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Abstract

Pre-professional identity is a complex phenomenon spanning awareness of and connection with the skills, qualities, behaviours, values and standards of a student's chosen profession, as well as one's understanding of professional self in relation to the broader general self. It is an important, yet under-explored, aspect of graduate employability and can influence academic success, well-being and productivity. This study investigates the role of Work-Integrated Learning (WIL), more specifically work placements, in developing pre-professional identity among undergraduates. It uses qualitative data, in the form of structured reflections, gathered over two time periods from 105 business students in a Western Australian university. Findings indicate that work placements can offer a valuable platform for fostering identity construction. Students use the experience to make sense of their intended profession through observing, questioning and interacting with seasoned professionals. Appraising and reflecting on their experience, through learning activities and assessment, are highlighted as important elements of placement design and critical for students to question and make

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sense of what they observed and learned. Strategies are presented for industry and education practitioners to enhance pre-professional identity development among undergraduates. The study underlines the important role of work placements in preparing students for graduate-level employment, beyond the traditional focus on non-technical skill development and the application of disciplinary knowledge. (HRK / Abstract übernommen) Jackson, Denise, E-Mail: d.jackson@ecu.edu.au