

AN INTERNATIONAL INTERNSHIP WITH A SERVICE-LEARNING FOCUS

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ABSTRACT

This article describes an international internship program that has a service-learning focus. Some comparisons to another international internship program are provided. It also presents student views concerning the internship. Finally, some suggestions for the programs are made.

INTRODUCTION

The experiential learning nature of internships has been discussed fairly extensively. In the 2005 edition of the *Bernie Keys Library of the Association for Business Simulation and Experiential Learning (ABSEL)* alone, there are over 60 articles that have the word internship in the title. In recent years there have been calls from business executives and academics for students to engage in learning that makes them more aware of international issues. Another call that has come forward in recent years is to have students engage in service-learning. There are many definitions of service-learning; however, the following generic statement from Bailey (2005: 270) captures the essential aspects of the concept:

Service-learning is an opportunity for students to apply academic concepts to real-world issues in context that is typically non-profit, all of which is rooted in established theory and clear objectives with reflective elements. In this way service-learning personifies the intersection of the grand tradition of action-learning approaches and a universally transcendent ethical responsibility.

A good overview of the literature and thoughts concerning service-learning can be found in the recent special issue devoted to the topic in

Academy of Management Learning & Education (Kenworthy-U'Ren and Peterson, editors, 2005).

It seems clear that an international internship experience that emphasizes service-learning could help address both these calls. Students would actively become more aware of international issues while engaging in service-learning.

For over 50 years Arcadia University through its Center for Education Abroad has offered students enrolled in US colleges and universities the opportunity to study abroad. For more than 25 of those years it has offered international internship opportunities.

In the Fall 2005 semester as a follow up to a review of the London Internship Program (Biggs, 2005), the author traveled to Australia to review the Sydney Internship Program. The author participated in the orientation program with the students and then met with them again two weeks later after they had started the course work and the internship. The Sydney Internship program is described in the next section.

THE SYDNEY INTERNSHIP PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Upon arriving in Melbourne the students participate in a four-day orientation program. One day is spent in Melbourne, learning about that city and Australia in general, and three days are spent on the Mornington Peninsula, where the students have the opportunity to get to know the Arcadia staff and the rest of the group, whilst experiencing a somewhat more rural area. The student then flies to Sydney where additional orientation takes place, the work site is visited, and courses begin.

The program consists of the following four courses, which are described in the Arcadia University International Internship Student Handbook 2005-2006.

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The Australian Workplace Reality – This seminar series provides a compelling cultural and sociological context for the urban work experience and for understanding Australia in general. Its central focus is a trip to the far north west of Australia where the student experiences the way Aboriginal organizations are developing from a context of disadvantage and poverty. These factors combine with distance and challenging climates to provide alternative viewpoints to the very definition of ‘Workplace’. Further in-situ seminars back in Sydney businesses highlight differences and similarities in the wide Australian workplace landscape. Evaluating the realities, connections and disconnections of this wide landscape is the objective of the course.

Work and Thought in Action (Academic Project and Internship) – This course consists of the work experience and a 5000-word written academic project related to the work experience. There are two or three individuals who work with the student to define, write, and assess the project: (1) the workplace supervisor; (2) the site faculty sponsor, who has arranged the work location and stays in contact with the workplace supervisor; and, (3) the academic faculty sponsor, who focuses on the written academic project. In some cases the site faculty sponsor and the written academic project supervisor are the same person.

Australia: Encounters in Place – This is a multidisciplinary course that provides an introduction to Australian society by examining the relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. It also provides the opportunity to consider comparative issues with other Indigenous societies. The course analyses historical and contemporary encounters through the study of art, film, documentaries, music, literature, and academic articles.

Australia in an Asian Context – This is a multidisciplinary course that explores differences in cultural values across the Asian-Australian region. It looks at perceptions, stereotypes, and socio-cultural values in the

context of issues such as urbanization, modernization, internationalism, and the growth of cyberspace. The course also emphasizes the theory and practice of intercultural understanding issues in the region, such as human rights, the role of media, and acceptable cultural mores.

THE LONDON AND SYDNEY INTERNSHIP PROGRAMS COMPARED

As with many things differences are more interesting than similarities, so I will primarily focus on the program differences. Keep in mind, however, that different does not mean, better or worse, but merely different.

