

Running head: WIL AND COMMUNICATION INDUSTRIES AT TWO AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITIES

About the Free in Freelance: Communication Industries and Work Integrated Learning  
at Two Australian Universities

Abstract

Ongoing and secure employment is increasingly difficult to attain in the Australian media and communication industries. In its 2013 report *Experience or Exploitation? The Nature, Prevalence and Regulation of Unpaid Work Experience, Internships and Trial Periods in Australia*, Australia's national workplace relations tribunal Fair Work Australia (FWA) found the Australian media and communication industries to be prolific in their use of unpaid work place experience. The report featured a survey of students from the metropolitan University of Technology (UTS) Sydney to understand how journalism students viewed internships. The University of Newcastle (UoN) is a regional university and has a higher than average rate (27 per cent compared to the national average of 16 per cent) of students from low socio-economic backgrounds. The researchers sought to compare and contrast expectations around work – integrated learning (WIL) and found the experience of students from a regional university differed from the experience of students from a metropolitan university. The research found the increasing demand of employers in the media industry for work-ready graduates, along with a desire and aim of universities to promote and embrace work-integrated learning, provides a number of questions that beg further inquiry. These questions relate to the concept of a mutually beneficial relationship guided by a framework that underpins much thinking about internships, work experience and work-integrated learning. Such a framework needs a more complex and developed understanding of student expectations and desired outcomes pertaining to gaining experience in the workplace.

*Keywords: communication, journalism, work experience, work integrated learning, Australia*

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The issue of unpaid work experience in media and communication industries has been in the news in Australia on numerous occasions over the past few years. In January 2013, the independent tribunal that monitors workplace relations in Australia – Fair Work Australia (FWA) – released a report entitled *Experience or Exploitation? The Nature, Prevalence and Regulation of Unpaid Work Experience, Internships and Trial Periods in Australia*. The report was commissioned by the Fair Work Ombudsman to examine the “nature, prevalence and regulation of unpaid work experience, internships and trial periods in Australia” (Stewart & Owens, 2013). The FWA study surveyed organisations about their experiences, including members of the Australian Collaborative Education Network (ACEN), and several groups of students including law and journalism students. Furthermore, the report included international perspectives on unpaid internships and compared these perspectives to the Australian experience. The report found the media industry to be one of the most prolific industries in terms of unpaid experience in the workplace and found the media industry often exploits student labour. In June 2013, the union covering media workers in Australia – the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA) – released a statement outlining that the Fair Work Ombudsman (FWO) had agreed to work with the MEAA to ensure “unpaid work arrangements throughout the media industry – including unpaid internships for young people – will be fair and lawful” (MEAA, 2013).

Similar concerns around internships have been unravelling globally. In the UK, Labour MP Hazel Belars described the growth of unpaid roles ‘a modern day scandal’ and introduced the *Internships (Advertising and Regulation) Bill*. Part of the attention around the bill resulted from a 2011 freedom-of-information request that revealed 6,283 people had worked for the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) for free since 2007. The article quoted a BBC source as saying the interns “do it all for nothing in the hope of getting a job at the end of it” (Blake, 2011). In the USA, in October 2013, publishing

house Conde Nast abandoned its internship programmes after numerous allegations of exploitation blasted a spotlight on the use and abuse of student interns. But the demand for various types of unpaid labour for ‘work experience opportunities’ continues to grow in many media and communication industries and demand for those opportunities is also growing from students enrolled in media and communication programmes. Work-integrated learning (WIL) strategies in Australian universities are being enthusiastically facilitated by a combination of government policy, university strategic plans and the demand for such experiences from industry and students.

