Purple Innovation: A critical analysis of simulations and simulations as work-integrated learning in an SIC course

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Abstract: This paper conducted a critical analysis of simulated learning, and simulated learning as work-integrated learning environment (Purple Innovation) assessments in a Strategic Integrated Communication course towards the development of graduateness. An exploratory mixed-method approach was executed using qualitative feedback and reflections as well as performance results to ascertain whether students could achieve the outcomes of the assessment in Purple Innovation, how well they engaged in experiential and problem-based learning, and which graduate attributes they developed through the simulated learning and simulated learning as WIL activities. The findings revealed that (i) students performed better in assessments that focused on experiential learning; (ii) students performed poorer when more graduateness was embedded in the assessments; (iii) the more they engaged in simulated learning as WIL, the better they performed; and (iv) students achieved overall higher results in the executive summary assessment, which was a difficult assignment to execute.

Introduction

The expectations of industry regarding the competencies of university graduates are constantly increasing and this brings a level of competitiveness among universities to ensure that their students have a competitive advantage to offer the best graduates to industry (Bansal & Agarwal, 2019:15). However, Jackson et al. (2017:35) articulate that, in general, undergraduate university degrees to equip students with the graduate attributes they require for industry; however, university curricula focus primarily on assessing content and not on developing graduateness. Furthermore, Anderson and Freebody (2012:362) and Álvarez (2015:233) substantiate this argument by highlighting that there exists a theory-practice gap between the pedagogical knowledge acquired during university and the practical application of theoretical knowledge in practice. Therefore, universities have a responsibility to bridge the gap between theory and practice as employers expect prospective employees to have skills instead of content knowledge (Times Higher Education, 2021). Higher education institutions (HEIs) can only bridge this gap if they adapt from traditional teaching and learning to more innovative approaches to teaching, learning and assessment that will increase graduateness and value for both industry and students (Kaider et al., 2017).

To address the theory and practice gap narrative and develop the graduate attributes has led to the development and application of work-integrated learning (WIL) in teaching, learning and research (Björck (2020:1). However, within the South African context, due to geographical and economic challenges, it is difficult to offer WIL opportunities for students. Therefore, at the North-West University (NWU), in the School of Communication, in one course, the lecturers integrated work-simulated learning (WSL) and assessments to

address the gap between theory and practice. This paper focuses on conducting a critical analysis of the assessments to ascertain whether the formative and summative assessments achieved bridging the gap as well as fostering the development of graduate attributes.

Literature review

Graduate attributes

The Council of Higher Education defines graduate attributes as "the extent to which the blend of learning domains (knowledge, skill and applied competence) reflect the purpose of the qualification type, and the extent to which the blend is reflected in the competence of the graduate" (Council of Higher Education, 2013). The NWU values instilling these character traits and developing the professional skills and practical knowledge within their students. These are grounded in the dream and purpose of the university, "to be distinguished for social responsiveness and engaged scholarship, which fosters engaged and caring staff and students, characterized by the foundational values of ethics in all endeavors, academic integrity, freedom of intellectual inquiry, responsibility, accountability, academic freedom, fairness and transparency, and embracing diversity" (North-West University, 2023). "NWU aims to develop graduates who will become lifelong learners and independent thinkers, able to manage knowledge creatively and effectively, exercise sound ethical judgement, and appreciate and value diversity in all its forms, respecting the diverse socio-economic and cultural contexts, natural environments, and workplaces" (North-West University, 2023).

As such, these characteristics form an integral part of the NWU curriculum project for both undergraduates and postgraduates. It is acknowledged that the graduate attributes will be developed in different ways and in a scaffolded manner depending on the level, nature, purpose, and disciplinary context of an academic program.

Therefore, in various programs and courses, the faculty members at the NWU have started to incorporate work-integrated learning (WIL), simulated learning as WIL, or simulated learning to develop these graduate attributes. Particular programs where this approach was integrated were in the BA Communication and BCom Communication degrees, particularly the Strategic Integrated Communication course.

A conceptualization of simulated learning and simulated learning as work-integrated learning

Zegward et al. (2020) conceptualized a model to clarify the distinct difference between work placement types of WIL, simulated learning as WIL, and simulated learning. Figure 1 illustrates the differentiation between the three concepts.

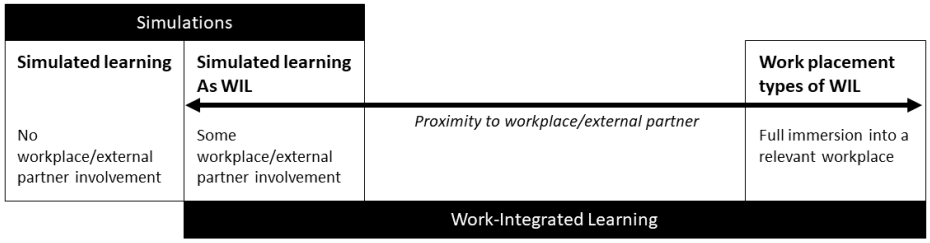


Figure 1: A conceptualization of simulated learning and simulated learning as WIL by Zegwaard et al. (2020:325)

Simulated learning

Shepherd et al. (2019:15) define simulations as "a strategic, experientially based teaching, learning and assessment method." It is an agile theory-to-practice methodology utilizing active learning tasks, employing space, movement , and conceptual challenges that infuse the learning environment with *life-like* experiences. Simulations integrate multiple strategies and technologies, which can include a combination of tools from industry involvement (face-to-face) to the use of virtual reality (multimedia) (Patrick et al., 2008:16; Shepherd et al., 2019:15).

