 2010 Shanghai World Expo where students worked to produce news copy, some of which was used by outside organisations.

However, while the QUT course has done much to provide a curriculum that transitions seamlessly to industry and seeks to reinvigorate the course in a continuing cycle it is acknowledged that such programs remain a work in progress.

WIL and the way ahead - University/Industry links

This point is particularly pertinent when it is considered that the object of WIL arrangements, at least in part, is to develop new knowledge that is mutually beneficial to all parties and to move beyond the acknowledged industry benefit that work placement schemes are integral to the recruitment of new staff (Helyer and Lee 2014). The benefit of WIL to universities helps to achieve aims of ‘inviting students to change’ (Billet in Johnston and Bishop 2012), to have students ‘enter the workforce with empathy and motivation’, and to plant ‘the seed of a vocation for those who engage’

(Johnston and Bishop 2012). However, as such arrangements have matured, there has developed a greater recognition that universities need to strengthen industry connections in ways that, more specifically, address the goal of providing new knowledge to their industry partners.

The literature suggests that the reciprocal creating and sharing of knowledge that comes from industry placements can help to develop students into “resourceful change agents” who have the potential to work across the industry/university interface (Heyler and Lee 2014). However, a particularly coherent, and well-established, knowledge transfer path from the academy to industry is rarely raised as a particular benefit of the relationship. In terms of a WIL whole-of-curriculum approach, the G20 exercise presented an ideal opportunity to fuse downwards the benefits of event coverage that could both incorporate lower level units and enthuse and engage such cohorts around a course coverage topic. However, it also provided the opportunity to further develop course mechanisms with the potential to fuse upwards, providing a more direct and tangible knowledge transfer to the media industry. In this regard, QUT took the opportunity to use the particular G20 focus to further develop the ability of library resources to adapt to the needs of the journalism field. Considerable early work preceded this decision. It came from an already established partnership in a final-year unit Investigative Reporting (KJB337). The partnership has trialed approaches that diverge from what is considered the traditional approach to library service to the institution.

Library/Journalism interaction - the background

The role of academic libraries has traditionally been to serve the educational institution to which they are attached, through supporting teaching and learning and research activities. However, the traditional role of the academic library as gatekeeper of information has adapted to new client needs brought about by advances in technology, that have facilitated the additional role of working as a guide – navigating staff and students through the masses of information available in order to find the type and quality of information needed for particular courses or projects (Brabazon 2014; Shank and Bell 2011). Such developments and the changing demands of the curriculum has required that librarians develop skills in curation, i.e. acquiring, analysing

and bundling up appropriate resources in support of teaching and learning and delivering them in a way that students value (Little, 2013; Anderson 2011; Ovadia 2013).

Such an approach has been trialed and developed within the KJB337 Investigative Reporting cohort (a final year cohort) at QUT for the past few years. Students enrolled in this unit are required to produce feature articles on topics of public interest at the time. Topics covered in the last three years have included the National Broadband Network (NBN) the proposal for an Emission Trading Scheme (ETS), coal seam gas, the Great Barrier Reef marine park, university deregulation in Australia and, most recently, analysis surrounding the G20 Leaders’ Summit. For each topic, the liaison librarian and unit coordinator work closely to curate content to help students research these topics, which is presented in an online information portal (subject guide) accessible via the online course support Blackboard system.

The eclectic nature of the journalism knowledge base means that journalists often have to start researching, from scratch, topics that suddenly become newsworthy and the informational portal contains a breadth of information from many reputable resources. The faculty librarian promotes the information portal through an in-class lecture where the portal is showcased and explained, and conducts tutorials a few weeks after the lecture where students who have had time to consider their particular angle on the news feature article required for assessment can ask for more specific, targeted assistance. As the KJB337 students are in their final year of their Bachelor of Journalism degree, or are double degree students completing their journalism component, the assumption was made that they needed less emphasis on finding and evaluating the right information for themselves having done this in previous years, and more on giving them the right suite of information to kick start the writing of their feature articles.

The perceived need, however, to permeate such understandings throughout the course and to provide a sense that ALL activities, at all levels, were related not simply through a process of skills development –but through the inherent usefulness of each item published around a particular topic - meant that the 2014 G20 Leaders’ Summit provided a unique opportunity to experiment with course development. It allowed the opportunity to fuse downwards information that the collaborators believed had the potential to

provide knowledge at a course rather than unit level and that could help to embed the assumption that all levels of the course could work together to provide various levels of information useful to the coverage of a particular topic. Such a step was seen as then, potentially, forming the basis for informing the work placement relationship, and ultimately, a closer relationship between the university and the media at all levels.