The BComn programme at UoN has been engaging students and industry for more than two decades. This engagement has achieved a wide range of outcomes resulting from various inputs, strategies and support mechanisms. Throughout the three years of full-time enrolment, students in the BCOMN are encouraged by staff at the university to avail themselves of the experiential opportunities provided through both the programme’s formal links with industry partners and informal opportunities they are able to seek out for themselves. The BCOMN has formal arrangements with communication industries — including through its industry advisory board comprised of management representatives from NBN Television, radio stations 2NURFM and ABC1233, the *Newcastle Herald* newspaper, and public relations firm Edelman Australia — and these links have ensured an often mutually beneficial relationship for employers and students. This relationship has seen many of the programme’s graduates take up ongoing employment that can at least be partly linked to the experience provided either with, or through the guidance of, the industry advisory board assisting the direction and focus of the WIL aspects of the BComn programme.

Traditionally, internships in the field of communication in Australia have provided employers with what Harrison, Bromley & Frangi, (2012, p.102) have labelled a “try before you buy” approach, or a “test-bed for both technical and employability capabilities”. Previous studies have shown that an

internship has provided a mutually beneficial outcome for students and employers through an identifiable pathway into ongoing employment (Austin & Cokley, 2006; Forbes, 2009) as well as a way for students to apply academic experience to real world situations (Forbes, 2009; Harris, Bromley & Frangi, 2012). Furthermore, empirical research has demonstrated that media professionals such as journalists found their own internships a valuable experience and provide practical, work-ready skills (Fulton & Scott, 2013).

Anecdotally, it has been noted by the authors that internships increase students' maturity, confidence and leadership skills. In a similar fashion, Forde and Meadows (2011) found that internship experiences in Australian journalism enabled students to learn about themselves as well as practical skills and that journalism internship programmes, if run with a solid pedagogical foundation, enhance student learning. Forde and Meadows provides one of the few empirical studies that systematically assesses journalism internships as a learning tool.

However, ongoing and secure employment is increasingly difficult to attain in the Australian mainstream media industry with changes in the media landscape leading to a decline in jobs (Fulton & Balnaves, 2013) and the authors note that an increasing number of organisations appear to be taking advantage of students who are desperate to work in that industry. Many students in communication programmes majoring in journalism remain focused on achieving employment with mainstream media organisations and are willing to spend significant amounts of time during their education working for these organisations in a voluntary capacity. Such willingness among students has seen unpaid work in media industries become significantly normalised in Australia. The 2013 FWA report surveyed journalism students from the University of Technology, Sydney (UTS) to discover how journalism students viewed internships. However, UTS is a metropolitan university and its students may have a different experience of university than students in other areas. The University of Newcastle (UoN) is a

regional university in a one university city and the communication discipline has strong industry ties in the region. UoN has a significantly high rate of students from low socio-economic backgrounds.

This paper is reporting on a survey conducted with students enrolled in the Bachelor of Communication at the UoN in 2014 and will discuss internships and work experience, focusing on journalism, comparing and analysing the UTS and UoN experiences within this context. The research mirrored the methodology used in the FWA study in the form of a survey and, for the part of the project reported in this paper, compared the results of UoN journalism students to journalism students at the University of Technology Sydney (UTS), a cohort of students included in the FWA sample, to discover if there are differences in work experience and internship experiences between the cohorts at the two universities. What kind of internships and work experience the students are doing; and, what was the students' experience of internships and work experience?

Another reason for the authors to conduct the survey was to establish if the two student cohorts had different experiences in regards to internships and work integrated learning. Does the internship expectation and experience of UoN students differ from the students at UTS? And if expectation and experience does differ between the cohorts, are there thematic similarities that can be identified? The two universities have several differences that need to be taken into account when analysing the survey results. UTS is a metropolitan university in the largest city in Australia. Sydney is the capital of the Australian state of New South Wales. There are five universities in Sydney as well as several campuses of other Australian universities. The greater Sydney region has a population of 4.76 million (ABS, 2013). UoN is situated in Newcastle, Australia, a regional city that is the seventh largest city in Australia and is located approximately 160 kilometres north of Sydney. Newcastle is the major city in the Hunter region and the approximate population of the Hunter is 625,000 (ABS, 2013). UoN is the only university in the region. The employment situation in the two areas is also different. Many UoN

undergraduates need to move out of the area for work in the media industry, particularly if they want to work in traditional media. Sydney and other capital cities are the hubs for mainstream media organisations and in the last couple of years, opportunities in Newcastle media have decreased due to redundancies and downsizing.

