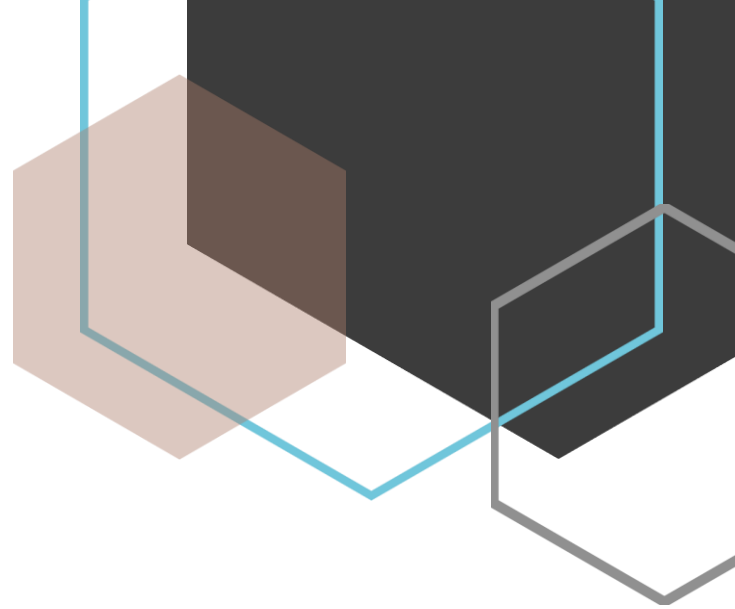




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PROPOSAL FOR REVIEW OF INTERNSHIP AND PLACEMENT SCHEME FRAMEWORK

UNIVERSITY OF PERADENIYA, SRI LANKA

Integrating Talent Development into Innovation Ecosystems in Higher Education

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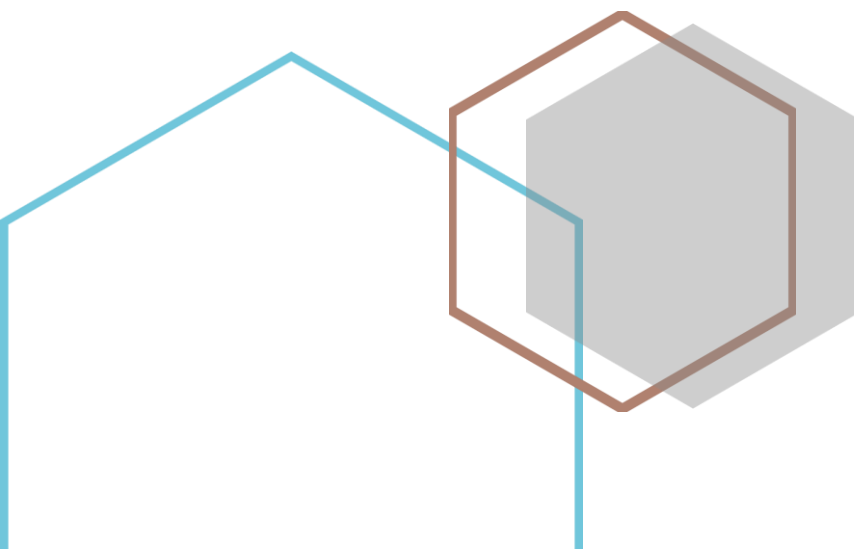




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The framework review proposal outlines the current University policy and practice regarding student internships and placements and makes proposals for improvements.



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INTRODUCTION

University of Peradeniya (hereafter referred as the University) is the largest public higher education institution in Sri Lanka, and the heir of the oldest university in the Country, the University of Ceylon that was founded in 1942. Being one of the best free education providers in the country, there is high competition among students to gain university admission. The University awards bachelor degrees, diplomas, masters and PhDs. Since its foundation in 1942 the university staff, both academic and administrative, contributed to promote its standards to today's level. The University was also ranked 1st in the 2017 Webometrics ranking in Sri Lanka. The University has nine faculties: Agriculture, Allied Health Sciences, Arts, Dental Sciences, Engineering, Management, Medicine, Science, Veterinary Medicine and Animal Sciences together with three postgraduate institutes: Postgraduate Institute of Agriculture, Postgraduate Institute of Science, and Postgraduate Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences. In 2016, total undergraduate student enrolments amounted to about 18,000 (11,000 regular fulltime and 7,000 external students) and international student enrolment was around 100. Students following graduate studies are about 9000 at present. In the last few years, the University has initiated many major initiatives to upgrade quality of education, including, but not limited to, change of curricular to match with the changing country and global needs, introduction of new faculties and departments, funding of research programs and supporting a limited number of international staff and student mobilities.