G20 exercise-the background

The decision to provide coverage of the event was made in February, with the initial and specific focus being a series of television bulletins that covered the weekend summit itself with the addition of the two days of preliminary activities that centered on the arrival of the participating world leaders and the security, media, and cultural activities that accompanied their arrival. The coverage was planned to culminate with a G20 “wrap” broadcast, prepared post-event that took a look at the summit outcomes, along with a retrospective view of major highlights.

Such an exercise was a major operation in itself as gathering the resources and organizing the schedule for the production of 90 minutes of special event coverage is time-consuming. A long lead time is required to negotiate the necessary accreditations and all other requirements around an event where parts of the city are in security lockdown and a range of other protocols dictate the constraints within which coverage will proceed. Then there was the need to locate, and recruit, suitable students who were of a level sufficient to manage such challenges, and who could provide coverage to the high level of professionalism that QUT wished to present. The eight journalism students who would provide the reportage for the television programs were senior students with considerable experience in “on the road” reporting and who had also completed internships with major television networks. Each had either completed, or were completing, the Investigative Journalism unit. The five students who were concurrently enrolled in Investigative Reporting had to present for assessment, in Investigative Journalism, a G20 based feature only two weeks before they began the G20 coverage. In terms of the “virtuous circle”, the G20 coverage exercise allowed them to report and present stories that, otherwise, only a few

seasoned industry professionals would access. Such “feed back in” to the course could prove particularly inspiring to young students who could see for themselves more senior students conducting impressive coverage of major world leaders including the United States President, Barack Obama; a truly unique opportunity, available only through the generosity of the G20 organisers, in providing full media accreditation to five senior students each from QUT, the University of Queensland, and Griffith University.

However, in addition, QUT Journalism took the opportunity to extend the focus and activity beyond the first-hand event coverage exercise that would take place in mid-November, and worked from June to include all course participants (hundreds of students) in engaging with some aspect of the event. Such an approach also provided the library with the opportunity to provide particular efficiencies that allowed it to provide a high level of service within the resource allocation available.

In the past, QUT Library has created hundreds of subject guides – specially curated online collections of resources including (but not limited to) books, ebooks, journal articles, databases, videos, websites - specific to individual units, but the huge maintenance required has ushered in an approach that allows for the use of discipline-specific material germane to several units rather than a specific unit approach. The flexibility of the software used to create subject guides means that tabs can be utilised and clearly labelled to indicate the content most useful to each year level and yet an even newer approach has been to curate subject guides that can be used across-disciplines and even beyond the university. For example, the subject guide on “QUT Transform”, a project exploring cutting-edge learning and teaching innovation, uses a structure grouping resources by teaching theory which has value to all academics who teach.

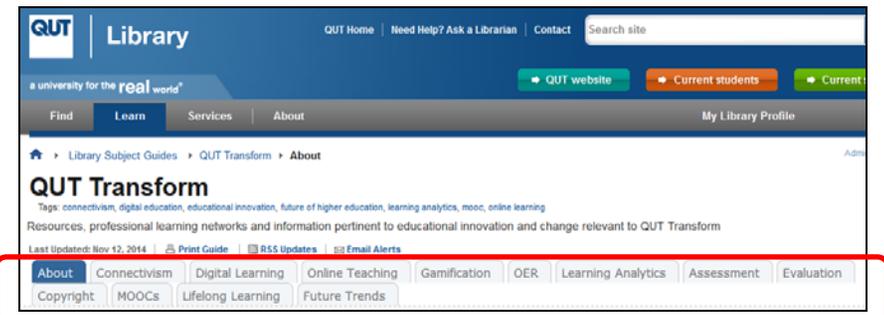


Figure 1. Example of how topics are curated within the Subject Guides created by QUT Library

The G20 portal drew on the features of this approach but also incorporated other features specific to the journalism needs that it sought to serve. As third year students have typically been exposed to and built skills in finding and evaluating suitable information for their studies in prior years, the unit coordinator and librarian decided to curate a range of appropriate resources that would not necessarily deemphasize these already existing skills but instead allow the students to immediately focus on the feature writing task at hand. This method also builds the students’ trust in their educators’ abilities to recommend the best materials. A screenshot of the portal is included as Appendix 1.

A range of books, scholarly databases and websites were selected that provided background information to the G20. As is a basic tenet of librarianship, accurate, up-to-date and authoritative resources were selected from a range of sources in order to represent a broad range of material with very different audiences. Twitter and YouTube are also quickly becoming legitimate methods of scholarly communication and thus some suitable Twitter hashtags and YouTube videos were also included. Supplementary material was also linked to, which included material such as how to evaluate information which linked out to some of the other academic skills resources available on the Library website.