There are numerous benefits to using simulations in teaching, learning, and assessment: (i) simulations ensure reliability through control by providing student experiences and assessments to reach module outcomes; and (ii) the simulations limit the unpredictability associated with real-world experiences (Smith, 2014:211). It enables a safe environment where students can investigate, experience, and fail without feeling pressured or concerned about the risks and consequences of not succeeding (Zegwaard et al., 2020:325). Moreover, it allows a shift in students' frame of reference to engage more with authentic learning experiences that mimic the real world (Bayerlein, 2020:4). Through simulation learning, students can analyze situations, apply their knowledge, execute tasks within a safe environment, and reflect on the learning experience. This will lead students not only to understand content but also instill new actions and behaviors through the experiential learning process (Shepherd et al., 2019:54). However, integrating the simulations should foster authentic experiential learning that can narrow the gap between theory and practice while allowing students to reflect on the requirements linked to industry-related skills, knowledge and attitudes (Shepherd et al. 2019:29). Incorporating simulated learning excludes the involvement of external partners and no work placement takes place. Therefore, students do not get an authentic experience.

Simulations should be incorporated in conjunction with simulated learning as WIL, before WIL initiatives, so that students with limited exposure can transition from university to WIL and then into industry (Bayerlein, 2020:15). In this regard, Zegwaard et al. (2020:325) differentiate between the concepts of simulated learning, simulated learning as WIL and work placement types of WIL (see Figure 1).

Simulated learning as work-integrated learning

Simulated learning as WIL pertains to a combination of engagement with organizations or external partners (Zegwaard et al., 2020). Simulated learning as WIL offers students an opportunity to have some form of engagement with people within organizations during the course.

Simulated learning as WIL in a Strategic Integrated Communication course

Strategic Integrated Communication (SIC) course

Strategic integrated communication is an approach to communication in which organizations strategically manage all communication efforts to position themselves to reach their strategic intent (Cornelissen, 2020:115; Niemann-Struweg, 2015:215). Strategic Integrated Communication (SIC) aims to integrate all communication activities like public relations, marketing, internal communication and brand management to benefit the organization.

At the NWU, this course forms part of a second-semester/four-month-long capstone course called COMS325. This course aims to integrate the knowledge and practical skills obtained in modules such as Introduction to Corporate Communication, Public Relations, Reputation Management, Marketing Communications, Social Media, Visual Communication, and Web Development before students graduate from university. Students engage with the theoretical foundations of strategic communication, integrated communication, and Strategic Integrated Communication, which follows with the development of a communication model for a prospective client.

Simulated learning environment for SIC: Purple Innovation

Although WIL initiatives provide a better learning experience than simulated learning or simulated learning as WIL in terms of proximity to workplaces, not all students have access to or the opportunity to gain work experience opportunities (Bayerlein, 2015:681). Furthermore, scalability, cost, time, and support can also contribute to an issue that can prioritize the use of simulations over the use of WIL within curricula (Bayerlein, 2015:681; Cerimagic et al., 2022; Bilsland, 2020:434).

To foster the integration of simulated learning as well as simulated learning as WIL, *Purple Innovation* was established as a fictional communication agency that assists profit and non-profit organizations in improving their communication practices. Within Purple Innovation, the organizational structure had to have an established hierarchy, which includes a communication practitioner as well as a digital presence among stakeholders. The practical nature of the assessments and outcomes of the course made it an excellent course for students to engage in simulated learning and simulated learning as WIL. Students become interns within this

fictional communication agency. They had to execute various activities within the agency as well as tasks as part of their internship. These activities are summarized in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Execution of simulated learning environment for SIC with embedded assessments to address the gap between theory and practice and develop the graduate attributes.

The simulation learning environment for Purple Innovation included (i) simulated activities for the agency (Purple Innovation), (ii) simulated learning as WIL client-oriented activities (teal), and simulated learning as WIL pseudo-client-oriented activities. Each of the eight activities included an assessment, strategy, and particular assessment outcomes (Figure 2).

The learning management system for Purple Innovation included: (i) a website that provides students with the organization's strategic intent, (ii) a corporate identity document that dictates how the Purple Innovation brand must create content, and (iii) a code of conduct that students had to sign. The simulations, guided by the documentation listed above, are then incorporated into online learning, contact sessions, and assessments (Figure 2).

With the creation of Purple Innovation, students were provided with an opportunity to achieve course outcomes, engage with different learning strategies, and complete various types of assessments. Students continuously engage in two learning strategies, namely problem-solving and experiential learning, to attain the specific outcomes of the SIC course.