In the current world of work in Sri Lanka, finding suitable employment is challenging for undergraduates. This has resulted in a high level of graduate unemployment among the students of the Faculties of Social Science and Humanities. According to a recent report, only 18% of graduates from such Faculties were able to obtain employment within six months of their graduation. However, the internship programs offered by the University had significant impact on finding suitable jobs in the competitive work environment. Over the last few decades, the University has taken several measures to address the unemployment issues. One has been to offer Internship as per the guidelines suggested by Sri Lanka Qualification Framework (SLQF). In addition to Faculty-level Internship units, the Career Guidance Unit (CGU) of the university also facilitates the faculty-level internship programs through the representatives of the Career Guidance Units of each faculty.

The report is structured as follows. Firstly, it reviews current internship policies adopted by the university, including methodology, support mechanisms and assessment schemes. Secondly, the report highlights some weak points and inefficiencies in the current internship program. Finally, the report concludes by proposing nine ways to further improve the current internship placement scheme at the university.

REVIEW OF CURRENT POLICIES

The Internship program for the undergraduates of the University aims at enhancing the employability of undergraduates on the competitive job market. It is designed in a way to provide the students with exposure to the practical issues and challenges in the world of work. Usually the internship program offered to undergraduates is a complementary and integral element of the academic program of the university. Undergraduates are expected to acquire hands-on experience not only in the subject aspects of the work but also in related matters such as management, industrial safety, quality assurance, ethical practices, sustainability practices (workplace skills). Moreover, the internship contributes to a large extent to the development of socio-emotional skills that are expected by employers, such as networking skills, social pluralism, working under stress, etc. that may help students find potential job opportunities.

The intended learning outcomes of the internship program across the faculties are:

- Develop presentation skills, critical thinking skills and problems solving skills
- Apply theoretical concepts and models in a practical environment
- Formulate viable solutions to practical organizational problems through the internship project.

MODE OF OPERATION OF CURRENT PROGRAMS

Each faculty and fields of study has arranged their own internship program that largely depends on their requirements and thus follows different methodologies. For instance, the Internship Program offered by the Faculty of Management carries 6 credits and requires students to engage in Internship training (optional) for a period of 600 hours in their final semester. They are required to maintain a diary of the experience. In addition, students are required to produce a project report and make two formal presentations of their exposure to the respective academic department at the interim and the final evaluation. Completion of a minimum of 600 hours and submission of the Internship Diary, the Internship Project Report and Employer's Confidential Report are compulsory requirements in order to be eligible for the Final Presentation and Viva.

In the case of the Faculty of Engineering, the internship programme is facilitated by the faculty-level Career Guidance Unit. The internship has duration of 20 to 24 weeks of industry training that carries 6 credits. This is a compulsory course for those studying toward a degree of Bachelor of the Science of Engineering.

The Faculty of Agriculture has a 8-week Inplant Training in the final year. This is a compulsory professional skills development course. Students need to get a passing grade but the course does not contribute to the final GPA. Students have to maintain daily work records which are approved by the industrial supervisor. The supervisor also records his/her overall evaluation in the same report.

STUDENT ASSESSMENT IN INTERSHIP PROGRAMS

The Faculty of Science has two types of internships; six-credits, six-month compulsory course for the students who are following studies in computation and management, and three-credit, three-month optional course for the others students. Internships are offered when students are in their final year. Students need to maintain a log book for recording weekly activities and make a presentation after completion.

In the Faculty of Arts, until recently only a few departments offered Inplant Training. The department of Economics offers Inplant Training after completion of all the degree requirements and it is not compulsory or optional, but voluntary. The students following Psychology Special Degree have one-year compulsory Inplant Training which is a part of a taught course and carries credits. However, from the year 2021 a new revision of the curricula has been made and 6-credit compulsory Inplant Training has been included in all study programs offered by the faculty. It will be offered at the end of the final semester.

Internships for the professional degrees like Medicine, Dental Sciences, Allied Health Sciences and Veterinary Medicine are offered after graduation by the respective government ministries and that is a must for obtaining professional registration.

Different Faculties follow different methodologies to assess the students' achievement of internship. Students must keep regular contacts with both the Internship Supervisor at the Internship Organization and the academic Coordinator at the respective Department in the university on any matter related to their Internship. The completed Internship Project Report should be submitted to the Department at the end of the Internship Program.

