

CARRICK INSTITUTE : DISCIPLINE BASED INITIATIVES



Work Integrated Learning : A national framework for initiatives to support best practice

Griffith University

Dr Merrelyn Bates
 School of Criminology and Criminal Justice
 Phone: + 61 7 373 55820
 Email: M.Bates@griffith.edu.au



Vignette title and details	Professional Practice In Criminology and Criminal Justice Undergraduate workplace experience: Project-based, 1 day/week for 13 weeks (100 hours)
Discipline	Multi-disciplinary: Criminology and Criminal Justice; Welfare and social justice
Employment sector	Security and Justice, Social Justice, Human Services and Welfare, Government, Non-Government
Student numbers	Approx 50 per year
Optional/compulsory	
Credit bearing	10 Credit Point elective but there is also a 10 Credit Point pre-requisite 'Developing Professionally' in semester 1.
Assessment	20% participation 20-60%* reflective journal 20-60%* negotiated assessment, but usually the project completed by the student for the organisation * Students decide their own weighting in consultation with their organisational supervisor and their academic facilitator
Payment	No payment
Number of staff involved	One academic convenor One part-time 40% administrative assistant School academic staff involved as academic facilitators and mark the project component of the student's work If 50 students on placement, then 49-50 organisational supervisors
Key Words	Law; practicum; welfare; assessment; credit bearing; professional practice;

Overview

Professional Practice commenced in the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice in 1994 as a final year elective in the Bachelor of Criminology and Criminal Justice. This course has provided an opportunity for students to be exposed to organisations that employ criminology graduates and be involved in real work through the project that the organisation requires. All students wanting to complete *Professional Practice* must complete the pre-requisite *Developing Professionally*, which is designed to equip students with knowledge and skills about how to prepare for future employment, understand organisational cultures, and orient themselves for becoming an autonomous professional.

Structure of program

Following the preparation in semester one, we commence our 100 hours of organisational contact with a workshop, that begins with students and is followed by the supervisors joining us for morning tea, with all participants continuing to be involved for the rest of the morning. This allows participants an opportunity to meet, be briefed on expectations, share information, and at times form alliances because projects from different organisations can be addressing similar issues.

It is essential that the practice experience be conducted over a number of weeks and not as a block period. It has been our experience that an intensive placement causes the student to focus entirely on their work project and does not provide the same opportunities for being exposed to the work culture with opportunities for networking with other staff and personnel.

Students return to the university for Reflective Workshops in weeks five and nine of the placement and these workshops focus the students on the learning that is occurring as a result of their project and their interactions with staff. It also provides the university convenor with an opportunity to ensure that all students are in educationally sound placements and have safe work environments. A workshop for the supervisors is also offered in week 7 so that they are reaffirmed as partners in this educational experience and again this provides the opportunity to ensure that all expectations of students and their learning are being realistic.

At the end of the placement a further workshop is conducted to debrief all participants and again we start the workshop with students, have the supervisors join us for morning tea with the academic facilitators joining us just before lunch. In this final process it not only has a reflective component but it also contains an evaluative component to ensure that all participants can contribute to the ongoing efficacy of this program.

Special features

In the pre-placement semester, each student is interviewed, their academic record checked, and their preferences for practice experience discussed. Each student is individually matched: firstly, to a supervisor who provides a sound educational experience for the student and his/her abilities; secondly, to the project requirements so that the student is not only successful in their outcomes but is challenged to achieve beyond her/his initial expectations. An analysis of research data collected over many years has identified that a successful practice experiences requires that the student be involved in a project that has relevance, is problem-based, and demands he / she makes choices and acts upon those choices with consequences that can be reflected upon.

Supervisor feedback about our structure emphasises the value of our workshops and the focus on reflective practice and 'focussing experience for specific purpose...' They have commented that including supervisors in the workshops and having a workshop just for the supervisors 'is well worth attending' because it helps them to keep a focus on the educational component of the experience. Their feedback about the one-day a week practice experience is that it allows their supervision of the project to be an easier task and that, as a general rule, it 'allowed the opportunity for more extensive work to be completed than would otherwise be possible'.

Student feedback is invariably positive both as a learning experience, a career investigation and as personal growth, for example, 'I became aware that I require a job that does not involve sitting behind a desk for the entire workday'; 'In a work environment there is a lot of pressure to meet deadlines and priorities are essential. This is especially as I keep getting interrupted by the many visitors who stream through the office everyday'; 'At times I felt extremely stressed, tired or incapable. I have had to learn to deal with these emotions...'; 'I am becoming more assertive. ... I realise that whatever I write...will have consequences'; and 'I enjoyed the challenges... It allowed me to step outside my comfort zone...'

Future work

As the program continues, and with the additional offering of the pre-requisite course *Developing Professionally*, there is now an opportunity for a greater development of work self-efficacy skills. At this point in time, we do not intend to make the program compulsory for all students but with a greater emphasis on career outcomes from first year, we do expect that students will be more aware of the benefits associated with participating. We will continue to work from the position of where students wish to gain their practice experience and as a result continue to expand our partners in this educational opportunity. The success of the program is the result of the ongoing constructive partnerships between individuals across both the University and the government and non-government sector. It is that commitment and experience that has fostered the long-term relationships which allows this program to be so successful for all the parties involved – students, academics, supervisors and all other staff from partner organisations.