

60-Second SoTL

Episode 18 – Experiences of Students with Disabilities in Work-Integrated Learning

(Piano Music)

00:03

Jessie L. Moore:

What are the perceptions and experiences of students with disability regarding work-integrated learning? That's the focus of this week's **60-second SoTL from Elon University's Center for Engaged Learning**. I'm Jessie Moore.

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(Piano Music)

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In "Exploring the experiences of students with disabilities in work-integrated learning," published as an open access article in the *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, Mollie Dollinger, Rachel Finneran, and Rola Ajjawi report on survey data from a larger study of the perceived and lived challenges and opportunities of students with disability regarding work-integrated learning placements.

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The study focuses on students at an Australian university at which an estimated 12% of students identify as having a disability, and the researchers "defined disability as extending to students with learning, physical or sensory disabilities, as well as those who have mental health, neurological and/or chronic medical conditions." 132 students completed the survey, which was distributed via the university's disability resource office and a blog on the student union body website.

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Students self-reported ten disability types, with 74% reporting mental health conditions, 45% reporting medical conditions, 28% reporting neurological conditions, and 16% reporting physical disability. Participants represented a range of degree types and courses of study and included students who were first in family, from regional or remote areas, from low socioeconomic areas, with career responsibilities, and other equity groups.

Over half of the participants had not yet completed a work-integrated learning placement. Of those who had, half had completed their placement in-person in a metropolitan-based organization, 33% had completed an online or blended placement, and 19% completed a regional or rural in-person placement.

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Students who planned to complete a placement anticipated benefits related to gaining industry knowledge, networking, understanding what the daily work of the career might be like relative to their disability, advocating for people with disabilities, and meeting new people.

While many of these anticipated benefits were reinforced by the lived experiences of students who already had completed a placement, 32% of students somewhat disagreed or strongly disagreed that their work-integrated learning experience had contributed to preparing them for entering the labour market with disability or condition.

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Reflecting on anticipated challenges, students who planned to complete a work-integrated learning placement expressed concerns about meeting expectations at their placement, how the organization would accommodate them, potential impacts on their health, and challenges related to navigating the built environment. Students who had completed placements echoed these concerns and also reported challenges with course policies and procedures, reiterating that equitable work-integrated learning experiences require partnership between both the placement site and the university.

75% of students who had completed a placement opted not to fully share the details of their disability with their placement supervisor, with many expressing concerns about how their disability would be perceived.

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The authors conclude that universities need to be more proactive in supporting students with disability in work-integrated learning placements and in working with industry partners to provide appropriate accommodations.

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To learn more about this study, follow the link in our show notes to read the open access article and to review our supplemental resources for this episode.

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(Piano Music)

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Join us next week for another snapshot of recent scholarship of teaching and learning on **60-second SoTL from Elon University's Center for Engaged Learning**. Learn more about the Center at www.CenterForEngagedLearning.org.

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(Piano Music)