

COVER STORY

# Of student internship, its process and benefits

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In today's competitive world, gaining employment is a tough task. To get a good job, one must possess both theoretical and practical knowledge as well as be an innovator and a team player.

At university, students apply theoretical knowledge gained at lecture halls and tutorials and from assignments into practical terms through internship programmes which comprise on-site work related to their discipline.

Nurul Nadia Rosli, a psychology officer at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia's Career Development Centre (UKM-Karier), said the hands-on experience during internships helps to enhance students' job readiness, career adaptability and workplace communication skills.

"At the same time, students are given the chance to identify and explore their career interests and opportunities in the job market. This increases graduate employability and productivity in terms of their contribution to the country's growth and development," she said.

UKM students either undergo internships after completing all semesters comprising academic classes or in between semesters. The duration of the internship depends on the



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**MARINAH MOHD ARIFFIN**  
Universiti Malaysia Terengganu, School of Marine and Environment Sciences, dean

field of study and may span six to 20 weeks. "Academic credit is given for internship but should students have disciplinary issues or are unable to fulfil the requirements of the internship, they have to undergo it in the next semester," she added.

UKM students apply for the internship themselves or with the help of the head of the programme.

"During this stage, students seek advice from their coordinators on the suitability of the selected company. After the selection, the faculty issues an application letter to the chosen company. Qualified candidates will be called for an interview at the company. Lastly, the faculty will issue a reply letter after an internship placement confirmation from the company," added Nurul Nadia.

While some employers recruit students during the Integrated Internship and Career Day organised by UKM-Karier, students are free to find their own placements.

Associate Professor Dr Tengku Nor Rizan Tengku Mohd Maasum of UKM's Faculty of Social Science and Humanities, who is in charge of the faculty's internship/industrial training, said students go for internship in the final semester of the third year.

"Students identify their own placements and the programme facilitates the application. We also hold career fairs and industry



UPM business administration students (second and third from left) on their first day of internship at Yame Food Product Co. Ltd. Japan.

road shows on campus where industries offer placements for internship.

"The basic criteria for employers include an established organisational structure, formal office space and co-workers for undergraduates to interact with. Payment and allowances are optional though encouraged," said Tengku Nor Rizan.

Undergraduates are monitored via visits by the university lecturer, student log book, a final report prepared by the student and on-going and final evaluation by a supervisor at the industry. The internship period for the students of the faculty ranges from eight to 15 weeks, according to the requirements of the programme.

"The training provides opportunities for students to acquire workplace skills, enhance interpersonal communication, step up networking and hopefully get a greater chance to secure employment," said Tengku Nor Rizan, adding that those who fail internship cannot graduate and are required to undergo internship again.

### IDENTIFIED INDUSTRY PARTNERS

At Universiti Teknologi MARA's Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management, some students undergo internship more than once.

Alina Shuhaida Mohammad Ramly, head coordinator of practical training at the faculty, said: "For the Bachelor of Science (Honours) Culinary Arts Management programme, students undergo internship in the fourth semester under the Experiential Learning course and in the final semester under Culinary Internship. The duration for both is 12 weeks."

"For programmes such as the Bachelor of Science (Honours) Tourism Management, Food Service Management and Hotel Management, a 12-week internship is scheduled during the semester six, the final semester." For each programme, the faculty applies for student placement in the industry based on the university-industry rapport built over the years. Students can also find placements through interviews carried out by companies which participate in "finishing school" programmes organised for final semester students. The faculty does not require students to be given an allowance.

"The evaluation from the industry counts as their marks. Culinary arts students un-

der grading at a final practical exam post-ship," added Alina Shuhaida.

Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI), which focuses on education, requires students to undergo internship either in the form of teaching practice or industry attachment depending on their discipline.

Associate Professor Dr Nor'ashikin Mohd Idrus, director of the Centre for Teaching Practice and Industry at UPSI, said programmes at the university include Bachelor of Education (Major), Bachelor of Science (Major) with Education, Bachelor of Science

and diploma courses. Bachelor of Education (Major) students go through a Teaching Practice (TP) course, which is part of the graduation requirement. It lasts 16 weeks (one semester) and students will undergo the course during semester seven (old structure) or eight weeks in semester six and another eight weeks in semester eight (new structure).

Students also undergo the Teacher Apprenticeship Programme (TAP), which aims to provide an opportunity to understand the school as an educational institution and the role of teachers in class before going for TP. TAP consists of two phases: TAP 1 (two weeks) and TAP 2 (four weeks) which run during the first two and semester four respectively.

For the Bachelor of Education (Major) Counselling programme, students undergo TP, students undergo TP Counselling at schools for 12 weeks. They need to apply for the skill of counselling at UPSI to solve cases at schools. In the 16 weeks, they have to complete a certain number of hours required by the National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT) to be eligible as a counsellor.

Bachelor of Science (Major) with Education programmes, in addition to TP and internship, is compulsory for students to undergo industrial training. "For example, for the Bachelor of Science (Mathematics) with Education programme, the duration of industrial training is eight weeks. It gives students the chance to practise the theory that they have learnt in real situations of the workplace," said Nor'ashikin.