The portal was loosely structured around the steps the library encourages students to take to find good information. Thus, while content was ultimately curated for these students, the structure of the portal itself was intended to

remind students of the steps taken in the research process, starting with the first step of understanding the context and gaining an overview of the topic. The resources included in this section included links to the G20 Summit Brisbane 2014 Wikipedia page (accompanied by the mandatory warning about using Wikipedia thoughtfully) and links to websites explaining how the G20 is constituted and its purpose. The next steps were then finding books (step 2) which linked to key G20 titles in the library collection, finding articles (step 3) which linked to key multidisciplinary databases, and finding news (step 4) which linked to key news databases, all of which contained G20 content. As students were required to interview an expert for their feature articles, the portal also included a section on this, naming individuals and particular institutions where a student may find an expert. The next section on “Social media as a source” also included a list of “G20 influencers” as well as recommendations of Twitter feeds and users to follow. Finally, a section dedicated to “why is hosting the G20 important for Australia” listed a variety of specially selected websites. The portal was structured in this way as when a student includes all of these types of sources in an academic piece of assessment it is a good indication of well-rounded research. This strategy also proved very useful when the portal was promoted to students across the whole of course including first year students who were still new to the research process.

The portal is hosted on the library website which is publicly available, thus it is easily shared with the outside world and industry partners. The portal is also easily linked into Blackboard, where students spend most of their time engaging with unit materials. Thus the transition from Blackboard into the portal is seamless and students don’t need to find their own way there or even know that the portal is hosted by the library. It is also possible for a collaborator external to QUT to be added as an administrator to the portal which grants them the power to update, edit and publish. The general public also has access to the portal (which is discoverable via Google and the QUT Library website) but their only limitation on use is where portal content links to material that the library subscribes to (such as scholarly databases and journal articles) where strict licensing allows for QUT user access only. Care is taken to see that the portal only contains copyright compliant material.

Such an approach to curating content is particularly useful to journalism where coverage often will cluster around a particular major news event, such as the G20, and the differentiation is measured through the varying degrees of breadth and depth of reporting and analysis that is possible given the level of expertise and experience that is available at the various year levels. The particularly useful aspect for a whole-of-course outcome is for ‘junior’ journalists to appreciate that even apparently simple stories are relevant and these initial accounts or background pieces provide a sound platform for later more sophisticated and nuanced accounts that emerge around the event itself. It is particularly helpful in both educational and motivational senses when the junior members can see the growth in their older compatriots work, and to realize the potential for similar growth in the same work that they are producing at a lower, but nevertheless, valuable level. In terms of the potential for the library to support and enhance such an emerging “cultural fusion” there is exciting potential. Two noteworthy events from work done towards the G20 coverage by students in the first year of the course are presented here as relevant outcomes where the portal containing library resources provided relevant information that fuelled a more whole-of-course approach to the event. The first-year “Newswriting” subject discusses the conventions of reporting media conferences and provides access to a press conference that is arranged to test student ability to research and cover a press conference topic. In the case of G20, however, the press conference was a real event - the final G20 briefing from the organizing committee that the 120 students covered alongside the mainstream media. The October media conference was the first major reportage event of the QUT G20 coverage effort and the students were aware that their coverage was a precursor to later, more intensive, coverage of the actual event. Furthermore, the availability of the portal for research and perusal emphasized the fact that ALL were sharing a common research approach and pursuing a common topic. In some cases, the same students who attended the press conference had, in July, begun work on a project that could importantly inform their media conference questions and further develop the requisite professional skills and ethical understandings sought as part of the course. Specifically, in the first-year subject, “Computational Journalism”, some students wrote evaluation reports that required the identification of two reliable sources that gave information about two opposing positions on G20 topics of interest. The students needed to present balanced material. To emphasise such ethical

‘balance’ they often chose a protest movement whose views on certain issues differed from the opposing, often “establishment” views of, for example, the police or the government. Next, they took these issues and wrote a background report that more deeply explored the facts behind both points of view, encouraging a broad, well–rounded understanding of what was going to happen during G20. Again, these students had access to the same G20 portal accessed by senior students in “Investigative Reporting”, a resource that was also available to students who, ultimately, would work on the Summit itself.

