Description (What)

The Commerce Internship Program at University of Wollongong exposes commerce students to real-life business challenges and operations through participation in organised and independent learning activities during 16 days of learning in both for-profit and not-for-profit workplaces. Students apply what they are learning at university in a professional environment. The coordinator initiates, maintains and oversees all processes, from industry placement development through to nurturing student learning. This role and similar roles at other institutions might be regarded as a key institutional enabler of Professional Learning. They emphasise the importance of creating new relationships and maintaining existing partnerships with organisations through such programs. Learning through the internship program is supported by modules that require students to reflect on their learning at host institutions, helping students evidence for themselves their professional growth and self-development.

Objectives (Why)

- Foster student learning
- Prepare students to contribute to society and the workplace
- Provide continuous improvement through meeting the needs of key stakeholders
- Achieve flexibility in program design
- Provide a world-class internship program

The teaching style is to engage students in fun activities and open discussion to stimulate thought and facilitate greater knowledge. Teaching is seen as an opportunity to inspire and empower. The operationalisation of this teaching philosophy is furthered through commitment to collaboration. Participation as a team is seen as core to the success of the program, with team commitment internally to teamwork mirrored externally through industry partnerships, collegiality and dissemination of knowledge.

Practice (How)

Students are asked to reflect on the experience to bring about an awareness of what they are doing, why they are doing it and what they are learning from the experience. This passion for learning is demonstrated by educators, as described in their teaching philosophy. Staff members work hard to maintain this excitement for learning. Built on WIL (Work Integrated Learning) principles, staff have designed this program with the clear purpose of encouraging the lifelong pursuit of learning in the student, equipping them with tools and practical skills that focus on recognised learning outcomes within a practical context. This program provides an easily accessible platform for engaging students in the learning experience as involvement and assessment is designed for a flexible e-learning environment. This subject enables students to engage in learning in a manner complementary to their existing lifestyle, such as their daily involvement in Facebook and MySpace. The design of the program also ensures students are able to maintain their existing studies while completing this work experience component.

Industry Engagement

Relationships with professional bodies are critical to the success of this program and are at the core of its operation. Staff members constantly engage with industry, with over 30 organisations currently involved. These range from small family-owned businesses to international chains (such as Accor Hotels) to government and local councils (such as Kiama and Sutherland Shire councils), to the not-for-profit sector (such as Greenacres, Anglicare and Barnardos). Students are placed with one organisation for the duration of the placement period.
## Enablers

- Support from industry organisations and the Dean of the Faculty
- eLearning site
- Established process of recruitment and selection

## Impediments

- Extensive internal processes
- Resource intensive
- Lack of support from some academics for professional learning

## Evidence of Impact and Benefits

The feedback from students about the use of reflection is very encouraging, with one student stating, 'I don't think I would have considered my internship so valuable without the reflection modules because they made me think about my experiences'.

## Unintended Outcomes

- Student employment at host organisations
- Securing graduate jobs
- Networking opportunities and continuing experience at many not-for-profit organisations
- Despite tough economic times and low employee recruitment, internship students are sought after employees in the community

## Good Practice Principles

- Formal and informal feedback from students and host organisations
- Reflective assessments that track the thoughts and experiences of students as they proceed evidencing professional growth and self-development
- Formal feedback from host organisations and students to reaffirm the program is making a difference in the work readiness of students