Bachelor of Science (Major) and Diploma students undergo industrial training during the last semester of studies. The duration ranges from eight weeks to 24 weeks depending on the programme.

"For teaching practice, the responsibility to find school placements falls on programme coordinators. The Centre for Teaching Practice and Industry (PULAMI) provides the schools database to the coordinators. For industrial training, students are responsible for finding the organisation with the help of the PULAMI database and networking, and with the aid of programme coordinators."

During teaching practice, students are assessed based on their preparation for lessons, their teaching based on their preparation and their reflection after class. They are also assessed on their contribution to the school, their involvement in co-curricular activities and their personality/ethics.

For industrial training, the student's grade is given based on their daily task, special assignment, marks from industry supervisor and lecturer supervisor, and their final report.

"Some industries do offer jobs to the students even before they graduate. However, for some programmes, students cannot accept employment until they finish the final semester. So UPSI plans to adjust the schedule for the teaching practice and industrial training," added Nor'ashikin.

### SPECIALISED SKILLS

Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT) School of Marine and Environmental Sciences (PPSMS) requires bachelor's degree students from four programmes — Marine Biology, Marine Science, Analytical and Environmental Chemistry, and Biodiversity Conservation and Management — to undergo a 12-week internship at the end of the third or final year (sixth semester).

"Generally, during the fifth semester, students attend a series of briefings by the industrial training coordinators which focuses on how to communicate and find placement, write an e-mail or cover letter and attend an interview. They are also reminded about ethics and professionalism."



UPSI intern (right) manning the registration desk at an event.

The dean, Associate Professor Dr Mariah Mohd Ariffin, said: "At PPSMS, we have a record of companies/agencies which have accepted our students as industrial trainees. We organise PPSMS Career Day and invite potential employers/agencies to share their experience and the requirements that undergraduate students need to meet."

Some companies require certain skills from students, depending on their focus. For example, marine conservation centres require students to have a scuba diving licence with a minimum level of Advanced Scuba Diving. For internship at research institutes and agencies, certain laboratory skills are needed as well.

"Recently, the faculty has placed students for industrial training overseas. This is part of the university's international mobility (outbound) programme. In tandem with UMT's approach to internationalisation, the faculty has been approaching its foreign collaborators via various agreements. Since 2016, 22 students have successfully obtained placements overseas in countries such as Taiwan, Italy, Indonesia, Australia, Japan, Russia, Sri Lanka, Sweden and Thailand. Some of them get assistance/financial support from UMT through its International Centre and Student Affairs Office. In some cases, the students are self-sponsored," added Mariah.

"Sometimes students are exposed to job scopes outside their field of study, and this greatly benefits them as they may have to take up temporary jobs beyond their scope of study while searching for a more related one. During internships, students are exposed first-hand to the working life culture and are more prepared to join the corporate world."

### CLOSE MONITORING

Internship, however, is not compulsory for certain programmes at university.

For example, at Universiti Putra Malaysia's (UPM) Faculty of Economics and Management, only Bachelor of Accounting students undergo industrial training as an integral component of its academic programme while it is an elective for Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) and Bachelor of Economics (BE) students.

Faculty dean Professor Dr Azali Mohamed said: "Accounting students undergo six months' industrial training during their sixth semester (of the eight-semester programme). This is in line with the requirement by the Education Ministry and Malaysian In-

stitute of Accountants. For BBA and BE programmes, students who opt for industrial training undergo two months of it during the inter-semester break at the end of the third year of studies.

"However from the September 2016 intake, industrial training is compulsory for both programmes. BBA and BE students go for industrial training in their final semester for five and four months respectively." Generally, students find the placements by themselves through the Internet, newspapers, advertisements and career talks organised by the faculty and university.

"While we encourage students to find placement on their own, the faculty through the Industrial Training Unit facilitates internship placements and yet their choices before the final decision is made by students.

"We prefer to place accounting students in large- and medium-sized accounting firms (or audit firms) and also organisations with an internal audit department. We discourage students from internship in firms that do not provide an allowance. The amount of allowance should reflect the nature of work and the size of the client base.

"BBA and BE students go for industrial training at well-established organisations in the public or private sector. Preference is for organisations which provide an allowance and are related to their programme," added Azali.

To ensure that students get good internship experience and relevant tasks, the lecturer/supervisor monitors students through daily reports which interns, particularly accounting students, must submit every two months. The lecturer will also communicate with the students and industry supervisor to check on the students' progress and solve problems should they arise.

"For students undergoing internship within the Klang Valley, we encourage faculty supervisors to visit students as this will also help the faculty to understand the intern and the firm better. Students are happy and feel that the faculty cares for their well-being when lecturers pay them a visit.

"We hope students take advantage of internships to develop skills such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving and critical thinking. We hope they gain confidence, mature in their thinking, are able to apply what they have learnt in class and be more prepared for the workplace."



Azali Mohamed



UMT students Ahmad Safuan Salehuddin (centre) and Nur Atiqah Maznan (right) during their internship at Hydrobiological Research Station Chioggia, University of Padova in Italy.