Experiential learning within Purple Innovation

The value of experiential learning allows for the interplay between experience and enabling the student to construct meaning (Lewis & Williams, 1994:9; Hedin, 2010:115). Experiential learning allows students to gain self-knowledge from experiencing situations in action, expose themselves to developing skills in analyzing the case studies, guide them in making accurate decisions, and enable them to create artifacts that will benefit the organization (Lewis & Williams, 1994:10; Parodi & Alon, 2019:112). Intentionally incorporating various experiential learning tools like role-play in class, reflective observations during or after class discussions, internship tasks in Purple Innovation, projects, and simulations contribute to meaningful learning (Lewis & Williams, 1994:10; Hedin, 2010:115). Ogbechie and Akanji (2019:954) advocate that experiential learning not only contributes to deepening theoretical knowledge but also improves the practical skills and competencies students need in the workplace. Moreover, through critical reflection, students create mental maps that, when exposed to similar experiences in the future, they can solve problems with. Furthermore, De Villiers and Leendertz (2023:989) maintain that simulations and simulated learning as WIL in courses such as SIC will enable students to challenge existing mental models by allowing them to apply what they learn practically.

Lastly, experiential learning fosters an understanding of the industry expectations associated with different professional roles and responsibilities that they will face in their future careers (Kinsky, 2015:37).

Problem-based learning within Purple Innovation

Problem-based learning students define their learning objectives based on a case study or scenario triggers. Students have to engage with content through self-directed learning before engaging with peers to refine their knowledge and skills. Students develop various graduate attributes through their engagement with peers, such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, conflict management, and so forth (Wood, 2003). The activities within Purple Innovation foster learning that is highly effective as it links to or is embedded in real-world situations. Within organizations, people are faced with various problems, with numerous possible solutions to these problems. Therefore, real-world situations exposing students to these simulated or simulated learning as WIL activities will enable them to derive meaning through contextual interactions (Hung et al., 2008).

Graduateness within Purple Innovation

Students develop various graduate attributes through their engagement with peers, such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, conflict management, and so forth within Purple Innovation (Wood, 2003). Therefore, real-world situations enable students to derive meaning through contextual interactions (Hung et al., 2008). The argument can be made that incorporating simulations in both teaching and learning and assessments can enable students to experience a controlled version of reality, allowing them to succeed or fail in a safe environment that can contribute to their learning and the development of their graduateness. Furthermore, De Villiers and Leendertz (2023:989) maintain that simulations and simulated learning as WIL in courses such as SIC will enable students to challenge existing mental models by applying what they learn practically.

Although WIL initiatives provide a better learning experience than simulated learning or simulated learning as WIL in terms of proximity to workplaces, not all students have access to or the opportunity to gain work experience opportunities (Bayerlein, 2015:681). Furthermore, scalability, cost, time, and support can also contribute to an issue that can prioritize the use of simulations over the use of WIL within curricula (Bayerlein, 2015:681; Cerimagic et al., 2022; Bilsland, 2020:434).

Assessments scaffolded to develop graduateness in Purple Innovation

The assessments within the SIC course included scaffolded formative and summative assessments. Students were expected to construct a personalized model for their clients to support them in integrating their communication practices more strategically (Activity 7, Figure 2). Students had to utilize the theoretical knowledge obtained within the SIC course and conduct research on a specific organization. Through this exercise, they had to identify communication challenges and gaps within an organization. By reflecting on the strategic implications of their research, students then had to improve the organization's communication by constructing a model (Activity 7, Figure 2). Therefore, students had to explore an existing system and create and unpack a new model that would benefit the organization and enhance their communication. Consequently, the assessments within the course enabled students to follow a model-based simulation. This approach aimed to ensure that students can contextualize the creation of a simulated theoretical model within the context of a communication agency. Instead of telling students what the value of such a model would be, students were able to experience a simulation of the context within which they were expected to utilize all the knowledge they obtained during their BA Communication degree. Furthermore, this approach enabled students to gain the professional competencies required in the professional work environment once they graduated. The simulated-work environment also allowed students to learn creative and critical problem-solving skills required in their future work environments.

Table 1: Detailed description of the assessments/tasks, outcomes, strategy, taxonomy and graduate attributes for Purple Innovation

Task/assessment description	Outcomes	Strategy	Taxonomy	Graduate attributes
CV activity Students had to construct a CV and apply for an internship at the Purple Innovation agency using the advertisement as a guideline.	• To enable students to design a CV that reflects their personal brand • To provide feedback for students on how to construct CVs to increase their chances of employability	Experiential	Creating	Professionalism Ethical conduct Digital literacy Communication Creative thinking
Team-building activity Interns had to create a teambuilding document in which they had to plan and coordinate how their agency team would function. The team also had to conduct a strategic team-building activity and provide evidence of their experience.	• To enable students to plan and coordinate their teamwork within the SIC course • To provide all students with the opportunity to create a plan to ensure groups meet deadlines and due dates • To create cohesion between student groups while teaching them about the strategic value of teambuilding	Experiential	Creating	Digital literacy Visual literacy Creative thinking Teamwork Negotiation skills Mindfulness
Brochure assignment Interns constructed a targeted digital brochure for a prospective client. The brochure's goal was to	• To enable students to critically and	Experiential	Understanding | Applying | Creating	Digital literacy Visual literacy Knowledge