In terms of student population, UoN has a higher than sector number of students from low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds: 27 per cent of UoN domestic students in 2012 were from low SES backgrounds compared to the national average of 16 per cent (University of Newcastle, 2013). Eleven per cent of UTS students were from low SES backgrounds in 2012 (University of Technology Sydney, 2013). Communication students at UoN have the choice of four majors: public relations, media production, media studies and journalism. The students also have the choice of doing a double major and they can also choose to undertake a double degree: Bachelor of Communication/Bachelor of Law. While students from all the majors at UoN were surveyed, this article only includes third-year journalism students to enable comparison with the UTS respondents. UTS journalism students complete a Bachelor of Arts in Communication (Journalism) but can also do a combined degree: Bachelor of Arts in Communication (Journalism)/Bachelor of Arts in International Studies; Bachelor of Arts in Communication (Journalism)/Bachelor of Creative Intelligence and Innovation; and, Bachelor of Arts in Communication (Journalism)/Bachelor of Laws. Each university's programme has a formal WIL component. UoN offers final year students a work placement course in their last semester called *Professional Placement* where students are required to complete an 80 hour internship at an approved place of employment. This course is not compulsory for any student. UTS journalism students are expected to complete two periods of work experience over their degree (Stewart & Owens, 2013).

During the last decade in Australia, in response to both industry demands and in "recognition of

the workplace as a unique and valuable learning environment for students” (McLennan, 2008, p. 4), providers in the Australian higher-education sector have increasingly focused emphasis and importance upon WIL in their offerings to students. This emphasis and importance has been demonstrated through the promotion and advocacy of WIL in institutional strategic plans; discipline and degree learning outcomes for students; recognition awards for staff, students, industry groups and employers; marketing campaigns that spotlight ‘real-world’ connection and opportunity; and the provision of internal structures with resource allocations that promote and support WIL. Furthermore, the broad goal of community engagement is increasingly reflected in university strategic plans. WIL provides higher-education institutions with mutually beneficial relationship opportunities that can enhance institutional reputation through avenues including a nexus from both social participation and community–university research.

But it would be disingenuous for those involved in the field of media and communication to simply form an uncritical cheer squad for the Australian WIL experience. The FWA (2013) report highlighted that industry and employer exploitation of media and communication students was occurring. While the literature surrounding WIL often focuses its gaze upon the benefits (Brown, 2002; Weisz & Smith, 2005) associated for key stakeholders - the institution, students and industry - there is less emphasis on difficulties and practicalities of implementation, although Berman (Berman, 1990, cited in Eyler, Giles, Stenson & Gray, 2001, p. 20) and Orrell (2004) do diverge from such an approach and advise of the need for strategies that embrace caution.

The authors of this paper have found that the experiences and expectations of WIL stakeholders in the media and communication field are subject to widespread fluctuation. There remains unease between industry expectations of students being able to ‘hit the ground running’ and academic staff who see their role as educative rather than providing ‘industry fodder’. This reflects a long-running



debate that Patrick et al (2008) outlines as a clear distinction between ‘learning’ and ‘working’. The authors of this paper view this debate through the same lens that polemicises theory and practice and see such mutual exclusivity as neither necessary nor useful to informing debate around WIL.

The authors have also found that WIL experiences, expectations and judgments regarding ‘worth’ are dependent upon myriad factors including adequately resourced planning; university, discipline and industry resources; timetabling flexibility; student resources; the availability and interest of suitable industry partners; external and internal attitudes toward students and student perceptions of whether the experience will be – or was – worthwhile’. Additionally, the authors found that in the media and communication field there was comparable appreciation among all stakeholders regarding the concept and mutual benefit of WIL and in particular, noted similar outcomes to the research findings of Smith, Mackay, Challis and Holt (2006), who found a “disconnect” in their study of stakeholder understanding of the purpose, implementation and role of WIL in the field of information technology.