The Sydney Internship Program, like the London Internship Program, consists of the internship experience and classroom courses. In both programs there is an orientation to help the student learn about and get acclimated to the new environment in which they will be living and working during the semester. Each program has at least one course that is designed to provide background about the country and the work environment. Thus, “The Australian Workplace Reality” course is similar to the London Internship Program course, “Working in the UK and European Union,” in its aims of providing cultural and sociological background, but differs in its outreach methodology. Likewise, each program has a course that is associated with the work experience and the academic project. The Sydney Internship Program course, “Work and Thought in Action (Academic Project and Internship)” is very similar to the London Internship Program course of the same title; however, the London course is somewhat more formal and requires more defined class meetings. The mechanical aspects (i.e., 5000-word, integrative, organized, etc) of the written academic project and the methods of assessment are the same for both programs.

The programs differ, however, in three important respects. First the London Internship Program involves another institution for the course work, whereas, Arcadia University offers all components of the Sydney Internship Program.

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Second, the London Internship Program offers a wide range of courses through City University of London whereas the Sydney Internship Program is a specific set of courses taken by all the students. Third, the Sydney Internship Program, by its very design, has service-learning built into the program which is not the case in the London Internship Program. An important aspect of this unique service-learning component is a field-trip experience with Aboriginal communities in Australia's northwest.

The programs differ in who provides the courses. In the London Internship Program the student does the internship experience and one course through Arcadia University, and takes two courses at City University of London. In contrast, in the Sydney Internship Program Arcadia University offers all the courses. The fact that Arcadia University offers all aspects of the Sydney Internship Program on its own, rather than offering some courses through another institution, as is done in the London Internship Program, defines the differences between the two programs. By not using another institution for courses, the number of courses offered is restricted. In fact, under the current arrangement only four courses are offered in Sydney and each student must take these four courses. In addition all of the courses are under the direction of the Senior Coordinator Internships, who teaches the "Australian Workplace Reality" course, and the "Work in Thought and Action" course, which also involves the work experience and the written academic project. The Senior Coordinator Internships also hires and works with the individuals teaching the other two courses both of which are held in the Arcadia University office in Sydney. These conditions result in a high degree of integration among the courses and the learning experience. This in turn means that the "Work in Thought and Action" course does not need to be as formal as in the London Internship Program since the topics are covered in each of the courses in the Sydney Internship Program. It also means that each student can be expected to include elements from each of the four courses in the written academic paper, which cannot be done in the London Internship Program, due to the variety of courses

that the students take. Finally, this set of conditions results in a service-learning aspect to the Sydney Internship Program, which is integral to the program. While service-learning can occur in the London Internship Program, it is not an aspect of the design of the program. Due to the centrality of the service-learning aspect to the Sydney Internship Program, it is described in more detail in the next section.

SERVICE-LEARNING IN THE SYDNEY INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

In the Sydney Internship Program service-learning is emphasized in five ways. First, each course has aspects that require the student to think about the broader implications of the work experience in light of conditions in Australia. Second, for two weeks all the students travel to Western Australia where they have the opportunity to see a set of conditions they have not previously experienced. Third, the students are expected to integrate aspects of the various courses and their experiences into the written academic project. Fourth, if the major work experience is in a for-profit type of organization, students frequently are briefly placed in a not-for-profit, social services, type of setting as well. Finally, students learn about service-learning as they discuss their experiences in their classes. This exchange is facilitated by the students taking all their courses and traveling to Western Australia together.

It appears that the above aspects of the Sydney Internship Program relate well to the service-learning attributes indicated by Bailey (2005). Students are applying academic concepts to real-world issues. They are using established theory not only from their own academic disciplines but from others as well. The program has clear objectives and involves significant opportunities for reflection. The students are often working in non-profit organizations. The students are engaged in action learning. There is a strong sense of ethical responsibility, particularly with respect to the treatment and conditions facing the indigenous aboriginal people.

STUDENT FEEDBACK CONCERNING THE SYDNEY INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

The author asked five students who are currently in the program to provide comments. The students are from five different universities and from diverse academic disciplines. One of the students responded and her comments are provided below.

