

# International Student Placements and Reflections on WIL – a Health Service Management Case Study

SHEREE LLOYD<sup>1</sup>

Griffith University, Queensland, Australia

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## Abstract

International students can have difficulties obtaining and succeeding on WIL placement and securing employment in their chosen field. The authentic student voice captured through a structured testimonial identifies where graduates have obtained employment, their impressions of WIL as a mechanism to prepare graduates for employment and their reflections on preparation for the placement. Student and graduate voice are an important tool for understanding WIL and the international student experience.

**Keywords:** work integrated learning, case study, employability, testimonial

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## Introduction and Background

WIL provides students with the opportunity to translate theory into practice and to gain the necessary attributes and skills to work as a health services manager. Since 2009, WIL has been part of the Masters and Advanced Masters in Health Service Management (HSM) at Griffith University. Students undertaking WIL in health service management are placed for four full-time days a week in the workplace where they complete a major body of work or deliverable, such as a project (McConnell et al., 2019). WIL is a capstone course however there are no minimum GPA requirements necessary for enrolment. Prior to placement, students complete an online form outlining their health service management interests, career prospects, strengths, and weaknesses. Students also make a 3-minute ‘pitch’ regarding their interests and 5-year career outlook. Information collected is used to assist the academic convenor and placements officer to identify a suitable placement location and supervisor.

The HSM WIL course is popular with international and increasingly with domestic students, typically clinicians wanting to enhance their opportunities to move from clinical to healthcare managerial roles. Health industry partnerships are integral to the success of the WIL courses and the health organisation’s support through supervision, identification of suitable projects and opportunities, mentoring and engagement are highly valued by the university. Students are prepared for placement through orientation, the scaffolding of assessments, course site learning material and weekly on-campus workshops. The outcomes for our graduates are strong and we know from a small (yet to be published) study conducted in 2021 that seventy-four percent (74%) of graduates we followed on LinkedIn were employed in roles related to


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<sup>1</sup> Corresponding author: [sheree.lloyd@utas.edu.au](mailto:sheree.lloyd@utas.edu.au)

their studies in health service management (Lloyd et al., 2021). For international students most were working in their chosen fields as health service managers (69%). All domestic students in the sample (100%) were employed as health service managers after graduation (Lloyd et al., 2021).

## Testimonials

According to the Cambridge English Dictionary, (2022) a testimonial is “a statement about the character or qualities of someone or something”. We collected testimonials from a snapshot of international students who have graduated and undertaken a WIL activity. Students who were employed as health service managers were asked to reflect on how WIL prepared them for their jobs as health service managers. The testimonials form a case study for one health service management WIL course.

<p>Alisha Vaz</p> 	<p><b>Country of origin:</b> India</p> <p><b>Employment status:</b> Employed full time</p> <p><b>Type of industry placement:</b> Mater Hospital Brisbane</p> <p><b>Journey since WIL and how WIL prepared you:</b></p> <p>As part of my WIL placement, I had the opportunity to work as a Project Officer supervised by the Surgical and Acute Care Services (SACS) Business Director at Mater Hospital, Brisbane.</p> <p>This role involved extracting and analysing data from various reports, performance portals as well as health information systems with an aim to deliver meaningful Key Performance Indicator reports and dashboards to support decision making. This opportunity gave me the confidence and experience I needed to kick start my career in project management in the health care sector.</p> <p>In my most recent role, I worked as a Senior Project Officer at Queensland Genomics, Herston QLD. This role involved close monitoring of program operations, including project coordination and project finance for projects. I had</p>
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	<p>oversight of over thirty translational research projects and education initiatives being undertaken across Queensland and worked collaboratively with the project teams to collect data and led on reporting deliverables: tracking project progress, ensuring project quality, identifying risks, reporting, and escalating issues along with coordinating executive meetings and educational projects.</p> <p>I believe WIL plays a big role in getting students ready for the workplace. In fact, having the option to undertake WIL placements was a huge factor when deciding which university to study in. After completing the placement, I felt more confident in my ability to perform well in busy and challenging situations especially in a dynamic environment like healthcare. I was able to support my team in various activities ranging from project planning to delivery. This involved project management support, risk identification and mitigation, finance reporting, developing briefs, schematics, reports, presentations, correspondence and fit for purpose documentation as well as engaging and collaborating with various internal and external stakeholders at all levels and disciplines including clinicians, research, project teams and university staff, and hospital and health service executives.</p> <p><b>What you wish you knew before you went on WIL:</b></p> <p>I believe as students we were well-prepared to undertake our placements and had support from the staff and workplace supervisors whenever we needed it. The only thing I could add is to be prepared for change – as it is inevitable. I would also recommend asking more questions if anything is uncertain and putting your hand up for opportunities when they arise.</p>
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**Joevin Vincent**