Task/assessment description	Outcomes	Strategy	Taxonomy	Graduate attributes
persuade the prospective client of the changes in the post-modern South African communication environment.	creatively reflect on the content they learned within the SIC course in relation to a real-world client • To enable students to adapt complex information in a manner that is understandable to different audiences • To teach students to package information in a digital format that engages audiences creatively			Critical thinking Creative thinking Teamwork Negotiation skills Mindfulness
Internal communication report assignment Interns had to research their chosen client and write a report on the strategic intent, internal communication, leadership, culture, and change management.	• To enable students to research their client's internal communication in relation to the theoretical constructs of SIC • To enable students to critically and creatively engage with different sources to	Experiential Problem-based	Understanding | Applying | Evaluating | Creating	Knowledge Critical thinking Creative thinking Teamwork Negotiation skills Mindfulness Problem-solving Ethical conduct Professionalism

Task/assessment description	Outcomes	Strategy	Taxonomy	Graduate attributes
	identify problems or innovative ideas • To teach students to package information in a report that engages the audience while adhering to the corporate identity of an organization			
Digital presence presentation assignment Interns had to analyze the digital presence of their chosen organization. Message alignment with the strategic intent and the salient issues affecting stakeholders was explored	• To enable students to critically analyze and evaluate their clients' digital presence in line with the theoretical construct of SIC • To enable students to critically and creatively engage with different digital communication platforms relevant to their future career • To teach students how to creatively package information in a PowerPoint	Experiential Problem-based	Understanding | Applying | Evaluating | Creating	Digital literacy Visual literacy Knowledge Critical thinking Creative thinking Teamwork Negotiation skills Mindfulness Problem-solving Ethical conduct Professionalism

Task/assessment description	Outcomes	Strategy	Taxonomy	Graduate attributes
	presentation or video to engage their audience while adhering to the corporate identity of an organization			
Executive summary assignment In the final assessments, students had to use the research from assessments 1-4 to construct a model for strategic communication for their chosen client.	• To enable students to critically synthesize all information obtained through research on their client's organization to address communication issues faced by their client • To create a conceptual model for SIC for their chosen client to improve their client's communication at various integration areas • To teach students how to creatively package information in an executive summary to engage their audience while	Experiential Problem-based	Understanding | Applying | Evaluating | Creating	Digital literacy Visual literacy Knowledge Critical thinking Creative thinking Teamwork Negotiation skills Mindfulness Problem-solving Ethical conduct Professionalism

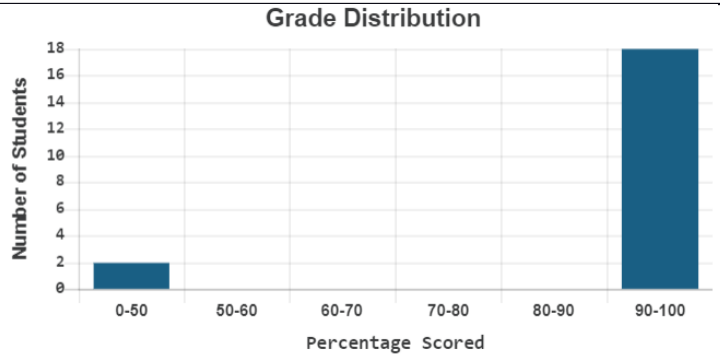
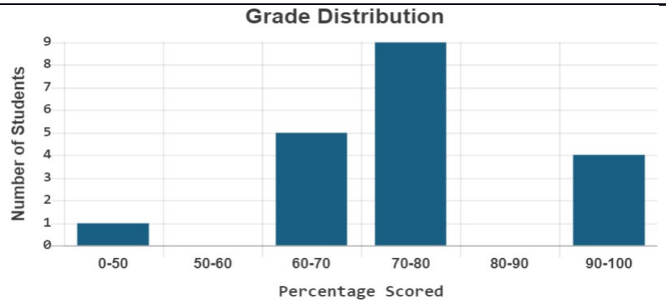
Task/assessment description	Outcomes	Strategy	Taxonomy	Graduate attributes
	adhering to the corporate identity of an organization			
Podcast activity In this activity, interns had to create a podcast for the Purple Innovation agency to benefit current and prospective clients. The podcast had to translate current theory and communication principles into a practical manner. It had to add value to clients and provide practical examples and tips that can benefit clients while adhering to the Purple Innovation brand promise.	• To enable students to add value to future and current clients by translating complex theoretical knowledge into valuable information that can benefit industry and communities • To enable students to gain an opportunity to address topics within their profession that can add value to the general public • To teach students how to creatively package information in a podcast format to engage their audience while adhering to the corporate identity of an organization	Experiential	Remembering | Understanding | Applying | Creating	Digital literacy Visual literacy Knowledge Critical thinking Creative thinking Teamwork Negotiation skills Mindfulness Problem-solving Ethical conduct Professionalism
Communication strategy and plan activity In this activity, interns worked with experts in	• To enable	Experiential Problem-based	Remembering | Understanding |	Knowledge Critical thinking