At the other end of the scale, the development of materials that can cater to such needs has potential to provide the sort of material that might enrich journalism accounts in time–poor, fast-moving and dynamic events coverage, such as a G20, or indeed other major news events. Partnerships both through industry placement and other journalism-industry joint placement approaches that tap such potential provide opportunities for the greater enrichment of all those involved a form of “new knowledge” exchange.

Conclusion

This paper- with its particular focus on the QUT G20 Leaders’ Summit – makes a number of particular points about the relationship between WIL, the broader curriculum, and the potential for more integrated university- media relationships with a greater emphasis on knowledge transfer.

In particular, it illustrates that the WIL approach can instruct curriculum design and application that moves beyond an approach where a few WIL units are charged with the responsibility of transiting students ‘out’ into industry. Rather, it makes the argument that such an emphasis is best achieved through a whole-of-curriculum approach where a ‘virtuous circle’ develops that: encourages the stepped development of journalism principles throughout the course; that seeks to transfer such principles to industry placements as a basis for a further development of these understandings; that infuses such knowledge back into QUT through special projects that serve not only to enhance the journalistic development of the participants, but also to serve as an inspiration to “junior” students and to encourage their understanding of the relevance of their work at all levels of the course.

Furthermore that the fusion of all journalism learning levels around a single events coverage such as the G20 creates a sense of course unity and dynamism and that such a holistic approach infuses a greater sense of the ultimate relevance of all course levels, and more starkly emphasizes the ultimate outcome of course learning as exemplified through impressive and highly visible coverage of a major news topic.

Finally but, not least, this test case has allowed for the expansion of principles for the integration of library resources into the curriculum in a way that enhances its use and relevance to the journalism field and opens up the possibility for an avenue of knowledge transfer to industry. Such knowledge transfer might occur organically through various WIL projects but also through more direct cooperation between the media industry and the university sector. QUT Journalism believes a strengthening and broadening of such approaches enhances journalism and university course goals in QUT and has the potential to make similar contributions elsewhere.

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Appendix 1: Screenshot of G20 Information Portal

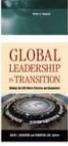
Part 1- top half of portal

The screenshot shows the top half of the G20 Information Portal. The header includes the QUT Library logo and navigation links. The main content area is titled "Investigative Reporting (KJB337) 2014" and is organized into four steps:

- Step 1: Understand the Context**: Includes an overview of the topic, a warning to check the accuracy of information on Wikipedia, and links to Wikipedia pages for "G20 Summit, Brisbane 2014" and "Who is in G20?". It also lists questions like "What on earth is the G20 and why should I care?" and "What does the G20 actually do?".
- Step 2: Find Books**: Lists four e-books: "G20 Governance for a Globalized World", "The Group of Twenty (G20)", "Middle Powers and G20 Governance", and "The G20".
- Step 3: Find Articles**: Provides "Good Databases for this topic", including EBSCOhost and ProQuest.
- Step 4: Find News**: Offers "Find out what the jourmos are saying", with instructions on how to use TV News and Factiva for news and streaming media.

Part 2 – bottom half of portal

Global Leadership in Transition
Call Number: ebook



The G20: Evolution, Interrelationships, Documentation
Call Number: ebook



The G20
Call Number: ebook



Social Media as a Source

G20 influencers - “G20 influencers” defines the top ten most politically influential people on Twitter in each of the G20 countries.

#G20, #G20report, #G20mobilize
@G20Australia



Why is hosting G20 important for Australia?



Comments (0)

Speakers at the G20 media briefing

Wednesday 15 October at Brisbane City Hall

- **Bernadette Welch**, Head of Operations, G20 Taskforce, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet
- **Terry Crane**, Executive Director, G20 State Coordination Unit, Department of the Premier and Cabinet
- **Peter Rule**, Executive Manager and G20 Coordinator, Office of the Chief Executive, Brisbane City Council
- Assistant Commissioner **Katarina Carroll**, G20 Group, Queensland Police Service
- **Athol Young**, Creative Director, G20 Cultural Celebrations
- **Jono Perry**, Creative Director, G20 Cultural Celebrations
- **Blair Allsop**, G20 Volunteer

Important Websites

- G20 home: Brisbane 2014
- Brisbane Global Cafe
- G20 on facebook
- G20 on The Conversation
- G20 Information Centre: statements and addresses
- The G20 (Safety and Security) Bill 2013
- The Lowy Institute - use sidebar on left to narrow your results
- Queensland Police G20 blog
- Queensland Government G20 website
- Brisbane City Council
- Queensland Police

Find a G20 Expert

- Our G20 Experts: Griffith University
- John Kirton - founder of G20 Research Group
- Lowy Institute - see experts in sidebar

Comments (0)

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