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# Enhance the Connection between Academic Studies and Internship

Frank Cullen

Technological University Dublin, [frank.cullen@dit.ie](mailto:frank.cullen@dit.ie)

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## **Enhance the Connection between Academic Studies and Internship**

### **Introduction & Context**

This module provides a structure to develop an enhanced learner experience. The concept of internship is complex. It hinges on the relationships and connections between the Schools, student, industry and institutions. It relates to the quality of the engagement with academic, administrative and support staff as well as their interaction with and for students and potential employers. At the institutes core should be the quality, breadth and appropriateness of internship that the student and industry experience.

### **Student Internship**

Internship engagement in learning can be influenced by: 'student expectations and perceptions, balances between challenge and appropriate academic course workload during the internship. To achieve a balance institutes need a framework that ensures connectivity between the students' industry experiences and their academic studies. Presented below is an overview of internship activities gathered from a wide range of doctoral research conducted that involved national and international placement officers and academic staff in DIT and other Universities such as: UCD, Trinity, Queens University, UCL, and at International Conferences. For example, interviews held at the Internationalisation as Lifelong Learning, IROICA Conference in Paris, June 2009 and Bonn International Workshop for mobility 2007.

### **External and internal drivers**

The National strategy for Higher Education to 2030, (Hunt, 2012) proposes that Higher Education should explicitly address the generic skills required for effective engagement in society and in the workplace. The collection of data was a key feature of research conducted over a five year period between 2007 and 2012. This data was further enhanced by the collection of views and experiences gathered from employers, career officers, placement officers and academics. Gaining an understanding of the issues related to national and international internships provided the necessary insight to develop a framework that enhances an internship programme delivery. The review of data collected indicates that there is:

- The need for profiling of students and of the prospective host organisation so that the students are better matched with the type of internship the host can offer in terms of a learning experience. The students could research the potential host organisation using their website, and reviews to identify what the host organisation can offer in terms of expertise and work practices before setting up training agreements.
- Students need to engage in reflection at the preparation stage of an internship and provide a profile of themselves, i.e. 'self-profiling and reflection of their strengths,' that outline their skills, expectations and even aspirations for their future careers.

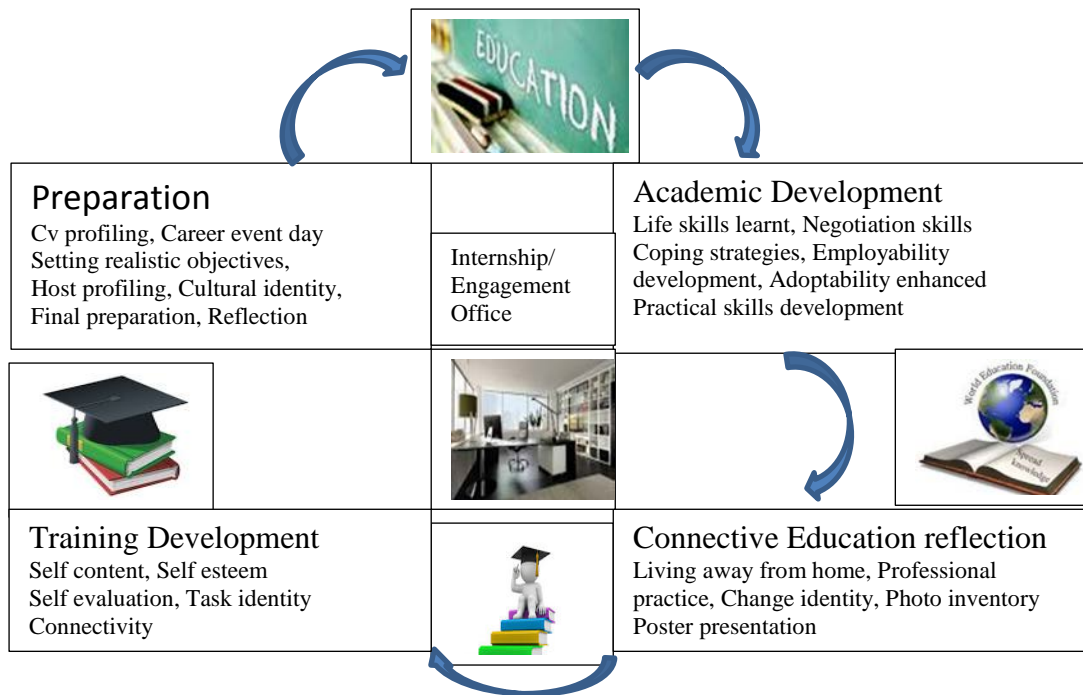
- Students can benefit if they are involved with the negotiations when setting-up the internship with host organisations. Their involvement would assist them to better understand the type of internship on offer.
- The analysis of data suggested that the profiling approach might help to manage expectations and clarify for all parties what they are getting out of the relationship and that this process might encourage future acceptance by employers of students for internship.
- The student learning can be enhanced through their engagement in reflective practice before and during the internship.