Smith et al. (2006) identified three common assumptions that higher-education institutions commonly misunderstand concerning the involvement of industry partners in WIL. First, universities misunderstand the degree to which industry partners comprehend and are committed to experiential/integrated learning. Second, universities assume that workplace supervisors are chosen because they understand the skills and knowledge required and are able to pass on those skills. Third, universities assume that workplace supervisors understand what constitutes a meaningful/satisfying experiential outcome as well as understanding their role in achieving this outcome. While these common assumptions require addressing, they are not insurmountable. Patrick et al. (2008) point out that recognising and addressing problems with WIL requires increased dialogue between stakeholders, including students, because such an approach “has the potential to provide greater understanding of

different perspectives and reciprocity of obligations and will, it is hoped, lead to increased diversity of WIL experiences” (p.17).

### **Methodology**

In October 2013, the authors conducted an anonymous survey of undergraduate students enrolled in the BComm degree at UoN. The survey was based on the FWA survey of students including the UTS students. The UTS survey was conducted in September 2012 and included responses from 14 third-year journalism students. Two hundred and four UoN students responded to the invitation to participate in the Newcastle research. Out of these responses, 22 students were eligible to be included in this section of the research, that is, to allow for a comparison between the journalism student cohorts, there were 22 third-year journalism students.

The survey repeated the 12 standard questions employed by FWA and administered to journalism students at UTS. Employing the same questions enabled the researchers to compare the experiences of the different student cohorts. While the survey is primarily quantitative, the final question invites the student to provide a comment on their experiences with internships and work experience.

### **Results and Discussion**

The results have shown that while there is not a lot of difference between the regional and metropolitan university students in the majority of areas that were assessed, there are a few key areas where they do differ. These key areas of difference include how much of their unpaid work was done outside the degree programme, how many periods of unpaid work the students had undertaken as well as the amount of time spent at each of these work placements, and how many students had received paid employment out of the experience. The first five questions established a demographic profile of the students involved in the survey from both institutions and identified which students had performed

unpaid work and which of those students had performed unpaid work outside of their degree programme. These first questions also meant that six students from the UoN cohort were not eligible to be included in the final questions in the survey, thus leaving 16 student results to compare with the 14 UTS results.

*Q1: At what institution are you enrolled as a student? (If more than one, please give the institution at which you have been contacted about this survey.)*

UoN	UTS
All answered University of Newcastle	All answered University of Technology Sydney

At both institutions, all the students were enrolled only in either University of Newcastle (UoN) or University of Technology Sydney (UTS).

*Q2: In which degree(s) are you currently enrolled in at that institution and what is your major and year of study (1<sup>st</sup> year, 2<sup>nd</sup> year, 3<sup>rd</sup> year)? (If you are undertaking a double degree programme, and have completed one of them, you should still list both degrees.)*

UoN	UTS
Bachelor of Communication (Journalism major) 95.5%	BA Communications (Journalism) 57%
Bachelor of Communication (Journalism)/ Bachelor of Law 4.5%	Journalism and Law 29%
10/22 x double major: journalism with PR 1/22 x double major: journalism with media studies	Journalism and International Studies 14%

1/22 x double major: journalism with media production	
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At UoN, 95.5% were enrolled in the Bachelor of Communication (Journalism major) and 4.5% were enrolled in the Bachelor of Communication/Bachelor of Law double degree. However, 12 out of the 22 students in the survey are doing a double major: journalism/public relations (10), journalism/media production (1) and journalism/media studies (1). At UTS, 57% of the students are doing a BA Communications (Journalism), 29% are doing a Journalism and Law degree and 14% are enrolled in Journalism and International Studies.

