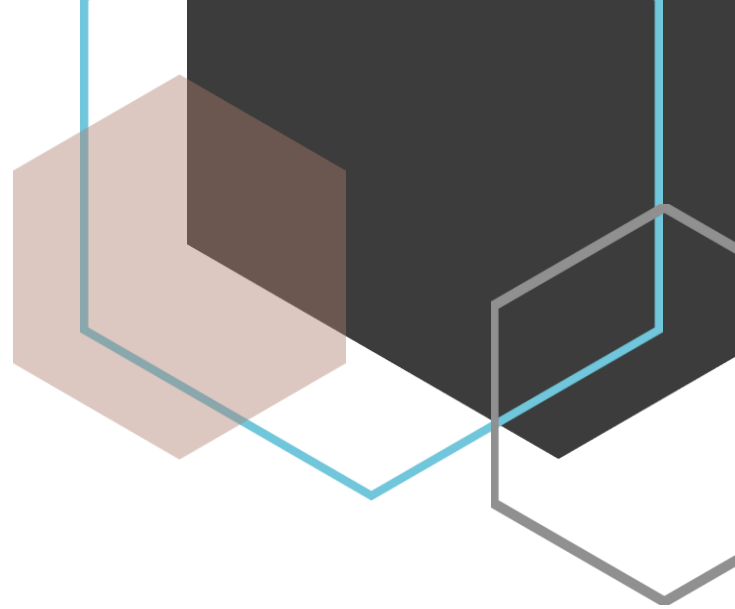




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PROPOSAL FOR REVIEW OF INTERNSHIP AND PLACEMENT SCHEME FRAMEWORK

POKHARA UNIVERSITY, NEPAL

Integrating Talent Development into Innovation Ecosystems in Higher Education

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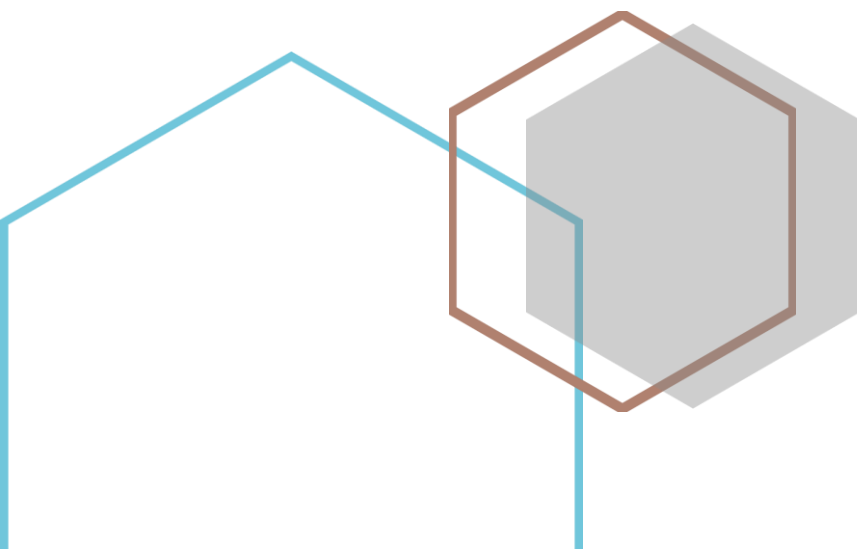




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The framework review proposal outlines the current University policy and practice regarding student internships and placements and makes proposals for improvements.

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INTRODUCTION

Currently at Pokhara University, only the Faculty of Management Studies has an internship requirement specified by the curriculum. Undergraduate and graduate curricula require students to work in industry for a certain period. The provision is as follows:

Undergraduate Level

Project Work and Internship: Students need to undertake an independent capstone project (3 credit hours). The project involves fieldwork and empirical analysis. Students must follow the prescribed formats to prepare reports. Besides this, a student also needs to do an internship in a business organization for a period of six to eight weeks. Specifically, the internship period for the Bachelors of Hotel Management is one year (two semesters). Aimed to provide an opportunity to gain real-life experience, this course also helps the students apply theoretical understanding to action. The internship awards 3 credit hours.

Graduate Level

Under the Internship Program students are required to undergo business exposure to assigned organizations for a period of 8 to 12 weeks. They are required to present an Internship Project Report in the prescribed format.