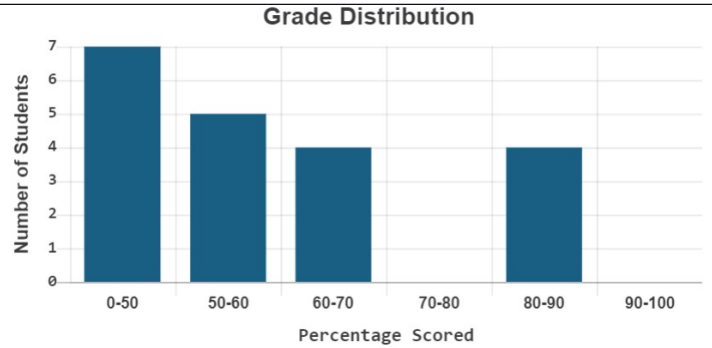
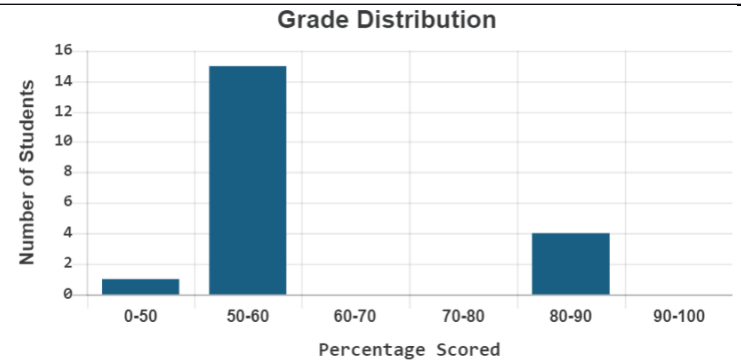
Task/assessment description	Outcomes	Strategy	Taxonomy	Graduate attributes
industrial psychology and strategic business management to solve the problems of a fictional client. After analyzing the client and their problems, the interns constructed a communication strategy and plan for their fictional clients.	students to understand the complexity and diversity of including different stakeholders in a decision-making process • To enable students to work together as a large group to understand the complexity of larger organizations and the importance of planning and structure • To enable students to critically engage with different stakeholders to find solutions to problems taking into account multi-disciplinary thinking and approaches		Applying | Creating	Creative thinking Teamwork Negotiation skills Mindfulness Problem-solving Ethical conduct Professionalism

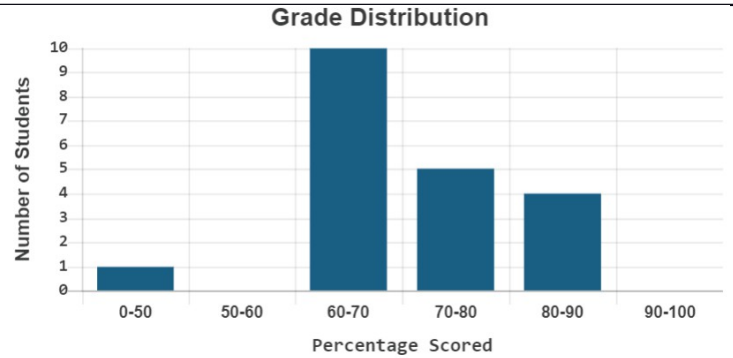
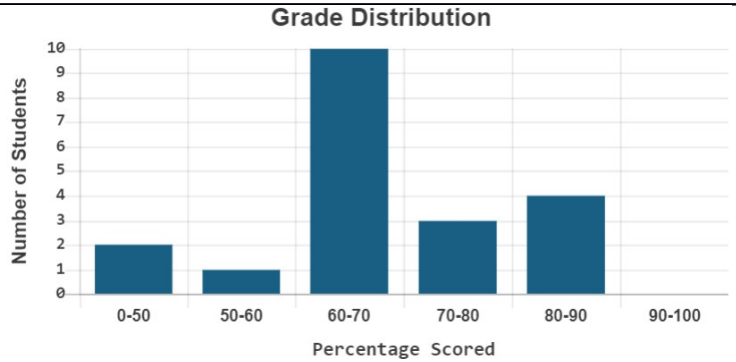
A Critical Analysis of the Assessment in Purple Innovation