*Q3: Are you a domestic student or an international student?*

	<b>UoN</b>	<b>UTS</b>
a. Domestic	95.5%	100%
b. International	4.5%	0%

All of UTS and 95.5% of UoN's cohort were domestic.

*Q4: Since leaving high school, have you ever performed unpaid work (other than as a volunteer or as part of your own or a family member's business)?*

	<b>UoN</b>	<b>UTS</b>
a. Yes	95.5%	100%

b. No	*4.5%	0%
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\* This UoN respondent has been excluded from further statistics.

All of UTS and 95.5% of UoN's cohort had performed unpaid work. The one student who answered 'No' from UoN is excluded from the rest of the data.

*Q5: (If Yes to Q4) How many of those periods of unpaid work were undertaken for credit towards, or as a required element of, a degree or other educational qualification?*

	UoN	UTS
a. None	28.5%	7%
b. Some	47.6%	93%
c. All	*28.5%	0%

\* These five UoN respondents have been excluded from further statistics.

Question 5 showed the first major difference between the two cohorts. All the UTS respondents had performed unpaid work that was not part of their degree programme, with 93% having undertaken unpaid work beyond their programme requirements and 7% of the students had done work where none of it was undertaken for credit. The UoN cohort had an unusual mix of students who had undertaken work experience, with 28.5% of UoN students having undertaken unpaid work outside their degree programme with no credit and 47.6% claiming they had done some of their unpaid work without academic award. Furthermore, there were almost a third of the students from UoN who had only done unpaid work as part of their degree programme while this was not the case at UTS, as noted earlier. These UoN students who had done no work experience outside of their degree requirements are

excluded from the rest of the data. None of these students made a comment in Question 12, which may have given an insight into the reason for not undertaking extra work, but researchers have consistently noted that not all journalism students want to be journalists (Lindberg, 2013; Simons, 2013; O'Donnell, 1999). Hanusch (2012) found that one out of five journalism students do not want to work in journalism. As Callaghan (2010) points out, "students entering journalism courses are not being groomed exclusively for one profession. Some students enter journalism courses not because they want to become journalists, but because they want journalistic skills" (p.47). As a comparison, though, it is telling that nearly a third of UoN students had completed work experience where there was no credit within their degree compared to only 7% of UTS students. UoN Communication students are encouraged throughout the degree to gain as much work experience as possible and it is clear that UoN students were more likely to work outside the programme's requirements. What is not revealed is why this occurs, although some possible reasons for this are discussed further in the paper in the qualitative comments. Furthermore, it is unknown why third year students at UoN who are doing unpaid work experience without seeking academic credit.

With these first five questions answered, 16 UoN responses and all the UTS (14) responses were included for analysis in the final seven questions.

*Q6: (If None or Some to Q5) Approximately how many periods of unpaid work have you undertaken since high school that were not part of a degree or other qualification?*

	<b>UoN</b>	<b>UTS</b>
No answer	12.5%	36%
One	18.75%	0%
Two	12.5%	14%

Three	25%	21%
Four	12.5%	14%
Five or more	18.75%	15%

UoN had a higher percentage of students who had done three or more periods of unpaid work - 56.25% to UTS's 50% - but this question had an anomaly in the statistics from UTS with incorrect figures and symbols used in the reporting of the data.<sup>1</sup>

*Q7: What was the duration, or range of durations, of these arrangements?*

Both cohorts had a wide range of durations for unpaid work ranging from a week to several months to ongoing, part-time arrangements. While both cohorts report undertaking unpaid work, and it was noticeable how many students were undertaking unpaid, uncredited work for lengthy periods, the UoN cohort reported undertaking a higher amount of unpaid work. For example, several UoN students had done two years or more of unpaid work at various media outlets:

"I interned at [*local radio station*] for almost a year, [*name deleted*] magazine for 6+ months, [*radio station*] for a month so about 2 years in total" (UoN student).