JILL HACKMAN'S SYDNEY INTERNSHIP PROGRAM EXPERIENCES

I am a senior at Wartburg College in Waverly, IA. My major is Business Administration with emphases in Marketing and Management. I am the oldest of three children and grew up on a farm in Northeast Iowa (near Protivin) in the US. Prior to participating in the Arcadia University Sydney Internship Program, I interned in the U.S. at a large for-profit corporation in their management training program. I also worked in the marketing department in a not-for-profit setting.

In the Sydney Internship Program I worked for two different organizations. Each organization was service-oriented.

On Tuesdays and Fridays I worked at the Hughenden Boutique Hotel with the owners, Elizabeth and Susan Gervey. At the Hughenden, I spent time learning all aspects of the organization, which is valuable to anyone learning management. To learn aspects of hotel management, I worked the front desk and served food in the restaurant. I also implemented one mass mailing about the Melbourne Cup luncheon. Finally, spent time working on an Export Grant application. It was interesting to see how much of the business is from overseas individuals.

On Wednesdays and Thursdays I spent my time at GoGet car-share working with owners/founders, Nic Lowe and Bruce Jefferys. GoGet is a new concept to Australia that involves saving space in the city and allowing people to live car-free. Members pay a monthly fee and then per hour rate when they use a car that is parked near their home. It is a small business and environmentally conscious. Here I had a variety of tasks, planning festival strategies, database

entry, researching areas for expansion and developed marketing briefs. I had a lot of freedom at GoGet to try a variety of things. Bruce was great about making sure I was learning and not just giving my time. At GoGet, I learned how to execute a marketing brief and about some of the problems new small businesses face. I could relate aspects of it to my entrepreneur class. Bruce and Nic showed me the passion necessary to own a small business and the rewards as well. My academic project was to research what makes a car-sharing service successful by interviewing potential clients and other car-sharing operations around the world.

The fact that I worked at two different organizations made my time table problematic. I spent two days at each, and while it was great to have the variety, it also kept me in a state of never fitting in. Up until my last few weeks of the internship, I was never at each place long enough to stay current on all the daily happenings.

Once I had actual projects I could work on, I felt more confident in my ability to contribute to the company instead of feeling like I was in their way. We had a meeting about half through with my supervisor, Patrick, to see what could be improved. Out of this meeting my manager at the Hughenden realized how she could better align my need to learn something that would benefit me with her need for someone to do routine tasks in between big projects.

Overall it has been a great experience and I have enjoyed meeting and work with the variety of people at the Hughenden and GoGet. I have learned some basic skills for marketing and management and am also developing new way to look at the world and keep a focus on the important issues. I am glad I could contribute to GoGet because I feel their cause is very environmentally conscience and they are there to truly help people run better lives, which is often rare in our consumer driven world.

CONCLUSION

The Sydney Internship program appears to provide a valuable personalized action-oriented international learning experience with a focus on

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service-learning. The strengths and uniqueness of the program are its highly integrated nature and the focus on service-learning. These strengths are also the weaknesses of the program.

The highly integrative aspect of the program and the focus on service-learning are both facilitated by having very few people involved in the courses. The Coordinator Internship Program with the assistance of one part-time faculty member arranges the internship sites and works with the students on their projects. He also arranges the trip and travels with the students to Western Australia, teaches two of the internship courses, and hires the faculty to teach the other two courses. It seems that the model used in London where we hire individuals from industry as internship coordinators to arrange for the work sites and individuals from universities to serve as academic supervisors to work with the students on their projects is one worth exploring for use in Sydney. Proving, once again, Eric Severied's Law that "the single most common cause of problems is solutions," there is a significant downside of the proposed arrangement; the program may lose some of its integrative and service-learning aspects due to the involvement of other people. Thus, such changes must be undertaken carefully.

The comments from the one student reinforce some of the strengths of the program since ultimately she found the experience to be a valuable learning experience. It is also interesting that her comments allude to the service learning aspect of the program and the expansion her world view.

REFERENCES

Arcadia University International Internship Student Handbook for 2005-2006, as modified by the Sydney Internship Coordinator, Patrick Franklyn. This handbook provides detailed information about expectations, course coverage, Guidelines for the Project, contact people, etc. The student also receives an *Arcadia University Australia Internship Program Acceptance Booklet* that provides a great deal of general preparatory information.

There is also a separate *Arcadia University Australia Study Abroad Parent Guide* to keep the parents informed.

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