REVIEW OF CURRENT POLICIES

The existing internship plan is implemented between the fifth and seventh semester based on the nature of the program. Colleges appoint one Internship Coordinator to implement the plan. Students get orientation about the importance of internship, what to do and what not to do in the office during the internship. They are suggested to visit industries and get an internship themselves but college administration also helps them in finding a good opportunity (organization). After selecting the organization where the internship will take place, the College issues a letter to the organization and a confidential evaluation form. After completion of the internship, students bring a letter of completion and the sealed and stamped confidential evaluation form completed by the host organization. Students in internship are required to work full office working hours and perform the tasks as prescribed by the supervisor. Some students work in one department or under a single supervisor, while others work in different departments with different supervisors.

There is a provision of monitoring the interns while they are in the host organizations, liaising with the supervisors and getting information through email and calls. The confidential evaluation form also provides feedback.

Placement of the students is not practiced by Colleges officially but recommendations can be made by the administration, management and faculty in a personal capacity. The School of Business has concluded a MoU with some financial institutions for the placement of students with the highest grade.



PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT OF THE PROCESS

The internship provision was approved by the Academic Council and implemented by the respective Colleges / Schools. The Principal is responsible for the implementation whereas he appoints a teacher to oversee the activities and processes. Non-teaching staff also help in issuing and registering the letter and keeping records of the internships. Program Directors / Coordinators are responsible for the effective implementation of the internship.

STUDENT ASSESSMENT IN INTERNSHIP PROGRAMS

At both graduate and undergraduate level, the evaluation of the Internship is based on a confidential report by the host organization (40 percent) and a presentation of the Internship Project Report in a seminar (60 percent).

RESULTS FROM CURRENT POLICIES FOR INTERNSHIPS AND PLACEMENTS

Students' experiences and performance have been mixed. Some receive excellent exposure while others only average. Reputed and big organizations provide them with good working environment and learning opportunity but it is quite difficult to get all students to do internships in big organizations. Most of them get opportunity to do an internship in a medium-size organization while some are interested to work in small organizations as these are nearby their residence and getting an internship there is easy.

The efforts of the College hardly influence students' chances for a placement. Some of the interns (students) however, get the opportunity of placement based on their behaviour, performance, quality of works and skills.

The University has no capacity to help students get jobs in the public services, where strict selection rules and procedures apply. Private sector and non-governmental organizations are more likely to hire graduates from Pokhara University. Interested students join such organizations during the last semester (thesis year) or after completion of their study.

PROCEDURES FOR MONITORING THE QUALITY OF INTERNSHIPS/PLACE MENTS

There is as yet no formal document, procedure or guidelines to monitor the quality of the internships at Pokhara University. Monitoring is done at the discretion of the faculty member responsible, by visiting the employer, asking supervisors about students' performance, discipline, attitude, etc. The responsible staff member can also contact the intern and ask about the activities performed in the organisation and the conditions of work. A formal procedure would make the monitoring process more formal and systematic.

The quality and effectiveness of internships can be measured by the feedback form. Currently, the Colleges are not using a separate feedback form for the employer and for the student (intern). This limits the opportunities for the University to learn more about the skills that employers value in the students.



PROCEDURES FOR MONITORING AND ASSESSMENT OF THE SKILLS AND COMPETENCIES THAT THE STUDENT HAS DEVELOPED DURING THE INTERNSHIP

POSSIBILITY OF INTERNSHIPS/PLACEMENTS IN THE NON-PROFIT AND PUBLIC SECTORS

WEAK POINTS AND INEFFICIENCIES

Pokhara University has as yet not developed a mechanism to assess the skills and competencies that the students gain or improve during the internships.

There is the possibility for students to do internships in both the non-profit and the public sector. However, the university needs to talk with the public sector and request such opportunities. Internships in the government offices are quite challenging due to different factors like confidentiality and sensitive nature of some of the work. In the non-profit sector it is easier to find and get internship but such organizations are not many.

The students from business and management disciplines prefer internships in the financial sector, followed by the manufacturing and trading sectors. They have less preference for the non-profit sector. However, public entities such as hospitals and utilities offices (Electricity authorities, Drinking Water Supplies Office) are a good option for internship. The problem is that these institutions are not many and cannot host a large number of students.

Creating opportunities for internships:

The University can create better opportunities for internships by building professional and institutional relationships with the corporate sector. As Pokhara University is a national-level and reputed university, there is a large number of alumni across the country that may help in this process.

Planning:

Currently, Colleges are not very efficient in planning for internships. Everything is being done on *ad hoc* basis rather than through proper planning.