"1 year at [*name deleted*] website, 1 year at [*name deleted*] magazine, 1x [*broadcast outlet*] internship 1 week, 4 weeks at [*print publication*], 2 months as [*job title*] [*radio station*]" (UoN student).

"Ranging from 1 week to 18 months" (UoN student).

While UTS students did not seem to have as many long stints of unpaid work, there were also several who had done extensive amounts.

"First - one year (2 days a week). Second - one week. Third - one night a week for 6 months" (UTS

<sup>1</sup> There was an anomaly in these statistics from UTS: 'Two' had a numeral (2) and we converted it and 'Five or more' had 36%. We added up the first five percentages and the 'Five or more' percentage was then 15%.

student).

“10 internships roughly 3 months long across 3 years. Also completed 5 different work experience placements” (UTS student).

“A month, periodically, a year, one week, 3 months, ongoing (UTS student).

As noted in the FWA report, the media industry is understood to be a difficult one in which to gain employment and unpaid work is endemic in the industry. Stewart & Owens (2013) believe that “the way to build a career is to spend weeks or months undertaking unpaid work in the hope of impressing the right person” ( p.55). The pertinence of this statement can be observed further in this article where students provide qualitative comments about their experiences.

*Q8: Please identify the type(s) of business or organisation for which you worked (eg law firm, radio stations, public hospital, childcare centre, etc.)*

Both cohorts performed work experience at a broad range of organisations including: radio stations (commercial and public), TV stations, production companies, event management organisations, publishers, student and other magazines, advertising and marketing agencies, online marketing groups, government organisations, online publications, web design companies, NFP organisations and commercial businesses. It is interesting to note within these answers that the journalism students performed their work experience outside of what are typically considered mainstream journalism occupations.

*Q9: While undertaking such extracurricular unpaid work, have you ever performed tasks that are of direct and immediate benefit to the business or organisation in question (eg work that contributes to some product or service being supplied to a customer)?*



	<b>UoN</b>	<b>UTS</b>
a. Never	0%	0%
b. Sometimes	18.75%	8%
c. Often	31.25%	50%
d. Always	50%	42%

All students at both institutions answered that they contributed positively to the organisation or business they worked for. According to the FWA report, a key legal issue with unpaid work experience is whether the person “in the course of undertaking work experience, performs work of a kind that would usually be done by a (paid) employee” (Stewart & Owens, 2013, p. 83). If so, the person would be considered an employee and thus should be remunerated.

*Q10: What perceived advantages or benefits led you to undertake unpaid work outside of a degree or other qualification? (More than one can be answered)*

	<b>UoN</b>	<b>UTS</b>
a. Better understanding of particular industry, business or occupation	87.5%	100%
b. Chance to acquire, practise or improve particular skills	100%	92%
c. Improve your employability	87.5%	100%
d. Make useful contacts	93.75%	100%
e. Promise of future employment if you performed well	37.5%	42%
f. Help decide whether to change career or course of study	18.75%	33%
g. Other		

Answers to the first four criteria in Question 10 show that students from both institutions understand the benefits of work experience with fairly minor differences between cohorts. The qualitative comments in Question 12 further verify that the students believe an understanding of the industry, better skills, employability and contacts are each important features of unpaid work experience. The high response rates to questions C and D demonstrate the students' understanding of the media industry, as noted earlier, as an industry that is difficult to enter. The fifth criteria, the promise of future employment, did not factor as highly as an advantage to the students. It is interesting to note, however, that a third of UTS students, who are in the final year of their programme, are still using work experience to decide if they still want to study journalism.

*Q11: Did any such periods of unpaid work lead to an offer of paid employment?*

	<b>UoN</b>	<b>UTS</b>
All	0%	8%
Some	37.5%	58%
None	56.25%	33%

The results for this question are opposite for the metropolitan students and the regional students. The authors believe this is one of the more important differences between the two cohorts. More than half (56.25%) of the UoN students said that none of the unpaid work led to an offer of employment while a third (33%) of UTS students said the same. These figures are unsurprising, considering the state of the media industry in metropolitan and regional areas. While the UoN students undertook work experience at a broad range of businesses and organisations, the media and communication employment

environment has contracted significantly in recent years, particularly at media outlets that traditionally employed journalists, and many Newcastle BComn students are forced to a metropolitan area after graduation to find work in their field.