In summary, the role required of the framework for internship is to reduce and possibly close the connective gap between the academic and the internship experience, while at the same time encouraging and enhancing the students' professional and social practice by finding suitable internship host organisations. The analysis of the data resulted in the development of a connective model '**Professional Academic Connective Educational Training' model (PACET)** to enhance the students' experience: The PACET model identifies with data collected and the illustrated narratives conveyed by students and employers about internship as a learning experience; such as living away from home, coping with the new environment, developing and or honing professional practice and negotiation skills for dealing with everyday life. Using this model I present the internship as a process which can enhance the students' skills, vocational self-concept and self-identity as a learner. The internship preparation is a key element in creating the academic connections. The benefits of the model: It provides a well-structured framework for internship that will assist students in developing professional identity of their skills, abilities and attributes and that complement their field of study. Key objectives of the model are as follows:

To:

- Maintain and enhance overall student experiences
- Contribute to enhancing the quality of educational and social activities
- Enhance a schools learning environment, associated policies and infrastructures to support internship processes and practice
- Consolidate and build upon the schools internal capacity for enhancing student engagement through profiling research and professional practice;

## The PACET model



### Anticipated Benefits of the Student PACET model approach

These benefits arise for the TU4D as well as at a student and include as follows:

For students, benefits include:

Increased support for student transition from third level educational to employment in their field of study;

- The strategy promotes student engagement with the internship process based upon a wide range of active learning activities both formal (Reflection, profiling and report writing) and informal (work experience) which enhances opportunities for student learning, success and future employment achievement;
- Opportunities for closer interaction with staff, peers and relevant external and internal Communities and employers;
- Student-centred approach, promoting independent learning self- evaluation
- Employment opportunities informed by their preparation and research;
- Create an enhanced overall student internship experience

#### For the Institute

- Build reputation as a place to study and to recruit graduates
- Promote student success and the achievement of learning outcomes and employment
- Promote greater student retention
- Enhance the development of the student graduate attributes needed for effective engagement in society and in the workplace.
- Branding and Marketing at School and Institute level

My analysis of the case study data suggested that the framework should incorporate four stages of delivery to help enhance the students' educational experience. The stages are,

Stage One: continuous internship preparation involving three briefings sessions, one at the start of the academic year, another following stage two of the preparation and the final session before the student departs for the internship.

Stage Two: workshop on career profiling of themselves and the host organisations.

Stage Three: internship with the host organisation.

Stage Four: student debriefing following the internship, final report submission and student presentations.

### Stage One: Internship Preparation Briefing

The first briefing session relates the case study data, I identified that many of the students did not plan for the internship. This briefing session should provide an introduction to internship that focuses on motivating the students to engage with the process, by identifying the academic requirements for internship. The internship tutors focus is to facilitate students to make the connections between the internship and the academic programme by addressing some of the issues identified in the presentation slides. It is recommended that the first briefing session incorporate one or two short presentations from previous internship students. I am recommending that the first workshop should address topics such as:

Why go on international internship? Opening discussion.

Dealing with expectations.

Making the most of the internship experience.

Opportunity to develop.

Becoming a reflective practitioner.

What to plan for: part one.

Erasmus funding documentation requirements - open discussion including a booklet for internship.