In the case of the Faculty of Management, a student must submit both an internship diary and a report. Students must duly maintain the Internship Diary by recording daily activities related to their practical experience. The Internship Diary must be presented to the Department Internship Coordinator for inspection monthly, and should be submitted to the Department within one week from the end of the Internship/Semester. Students must also make sure that the Department receives the duly completed Employer's Confidential Report directly from their employer by this time. The internship report must be limited to a minimum of 5000 words. The content of the report includes a copy of the contract, a brief description of the internship environment, such as name and nature of the business of the organization, details of the internship, supervisors, co-workers, team members and main features of different assignments undertaken, summary of activities that were carried out during the Internship Program, details of any document/s of the internship organization, which the student was a major contributor to, self-evaluation and critical analysis of the Internship Program by the student, and recommendations for further improvement based on his/her own experience. Annually, the Faculty organizes a competition titled "Management Internship Diaries" to select "The Best Intern of the Year" from those who participated in the Internship Program in the particular



academic year.

In the Faculty of Engineering, students have to maintain a daily diary during training and submit a comprehensive report covering each period of training. The assessment is done at an interview conducted by a panel consisting of a practicing engineer from industry, an officer from The National Apprentice and Industrial Training Authority (NAITA), lecturers from the relevant department and the Career Guidance Unit. This assessment is normally conducted in the second semester of the final year of studies. The candidate who obtained the highest score in the program is awarded the “J.B. Dissanayake prize for Industrial Training” in the general convocation annually.

Students of the Faculty of Agriculture have to submit a report on the work experience they have gained and face an interview at the respective Department after completion. The grading is based on evaluation carried out by the industrial supervisor, the submitted report and the performance at the interview.

In the case of the Faculty of Science, the assessment has three components. The industrial supervisor provides a mark that amounts to 30% of the final grade, and the rest is based on the evaluation done on the presentation and the logbook records by the respective academic department.

At the Faculty of Arts, Psychology Department, assessment was based on a report submitted by the industrial partner, which contributed to 20% of the marks for two subjects. The remaining 80% of the marks was derived from the taught course examination. The newly proposed assessment is well structured.

**SUPPORT PROVIDED
BY THE UNIVERSITY
FOR INTERSHIP
PROGRAMS**

The University provides support for students to facilitate the internship program through the Career Guidance Unit (CGU) of the university. Most of the industries forward their available positions to the CGU and the CGU advertise them in their Career Hub and directly link with the relevant faculties.

Moreover, to connect their students to industry some faculties organize annually industry events. One such program is the annual Career Fair of the Faculty of Engineering. It provides opportunities for industrial organizations to get to know the potential future employees and enables final-year undergraduates to learn about the current trends in the employment market and the demands of the industrial sector. The Faculty of Science and Faculty of Management organize annually similar programs called ‘Industry Day’. The invited organizations visit the Faculties, select students for internship training and conduct mock interviews. This program will help students to gain knowledge on the skills and knowledge that the industry will look for in graduates, and to obtain experience by facing interview sessions. A workshop series was held for first-year students of the Faculty of Science from 25th November to 27th November 2019. In these workshops, experts aimed at enhancing the motivation, team work skills and leadership skills of undergraduates and at helping them become successful in both academics and extracurricular activities. The CGU of the Faculty of



WEAK POINTS AND INEFFICIENCIES

Engineering directly contact industries and place the students for industrial training.

In some faculties, faculty members visit the internship students during their training to monitor their progress and to address issues that students may be facing during the training.

The University is committed to offer better internship opportunities to its graduates who meet the demands and expectations of employers. However, there are weak points and inefficiencies in the current Internship Program offered by the university.

1. Lack of internship opportunities for undergraduates studying social sciences, humanities and pure sciences

In the current competitive environment, finding a suitable internship placement for undergraduates who study Social Sciences and Humanities is a challenge in Sri Lanka, where there is a considerable unemployment rate among the educated youth. This is partly resulted due to lack of socio emotional and communication skills in the English language, which are required by employers. A survey carried out by the University Grants Commission reported that English-language communication skills greatly contribute to graduate employability.

2. Mismatch between internship opportunities and field of specialization

Based on our discussions with students in several faculties, we conclude that only a few receive relevant training specific to their specialization whereas many indicate that there is a mismatch between their specialization and the internship opportunities offered to them.

3. Gender issues in Internships

Even though female participation in higher education is high in Sri Lanka, male students have advantages in obtaining placements in industries. In some Faculties where internship is optional female students show less motivation to engage in internships. Female students' interest in internship is low due to several reasons such as distance to home, personal security and family willingness. Discussions with undergraduates also revealed that some companies prefer to provide placement to male students in specialized areas.