However, 37.5% of UoN students said some of the unpaid work led to work while 58% of UTS students said the same so the when the figures are merged, they are similar overall.

*Q12: Please add any further comments or observations you may have about unpaid work undertaken outside of a degree or other qualification.*

In this particular question, there was little difference between the two cohorts. Both cohorts included students who recognise the difficulty of getting a job in the industry, and how beneficial it is to improve practical skills and employability. In other words, there was support from both cohorts for Stewart & Owens conclusion that “such arrangements are a common prelude to securing paid work” (2013, 245).

“It is hard to secure work experience and as a student in this degree you feel pressure to do it to improve your employability” (UoN student).

“I continue to participate in unpaid work, mainly to learn skills and become more employable” (UoN student).

“In a cutting edge industry, I believe that showing future employers that you worked for free to gain that extra experience looks amazing on a resume. It shows dedication and passion. All components which are imperative in the industry” (UoN student).

“In the field of journalism, unpaid work is a vital and accepted part of gaining employment in the industry the benefits are innumerable” (UTS student).

“I wouldn't be where I am today (in an industry I love, working for one of the most respected companies in the field) without having interned first” (UTS student).

There were, however, students from both institutions who found it unfair that the work was unpaid:

“Such an important thing to do but a small payment would really help. Time/ energy/petrol have cost lots” (UoN student).

“If you are doing work that is above and of the standard that others get paid for, it's not right that it's an unpaid internship” (UTS student).

On the other hand, students from both institutions also commented on the importance of gaining as much experience as possible to make them attractive in a difficult job market:

“Unpaid work is crucial, if students think they're above it they should change their degree” (UoN student).

“People with a sense of entitlement underestimate how necessary work experience is in this job market” (UTS student).

### **Conclusion**

In this replicated study, there were more similarities than expected between the metropolitan and regional universities although in some areas, the student demographics and region of each university played a part in explaining the differences. However, the wide variety in opportunities, emphasis, objectives, and outcomes suggest that not all students are receiving similar benefits. The authors appreciate that WIL is an important part of communication and journalism programmes in universities throughout Australia and emphasis around this importance is set to increase. Furthermore, while the authors have noted that successful internships and work experience can increase a student's maturity, confidence and leadership skills, there is little understanding of the appropriate phase of a student's undergraduate journey for when such opportunities might take place. This research is the first step in attempting to discover issues pertinent to a successful and rewarding internship and work experience framework for undergraduate communication students, specifically in a regional context. This paper

has reported on the first step in a planned broader study that will be assessing internships throughout the majors in the Newcastle BCOMN including journalism, public relations, media production and media studies. The authors anticipate the development of specific guidelines to assist employers, academics, university professional staff and students to ensure the work experience opportunity remains of mutual benefit.

The increasing demand of employers in the media industry for work-ready graduates, along with a desire and aim of universities to promote and embrace work-integrated learning, provides a number of questions that beg further inquiry. These questions relate to the concept of a mutually beneficial relationship that underpins much thinking about internships, work experience and work-integrated learning. The anecdotal experience of the researchers suggests that the mutually beneficial relationship requires a framework that will ensure positive outcomes for all stakeholders. However, the provision of such a framework needs a more complex and developed understanding of student expectations and desired outcomes pertaining to gaining experience in the workplace. WIL can certainly assist students to engage at a more sophisticated level as they apply developing content knowledge in an environment that engages with the communities it serves. A well designed and well implemented WIL programme will benefit all stakeholders. Systematic evaluation of a successful WIL programme should consider how the experience provides a mapping direction for career choices, knowledge and understanding of workplace cultures, and an ability to provide a relevance that drives deeper learning.

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