

## **EWO Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) Student of the Year Award Feedback**

### **Proposal:**

In understanding the goal of putting a WIL Student of the Year Award in place quickly, I have been extremely grateful for this student recognition channel for the last few years. Having gone through a number of cycles with this award, I would like to bring forward some suggestions about changes that could be considered to make this award even more accessible and inclusive, as well as culturally intelligent, not only for students, but also faculty, staff and/or community partners who are nominating students as well.

These suggestions include the following:

- Allow a student, or group of students, who were enrolled full-time within the calendar year, to be nominated for this award;
- Each having completed at least one experiential learning experience other than co-op, within the calendar year and if group nomination, and have done this as a group if that's the case;
- Have an academic average above 70 percent (or 75% might also be considered)

### **Rational:**

#### Individual and/or Group of Students Awarded

As a campus, we are making a shift in our Experiential Learning Student of the Year process such that nominating and awarding one individual student does not represent the way WIL looks on our campus. This is different than the Co-op Student of the Year, which is why my feedback is for the WIL Student of the Year award only. Many courses (upwards of 80 class sections each year at Brock University, which represents approximately 3,200 students) have students doing service-learning projects in groups with a local non-profit or small business. There are also additional students, in pockets of the University in all Faculties, working with marginalized populations such as seniors and Indigenous communities which is largely taking place in groups as well. Our current award, which is only available to one individual recipient, precludes all groups of students from fairly being nominated without centering out one outstanding student from within a group.

Through a cultural intelligence lens, with approximately 10% of our student population being International, and with a high level of diversity within our Domestic student population, being collaborative, as opposed to standing out as an individual, is the higher order skill that is respected in many cultures. Many are taught not to “stick out” within a group and that success only happens when the whole team achieves the goal. This makes it increasingly more difficult to hold respect for their cultural values as we seek to find the most “outstanding” student to nominate when the award process highlights individualism.

With the recent call for a renewed commitment to reconciliation, decolonizing the ways in which we celebrate student achievement is one of the many things we can be doing to act on this responsibility. A shift in this direction is taking place on other campuses, namely the University of Calgary, for similar reasons. Undoing the concept of a hierarchy within the student population as the only way of

acknowledging excellence might be something to consider. To paint the picture, I have permission to use a quote from one of the faculty member, which is included here:

*“When I got this email [Re: Student of the Year] I wondered about nominating one of our students, but then realized how wrong that would be as it would build a hierarchy. It feels the opposite of decolonization. Maybe one day we can make an argument for a group award, or a team EE project? I don’t know that the hyper individualism we love so much in the academy really does anyone any good, because so much better research, knowledge creation, teaching, etc. happens when we work together.”*

We have received feedback as a campus on the way the current awards are set-up (individuals-only awarded) from faculty for these reasons (groups not eligible and it being a colonized approach), but in updating our campus awards, groups of students who may become the recipients would not be able to move forward with award nominations at the provincial and/or national level. Having faculty buy-in to these awards is something I see as a success and a critical relationship to maintain for the future success of our students, both in the classroom and as part of this award process. At Brock we agree with their feedback, as well as the concepts outlined above that have been realized as part of our equity, diversity and inclusion work as of late, and would like to honour that by seeing all Student of the Year Awards updated in this way.

Brock University has a focus on breaking down academic silos and we now have faculty who are refusing to choose one student over another until the criteria is fixed. This is about pushing beyond the standard, colonized approach to crowning a winner and creating a hierarchy. This also helps move us into a space that recognizes cultural competencies and many of the competencies we focus on as a campus, such as collaboration, intercultural fluency and community engagement, and not just individualistic traits that have historically been rewarded.

### Academic Average

Might I also suggest that the academic average be considered as well. We are asking students to engage in a high-quality way both inside and outside the classroom and critically reflecting on how this has changed them, holistically. In the award adjudication process, the in-class and extra-curricular experiential learning elements are weighted the same. With this, allowing grades to still be Honours level while giving students the flexibility to strongly put their focus in the areas and experiences they deem most important/relevant curricularly or co-curricularly more closely aligns with the spirit of this award.

### **Conclusion:**

I think there is much merit in considering this and keeping the award open to individual students, but also groups in order to reflect the WIL definitions and what these look like on different campuses. We might also wish to consider opening nomination letters to be from an individual nominator or co-written by multiple nominators as well, in order to acknowledge that some may come with faculty, staff, or community nominators and we may not wish to put a hierarchy on who a nominator can be as well.

While this article focuses on a shift to a collaborative approach in research, I believe the same applies to teaching and learning and the value that can come from stepping outside the individual hierarchy.

<https://the-gist.org/2019/05/the-changing-face-of-research-from-competition-to-collaboration/>

### **Proposed Updates to Award Process:**

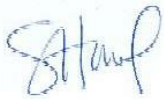
The scoring criteria may need to be reviewed, but there are elements of the application process that would need to be updated to reflect a group submission. For a group submission, the following may be considered:

- **Nomination Form:** highlight all student(s) being nominated
- **Student/Group Bio:**
- **Student's Updated Resume:** include the resume of each student being nominated
- **Host Organization Support Letter (only if applicable):** highlight the student(s) and their impact (individually or collectively) on the organization
- **Student Nominee's Essay**
  - Break this down into 2 parts:
  - Part 1 written by the group (or individual) focusing on the impact of EL on their knowledge of the industry and development as a professional.
  - Part 2 individual reflection (by the individual, or each student within the group) on the impact of EL on their personal, academic, and career development.

### **Student/Group Nominee's Portfolio (optional)**

My sincere thanks for considering this request. I am more than happy to discuss this further should your committee have any questions.

Submitted respectfully on behalf of experiential learning and WIL at Brock University,



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