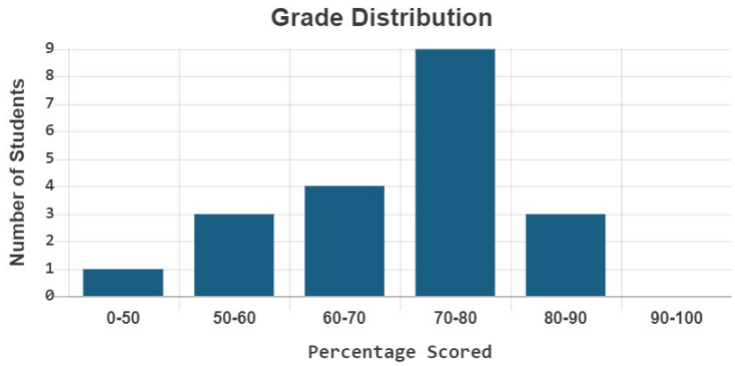
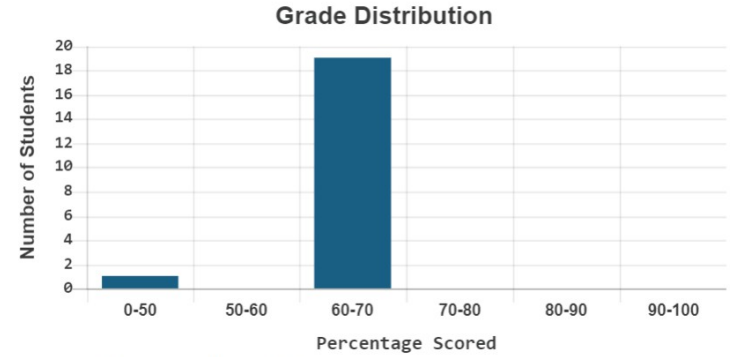
The study used a mixed-method exploratory study with a combination of qualitative feedback for the various assessments and student reflections to critically analyze the eight assessments students had to execute as part of Purple Innovation. The course is taught on three various university campuses with a geographical distance of up to 400 km. The student population of 194 (Campus 1=98, Campus 2=76, and Campus 3=20). The critical analysis was conducted on the dataset of Campus 3. The first set of data (as summarized in Table 1) included the assessment that included the course outcomes and the qualitative feedback provided to each student to ensure that they address the gaps before they do the following assessments. Supplementarily, the results (scores) of the assessments were integrated to measure the performance in each of the assessments in Purple Innovation. Additionally, through classroom engagement, the assessment of certain graduate attributes was gauged. Table 2 presents the results of the assessments, the overall performance, and the graduate attributes developed in each of the eight assessments in Purple Innovation.

Table 2: Analysis of the assessment for Purple Innovation

Assessment	Statistics	Performance/graduateness
CV activity:	 Average (mean) grade 27.00 Median grade 30.00 Standard deviation 9.23 Lowest grade 0.00 Highest grade 30.00 Total graded 20	Qualitative feedback was given on students' CV assignments, and students received pass/fail marks. Of the 20 students registered for the SIC course, only two failed to submit this activity. Despite the majority of students obtaining a passing grade for this activity, various issues were identified with the students' CVs, which were later addressed in a training session at the end of the semester before the course examinations. In terms of graduateness, this activity served as a start to the work-simulated learning in the SIC course. Students had to showcase their communication skills and professionalism in constructing a CV. Students had to use digital design tools such as Adobe InDesign, Illustrator, and Photoshop to construct their CVs. Creative thinking was also required by students to design a CV that adheres to the standard requirements of a CV. However, students also had to think about creatively packaging information on their CV according to their personal brand to ensure that their CV communicates a message that differentiates them from other students. This activity showed students the possibilities of constructing a CV in a creative manner while still remaining professional.
Team building activity:	 Average (mean) grade 71.42 Median grade 71.00 Standard deviation 20.04 Lowest grade 0.00 Highest grade 92.00 Total graded 19	Overall, student performance in this activity went well. The grade average was 71%, with one student receiving a failing grade. Five students received marks in the 60-69 range, nine in the 70-79 range, and four in the 90-100 range. Students could construct creative and extensive planning documents, enabling them to plan their teamwork and collaboration strategically. Students had to negotiate guidelines and rules to guide the team to their goal of completing the course. Additionally, students had to use creative thinking and mindfulness to construct engaging communication products that not only fit the corporate identity of the simulated agency but also showcased their skills in digital design using digital tools.

Assessment	Statistics	Performance/graduateness
Brochure assignment	 **Average (mean) grade** 58.95 **Median grade** 59.00 **Standard deviation** 20.51 **Lowest grade** 0.00 **Highest grade** 88.00 **Total graded** 20	Overall, student performance in this activity was average. The grade average for this assignment was 59%, with seven students receiving a failing grade. Five students received marks in the 50-59 range, four in the 60-69 range, and four in the 80-89 range. Graduateness was developed through this assessment in different ways. Students had to use their content knowledge on changes in the communication environment that led to more post-modern thinking and approaches to strategic communication. Students had to use critical and creative thinking to translate complex academic theories and ideas into practical ideas to guide the industry in understanding the need for more strategic approaches to communication. Teamwork was required of students working in groups to negotiate meaning while being mindful of the client and their information needs. Mindfulness was required to ensure students considered their client's understanding of concepts and the importance of being critical of their client's communication approaches and problems while being professional. Digital and visual literacy was required by students to package the information into a digital brochure that would differentiate the Purple Innovation agency from its competitors. Graduateness was further increased by forcing students to creatively package information and personalize marketing material to fit the needs of their prospective clients.
Internal communication report assignment	 **Average (mean) grade** 57.50 **Median grade** 56.50 **Standard deviation** 17.69 **Lowest grade** 0.00 **Highest grade** 82.00 **Total graded** 20	Overall, student performance in this activity was average. The grade average for this assignment was 57%, with one student receiving a failing grade. Around 15 students received marks in the 50-59 range and four in the 80-89 range. Students had to use online communication tools to find information on their clients. In this regard, digital literacy is important in helping students find information on different search engines, databases, and digital platforms (websites, social media, online news articles, and so forth). Critical and creative thinking guided students in their journey to apply the content knowledge they learned to their client organization. Students had to work together in their teams to find sources and to ensure they provided insights into their client's use of internal communication. This entailed negotiating meaning between students to decide which direction the assignment needs to go. Furthermore, students had to identify the problems faced by their clients in terms of employee communication, leadership communication, change communication, and ethics. By being mindful of their client and the South African context, students could analyze their client's communication based on the subject knowledge they learned. Ethical and professional conduct was required in the completion of the assignment, as well as in how students behaved towards each other. Finally, visual and design literacy was required to design the report using Adobe software and the Purple Innovation CID.