Academic programme assessment requirements and an open discussion to facilitate student questions/concerns.

Setting up of the Erasmus Showcase Event, an open discussion and identification of student representatives to work on this event.

A short internship booklet/hand-out should be provided setting out the requirements for the programme, including each of the topical areas above and a checklist.

Students should be encouraged to start researching for suitable host organisations for their internship following the first internship briefing session.

### Stage Two: Career Profiling Workshop

Stage two should address the vocational self-concept discussed during the presentation. My analysis indicated that many of the participants lacked vocational self-concept when deciding on the internship that best suited their career interests. This stage of the internship preparation should attempt to address the issues related to the development of the students' self-concept. The main purpose of this stage should

be to encourage students to engage in self-evaluation and help crystallise their understanding of their skills and abilities, and thus reduce some of the concerns expressed. It is recommended that this stage of the internship preparation include:

Self-evaluation – examining internship/career interests, personality and skills assessment to establish suitable internship work experiences.

Occupational research.

Networking and job search.

CV and cover letters.

Interview techniques.

Academic assignment that is focused on self-evaluation and career interests.

#### Briefing Session Two:

The second briefing session follows the career profiling workshop. The aim of this session is to enhance attempts to create connections between the internship and the academic programme as a continuous learning cycle. The need for this session emerged from my analysis of the case study data related to Major Theme Two identified in the presentation: Identity in Relationships. Host organisation integration issues were identified and in some cases resulted in having to move students from one host organisation to another. My analysis of the data indicated that in some cases there was a mismatch between the students' expectation of the internship and the type of experience the host organisation could offer. My analysis also found that a lack of research on the host organisations, as well as cultural differences in the country can result in culture shock and problems with the students' social integration,

'I cried because I was so far from home and I was living in a dump. I cried because we had a Turkish toilet [hole in the ground, I cried because the shower was disgustingly dirty and there was cockroaches.' (See slide presentation)

The second briefing session should engage the students in further reflection that requires them to match their own identified skills with their profiling of the selected host organisations. This briefing stage will address topics such as:

Professional practice concerns.

The reflective portfolio reinforcement of stage two.

Moving the internship forward.

Academic work and connections with the internship.

Time-management actions required to find suitable internship.

Questions and answer session.

The reflective portfolio reinforcement should draw on the assignment in stage two by getting students to discuss and focus more on the culture of the host country.

Briefing number three would be the final session before the students depart

This is the final briefing session before the students depart for the internship. The briefing session reflects the case study data and builds on briefing session one. The briefing attempts to reinforce and clarify the requirements of the internship

programme. The session should also encourage students to develop individual plans for reflection during the internship and should include topics such as:

- Writing a reflective journal.
- Interim internship report writing.
- Final report writing.
- Poster presentation.
- Time management actions.
- Questions and answer session.

### Stage Three: Internship with Host Organisation

This stage of the internship can develop the students' self-concept and personal development. The benefits and issues associated with the whole experience of internship are addressed throughout the presentation.

### Stage Four: Debriefing after Completion of the Internship

It was established that when the reflective report is based on the total internship experience and not just on the work-based learning aspects it might encourage self-evaluation. For example, individuals engage in the reflective project of the self in order to negotiate lifestyle choices, this process promotes the development of self-actualisation. The reflective style of the final report could assist students in the development of their reflective skills, encouraging evaluation of self-identity and identification of personal development as a result of the internship. The reflective report writing for the international culinary internships in the School of Culinary Arts and Food Technology should include topics such as:

- Living and learning away from home.
- Professional culinary practice.
- Cultural integration.
- Identifying the benefits and pitfalls experienced.

Stage Four should also include student presentations to the next cohort preparing for internship. The student presentations were identified during my analysis of the case study data as one of the most beneficial aspects of the internship preparation. The presentations are currently based on the reflective reports and include photographs of the students' culinary events and other internship experiences.

This paper was prepared and presented by Dr Frank Cullen, Head of School, School of Culinary Arts and Food Technology, Dublin Institute of Technology, Ireland. Any references to the model should cite the author Dr Frank Cullen.