Preparation of students:

Students are mentally prepared for the internship since their admission. However, they are preoccupied with project work, term papers, assignments, internal and external evaluation and they hardly have sufficient time to find a good host organisation. Sometimes, there are no proper transportation facilities to join otherwise good organisations. Some good organisations do not accept interns for less than three to six months but undergraduate students have just one and a half month period for the internship.

Monitoring of quality:

Another weakness of the current internship practice is the lack of quality monitoring. A single teacher has been assigned to oversee more than 150 students in a year which overloads this teacher. Assigning more teachers will increase the cost to the Colleges. Therefore, visiting each intern more than once is hardly possible during the internship.



Monitoring of developed skills and competencies:

It is expected that during the internship students acquire or improve skills and competencies. However, the impact is currently not being identified by any reliable means and measurement. The internship program has been designed to increase the quality of student learning but Colleges do not measure if skills and competencies were improved as a result of the internship. It is also not identified what the expectations of the students are and whether these expectations were actually met during the internship.

The University needs to identify the gap between the students' skill and competencies and the needs of industry, using special tools. The gap needs to be addressed by the University either by providing special classes or sending students for internship until they have acquired the minimum skills and competencies. This will guarantee that the students will be able to get better placement opportunities.

Diversification of internship opportunities:

Students prefer financial institutions for internship. The majority of the commerce/management graduates prefer to join banking and insurance, followed by government services, teaching and other profession. But, there are several other types of organisations like cooperatives, public institutions, social institutions, hospitals, and so on. If students intern in these organisations, they can acquire different experience. A few of the students start their own business and some run their family business. This trend needs to be encouraged, too.

Improving the process of planning internships/placements:

First of all, the top-level management of the university needs to be convinced that the internship is an important part of the students' learning journey. Good internships can help students develop skill and competencies, as well as get practical experience. It is necessary to prepare formal Internship Guidelines (IG) and implement them as mandatory.

All students should receive rigorous orientation to instil the view that internship is a great learning opportunity.

Each College needs to establish a separate Internship Section headed by an Internship Director. The responsibilities of the Internship Director should be written in a formal document and approved by the higher authorities. The Internship Director should have sufficient rights and mandate, including signing MoUs with organisations, inviting businessmen, organising meetings, seminars, and other programs. The Internship Director should also have the right to cancel the internship of any students if he/she does not fulfil the requirements.

The placement of students in industry with support from the university is not a new practice in the developed countries but it is quite new in Nepal. This is a challenge also at Pokhara University. The public sector hires staff through a formal selection process and students should pass the entrance examination. There is no provision of direct appointment / placement. In

the private sector, an interview is enough to hire a graduate. Public Limited Companies also hire staff through written examination, interview and group discussion. Above all, the university needs to design the courses as per the demand of the industry, sharpen the students' soft and professional skills, and develop their competencies by different credit and non-credit courses. This can motivate industry to hire graduates. Most of the improvements in the university policy therefore, should be focused on providing more relevant education and improving internships (rather than looking for ways to ensure placements).

In sum, first of all students should acquire the knowledge and skills as per industry requirements, and further develop their competencies through internship and exposure to the world of work. Then placements in industry will be easier.

Strengthening the monitoring process in order to ensure the quality of internships/placements

There is no doubt that the existing monitoring process is quite weak and needs to be improved. The proposed plan is the following:

- The University Authority (Executive Committee) needs to give top priority to internships and placements and establish guidelines. It also needs to create a position of Internship Director in each College and provide this person with adequate authority.
- The Internship Director should be responsible for monitoring the quality of internships and should have rights to streamline implementation.
- The University should strive to provide sufficient resources (human resources, vehicles, equipment, etc.) to reach every student and provide financial support for meetings and interaction with industry, employers and the corporate sector.
- The University should strive to provide a mandate from the highest authority to the Colleges to strengthen links with organisations and to collaborate with industry more closely.
- Prior to sending the students in internship, sufficient orientation needs to be provided by the employer and other experts. The intern student should get the opportunity to learn enough about the organisation where he/she does the internship.
- There should be a reward for the best performing interns, while for the interns with bad performance corrective measures should be taken.
- The employers should be encouraged to provide placements for the best interns after completion of their study.

Improving the procedures for monitoring and assessment of the skills and competencies that the students acquire during internships/placements

There are two ways to monitor and assess the skills and competencies that



the students acquire during internships/placements. First, the impact can be assessed by the university and second, by the employer or the supervisor of the intern. Measurement tools can include filling up a survey, making direct observations in the field, and considering the expressed opinion of the intern and the supervisors.

Colleges also can assess the skills and competencies through interview and practical exams (assessment) which takes time but it is possible and reliable.