Assessment	Statistics	Performance/graduateness
Digital presence presentation assignment	 **Average (mean) grade** 67.20 **Median grade** 66.00 **Standard deviation** 17.60 **Lowest grade** 0.00 **Highest grade** 85.00 **Total graded** 20	Overall, student performance in this activity was above average. The grade average for this assignment was 66%, with one student receiving a failing grade. Ten students received marks in the 60-69 range, five in the 70-79 range, and four in the 80-89 range. Students had to apply their skills in digital literacy by critically analyzing and evaluating the digital presence of their chosen client. In this regard, digital literacy also extends to students' abilities to utilize different tools to analyze and evaluate their clients' digital presence. The students had to work as a team to analyze and evaluate the social media presence of their chosen client. Due to the different team members' different perspectives, students had to negotiate meaning among the different members. Problem-solving skills were also required by students to ensure they identified the strengths and weaknesses of their client's digital presence. Creative thinking and content knowledge were required to ensure students came up with solutions to their client's problems. Visual and digital literacy was also required through the assignment, which required students to create a narrated PowerPoint presentation or video in which teams explained their findings. The PowerPoint presentation and video also adhered to the CID of Purple Innovation (a simulated agency). Ethical and professional conduct guided students throughout this assessment, as indicated by their contracts with the fictional agency.
Executive summary assignment	 **Average (mean) grade** 97.05 **Median grade** 100.00 **Standard deviation** 26.41 **Lowest grade** 0.00 **Highest grade** 121.00 **Total graded** 20	Overall, student performance in this activity was above average. The grade average for this assignment was 65%, with two students receiving a failing grade. One student received a grade in the 50-59 range, ten students received a grade in the 60-69 range, three students received a grade in the 70-79 range, and four students received a mark in the 80-89 range. Ten students received marks in the 60-69 range, five in the 70-79 range, and four in the 80-89 range. For this assignment, students used their digital and visual literacy skills to design an executive summary utilizing different software and programs that adhered to their client's corporate identity. Students used the baseline knowledge they obtained from Niemann's South African model for SIC and, through critical and creative thinking, had to create an adapted model for SIC for their chosen client. This model had to ensure that students addressed/solved the problems their client was facing in terms of communication. Students also had to be mindful of not only their client's context but also the larger South African context. Additionally, as this assignment was a group assignment, students had to work as a team and negotiate meaning to complete the assignment. Lastly, students were bound by a contract signed at the beginning of the semester to behave ethically and professionally when conducting their group work.

Assessment	Statistics	Performance/graduateness
Podcast activity	 **Average (mean) grade** 26.75 **Median grade** 28.00 **Standard deviation** 7.48 **Lowest grade** 0.00 **Highest grade** 35.00 **Total graded** 20	Overall, student performance in this activity went well. The grade average for this assignment was 70%, with one student receiving a failing grade. Three students received a grade in the 50-59 range, four students received a grade in the 60-69 range, nine students received a grade in the 70-79 range, and three students received a mark in the 80-89 range. In this assessment, students obtained digital literacy using digital technology to record and edit their podcasts. Visual literacy was applicable as students had to create a cover image for their podcast that could appear on the podcast streaming service platform. The cover image also had to adhere to design principles and the requirement of the Purple Innovation CID. Content knowledge and critical thinking drove the content development of the podcast, while creative thinking was required to structure the podcast and design the cover image. Students had to work in groups of three to construct the podcast, which meant that teamwork and negotiation were evident in the creation process. Mindfulness guided the students in focusing on the South African context and the value of the content for current and prospective clients of the simulated agency. Lastly, the content created had to adhere to the ethical and professional conduct of the agency and the governing communication bodies, such as the Public Relations Institute of South Africa and the International Association of Business Communication. Problem-solving also took place at different stages of the assessment.
Communication strategy and plan activity	 **Average (mean) grade** 12.35 **Median grade** 13.00 **Standard deviation** 2.91 **Lowest grade** 0.00 **Highest grade** 13.00 **Total graded** 20	Overall, student performance in this activity was above average. The grade average for this assignment was 65%, with one student receiving a failing grade and 19 students receiving a grade in the 60-69 range. Graduateness in this activity was instilled by providing students with a fake client whom students had to analyze using content knowledge and critical and creative thinking skills. Additionally, students, as a collective, had to work as a team with two professionals from different disciplines to negotiate a problem faced by a fake client. A mockumentary was sent to students, and all stakeholders (students and professionals) had to be mindful of the context of the video and the problems faced by fake clients. Students and professionals could share their knowledge and ideas and had to use their negotiation skills to ascribe meaning to the events that unfolded in the mockumentary. For this assessment, ethical conduct and professionalism were very important as interns had to engage with external experts who did not form part of the teaching and learning environment. In the end, the class had to use the knowledge obtained from their fake client's context, the knowledge of the professionals, and prior knowledge to construct a communication plan for their fake client. The activity violated expectations by forcing the whole class to work together and understand the complexity of decision-making when dealing with large amounts of decision-makers and sources of information.