**Country of origin:** India

**Type of industry placement:** Health Informatics and Business Analytics department, Gold Coast University Hospital (Public Hospital)


**Current position title:** Clinical Documentation Specialist, Information and Data Management, Gold Coast Health

**Journey since WIL and how WIL prepared you:**

WIL has had a very significant impact on my professional and personal growth. Placement at Gold Coast University Hospital, facilitated by Griffith University, provided the perfect opportunity to translate theory into practice by integrating myself into a real-world work environment. As we know from adult learning theory that an interleaved practice is crucial to consolidating knowledge and making memories stick. Apart from knowledge consolidation, WIL presented the perfect opportunity to meet people who have been in the industry for several years and they help you understand exactly why you need to know what you have been taught. I found this very useful.

As an international student, who has had a limited exposure to an Australian healthcare work environment, WIL prepared me with a 'professional orientation' on basic soft skills required to engage with the workforce by learning about culture and attitudes of the organisation.

During my WIL, I was keen to make a good impression and provided a fresh perspective to the project I was involved in. By demonstrating passion and integrity, I was fortunate to be offered a role at Gold Coast University Hospital as a Clinical Documentation Specialist soon after my graduation. I am currently working full-time and

	<p>preparing for my Australian Medical Council registration to register as a health practitioner.</p> <p><b>What you wish you knew before you went on WIL.</b></p> <p>As I commenced my placement, I had no clue that it would turn out to be a launchpad for my career.</p> <p>Although I was advised on the benefits of taking a moment to jot down my thoughts at the end of the day during my placements (Pebblepad reflections), it was only at the end of my placement that I actually realised how valuable it was. Hindsight 20/20! It helped piece together different parts of the puzzle and was useful to shape up my resume and work profile.</p>
<p><b>Paul Penumala</b></p> 	<p><b>Type of industry placement:</b> Checkup Pty Ltd (Not-for-Profit Organisation)</p> <p><b>Current position title:</b> Executive Strategy &amp; Planning, Goondir Health Services</p> <p><b>Journey since WIL and how WIL prepared you:</b></p> <p>Since I began my WIL journey, I felt my career took a steep growth curve. I honestly did not try anything particularly new; I simply followed every step of the advice provided at WIL sessions during Friday workshops. I used to take notes on Friday and aim to execute the weekly tasks as stated. Crucial success factors such as networking, up to date LinkedIn page and volunteering at forums provided exposure to the health sector market. I am still grateful to the Academic Convenor at that time, who was very helpful, encouraged and assisted me in making the right decision. I for one can say that WIL has contributed to the success of my employability and personal outcomes.</p>

	<p><b>What you wish you knew before you went on WIL:</b></p> <p>It rather sounds ironic, but I wish I studied more conscientiously all the management topics taught in classes during my degree. I had to revisit each of those important topics and skim through the notes during my WIL, as it equips you with skills to embed management tools in practice. To name a few, I often use systems, processes and tools such as Literature Review, Change management theory, Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis, Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Timebound (SMART) objectives even today in my current health services management role.</p>
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## Conclusion

The testimonials, presented in this case study, demonstrate that graduates have been appointed to positions such as senior project officers, operations or service managers, business co-ordinator or business development officers and clinical documentation specialists. Also, snapshot testimonials demonstrate that placements were valued by graduates in their pathways to employment and that their learning has prepared them for workplace roles. This supports the strategies of most universities that are focussed on employability as well as meeting government and employer demands for work-ready graduates (Ferns et al., 2021; Jackson, 2015; Matthews et al., 2019). Authentic industry-based WIL placements can be made available to students from diverse cultural backgrounds. However, this cannot be achieved without adequate resourcing to support relationship building and preparation of students for and during the placement. Industry relationships are key to this, and as Fleming et al. (2018) note reciprocity, co-ordination, communication, trust, expectations, resources, learning and recognition are important in sustaining successful WIL learning relationships. The findings from this case study are indicative only as they relate to one WIL course in one university. The richness of the data that can be collected in this way has potential to identify important learnings for WIL practitioners. WIL practitioners can, from the student and graduate voice, discover a valuable source of data to understand WIL and what is valued, and therefore testimonials are useful evidence for further WIL research.

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