4. Lack of Memoranda of Understanding with potential internship providers and limited choices

More students expect that the university must support them in finding suitable internship placements. However, except a few faculties such as Faculty of Agriculture, it is noted that there are no Memoranda of Understanding signed by the university in order to recognize internship providers. As a result, only the state sector offers internships for some of the degree programs at the Faculty of Arts and students do not have any other choices.

5. Problems with the academic calendar

Some students experience difficulties in reconciling the academic calendar of their Faculties with internship when internship is optional. During the period of the internship, same students are also required to follow courses toward their degree. In some other cases, only a 3-month period is allowed for internship which is less attractive for both students and internship provides.

As per the SLQF level 6 requirements, most of undergraduate curriculum includes an internship component carrying 6 credits, and the students are expected to undertake an organized industrial training in their final semester. To strengthen this process, the university has taken various measures such as signing Memoranda of Understanding with national and international organizations, establishing a University - Business Cell (UBL), several grants for training in the area of socio-emotional skills and in English language, and several other measures. One such measure is the Accelerating Higher Education Expansion and Development (AHEAD) project, which is organized in two components. The first is a Programme Component that supports the national Higher Education Development Programme. The second is a Systems Strengthening, Capacity Building and Technical Assistance Component that will assist the Government of Sri Lanka in strengthening the higher education sector and achieving the objectives of the AHEAD Program Component. However, the standard of the current internships need to be improved further in some faculties, and in particular in the Faculty of Arts and in programs in the Sciences. Therefore, we propose several measures to strengthen the university internship program.

- **Faculty members' monitoring of students' internships**

It is the responsibility of the student to search for organizations to undertake Internship in his/her area of specialization. However, organizations selected by the students should be acceptable to the Department as suitable for undertaking the Internship. For this purpose, students need to inform the Department Internship Coordinator in writing about the potential Internship provider prior to commencement of the Internship. The Department Internship Committee should evaluate the suitability of the potential Internship provider as per pre-determined criteria and should continuously monitor students' involvement.

- **Memoranda of Understanding with prospective Internship providers/organizations**

The respective Departments should look for possible organizations to provide Internships to students. All such Internship opportunities received by the department should be displayed on the Faculty Internship Notice Board. The University should also explore local and global internship providers for its undergraduates through formal agreements (Memoranda of Understanding). However, selection of a student for the Internship Programme by the Internship Providing Organization should be entirely at the discretion of that organization. The department should not under any circumstances influence or interfere with the selection process.

▪ **Support for Volunteering**

University should motivate student to get involved in various volunteering activities, especially if they cannot get placement in private-sector organization. This proposal is more suitable for Social Science students. This component has not been considered as important by the faculties so far.

▪ **Introduction of an Interim Internship Programs/Seasonal Internship before the final 6-month internship**

As internship plays a vital role in providing students with opportunities to learn about the “real world”, an interim internship would help them understand the industry requirements and identify their career choice early on in their study path. This arrangement would provide students with rigorous training in their field of specialization during the start of specialization in the second year. This arrangement would help students to gradually get accustomed to the corporate world. In addition, networking with professionals, multidisciplinary teamwork experiences, professional communication, working at an industry site, learning to work in an environment with deadlines are added benefits.

▪ **Establishment of Assessment Centre**

We propose the establishment of an Assessment Centre that can facilitate the assessment of students in a simulated environment in order to decide how they would react in the actual work environment. The Assessment Centre can use psychometric games, (online) case studies, presentations, role plays, in-tray exercises, and group exercises. Through this centre, employers can screen undergraduates who achieve the required level of competence.

▪ **Introduction of well-structured guidance on internship**

The university must introduce a well-structured guidance methodology with flexibility in each field of specialization. Students are responsible for upholding the reputation of the department, the faculty and the university at the respective organizations. Internship opportunities in the future will depend largely on the performance, behaviour and conduct of the current students undergoing the internship training in the respective organizations.

▪ **Introduction of a Career Support Framework**

A career support framework would require that a career chart is maintained for each student, indicating the students’ academic and professional goals and records of internship participation. The chart should be prepared already in the first year and maintained/updated onwards to create a vision for the student’s professional path. The career chart will also play the role of portfolio of the student’s career-related objectives and achievements. Career paths that are available for students should also be identified through career development programs.

▪ **Improved communication between students and faculty through an online platform**

Supervisors assigned by the University should guide the student in the

process of writing the project report and the student should be expected to maintain regular contact with the Supervisor using an online platform.

- **Establishment of an Event Hub**

The Event Hub should focus on organizing diverse events for the benefit of both employers and undergraduates. The activities conducted by this Hub should include networking sessions between industry and students, industry linkages such as II. Memoranda of Understanding, internship competitions, workshops and seminars on skills necessary for successful job interviews, writing a winning resume and business etiquette.