Summary of the Key Findings of the Critical Analysis in Purple Innovation

For the **CV activity** (experiential learning), the majority of the students performed above 90% on the assessments. In terms of graduateness, students displayed good communication skills and professionalism.

During the **Team Building activity** (experiential learning), the majority of the students scored above 60%, and only one student did not perform well in this assessment. This assessment enabled students to enhance multiple graduate attributes (creativity, mindfulness, communication).

In the **Brochure assignment** (experiential learning), marks were quite dispersed with a cohort of students receiving a failing mark. Despite this, the majority of students passed the assignment. This assessment enabled students to enhance multiple graduate attributes.

For the **internal communication report assignment** (experiential learning/problem-based learning), the majority of the students received a mark in the 50-59% percentile. In terms of graduateness, the assessment focused on developing skills related to academic writing and research (negotiation of meaning, critical thinking, and creative thinking). Furthermore, the assessment developed skills that could benefit students in practice, like mindfulness, ethical and professional conduct, and visual and digital literacy related to the communication industry.

During the **Digital presence presentation assignment** (experiential learning/problem-based learning), the majority of the students received a mark above 60%. This assessment developed graduateness through the critical and creative analysis of social media platforms using content knowledge. Digital and visual literacy strategies were then used to package information professionally and ethically to a client. This ensured that students thought about packaging information to make it more engaging for clients.

In the **Executive summary assignment** (experiential learning/problem-based learning), the majority of the students received a mark above 60%. This assessment challenged students' knowledge by ensuring that students reconceptualized the theory learned using their research as a starting point. This ensured that students critically and creatively engaged with the content and their research to conceptualize a new model for their chosen client. Graduateness was further developed through mindfulness of context and through the negotiation of meaning using existing knowledge and research findings.

For the **Podcast activity** (experiential learning), the majority of students received a mark above 70%. Due to the nature of this assessment students developed graduateness linked to digital and visual literacy. Critical and creative thinking also ensured that students carefully construct content while adhering to the content knowledge learned in the module. However, mindfulness had to guide students in their construction of the content as the podcasts had to professionally and ethically engage audiences within different industries in a South African context while adhering to international standards.

During the **Communication strategy and plan activity** (experiential learning/problem-based learning), the majority of students received a mark above 60%. Students had to engage with internal and external experts in a professional and ethical manner to find solutions to the communication problems faced by a fake client. Various other graduate attributes such as critical and creative thinking were required to ensure that students produce a workable strategy and plan through teamwork utilizing different stakeholders.

Discussion on the Engagement and Graduate Attributes Development in Purple Innovation

From the analysis of the assessment statistics, it is evident that students performed better in assessments using an experiential learning strategy than in assessments using a hybrid strategy (experiential and problem-based learning). Furthermore, the more graduateness embedded within an activity or assessment, the more students found it difficult to achieve higher grades. However, this was only true in the initial stages of the scaffolding assignments. Initially, students struggled with the brochure assignment and the report writing assignment; however, grades improved in the digital presence assignment and the executive summary assignment. It is evident from the statistics that the scaffolding nature of the brochure, report, and digital presence assignments based on simulated learning as WIL enabled students to better integrate various competencies, which led to higher overall performance. Despite the challenging nature of this capstone module and the inclusion of simulated learning and simulated learning as WIL, the inclusion of various assessment strategies and graduate attributes improved the achievement of the outcomes. Additionally, both content

knowledge and professional competencies were integrated during assessments, bridging the gap between theory and practice while increasing employability. The value of exposing students to a combination of simulated learning and simulated learning as WIL enabled students to not only achieve the outcomes of the SIC course but also to expose students to authentic experiences within a safe and conducive environment in the absence of a WIL partner.

Conclusion

Incorporating simulated learning and simulated learning as WIL provides students with various benefits and opportunities to develop skills and content knowledge, which can increase their employability. This paper critically analyzed simulations and simulations as WIL in an SIC course by exposing students to simulations and simulations as WIL students gain the opportunity to gain experience and face problems that they can experience within the industry. In this regard, students develop graduate attributes required by industry once they graduate. However, for students to learn the graduate attributes required by industry, lecturers must carefully plan tasks/assessments by incorporating different outcomes, teaching strategies, and taxonomies. Results from this study show that continuously incorporating simulations and simulations as WIL in different activities and scaffolded assessments can increase student performance.

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