



### Queensland University of Technology

Andrew Paltridge (pictured right)  
 Director of Studies,  
 Faculty of Business, Queensland University of  
 Technology  
 Email: [a.paltridge@qut.edu.au](mailto:a.paltridge@qut.edu.au)



Joanne Venturato  
 Coordinator, Business Advantage Program  
 Faculty of Business, Queensland University of  
 Technology  
 Email: [Bus.advantage@qut.edu.au](mailto:Bus.advantage@qut.edu.au)

<b>Vignette title and details</b>	Business Advantage Program
<b>Discipline</b>	Multiple business disciplines
<b>Employment sector</b>	Multi-sector
<b>Student numbers</b>	Approximately 500–600 per year in development modules Approximately 1700–2000 per year subscribed to e-newsletter Approximately 50 students involved in ancillary/spin-off activities
<b>Optional/compulsory</b>	Optional.
<b>Credit bearing</b>	Students choose to undertake activities on a non-award, voluntary basis.
<b>Assessment</b>	Varied assessment depending on topic. Assessment items include personal action plans, specific topic assignments such as developing a budget or resume, plus in-class exercises.
<b>Payment</b>	Programs are provided free to students. All costs associated with the program are covered by the Faculty of Business.
<b>Number of staff involved</b>	1 full-time staff member 9–10 internal/external facilitators running modules Various mentors as required
<b>Weblink</b>	<a href="http://www.bus.qut.edu.au/study/advantage/">http://www.bus.qut.edu.au/study/advantage/</a>
<b>Key Words</b>	Extra-curricular; generic skills; graduate capabilities; engagement; personal development; professional development; student experience; first-year experience; community engagement

## Overview

The Business Advantage Program was established in the QUT Faculty of Business in 2004. It is a voluntary, non-award, student centred program aimed at helping students draw more from their university experience. The program provides students with a range of structured and unstructured learning experiences and experiential activities which assist with personal and professional development. It connects students with each other outside of their academic disciplines and engages them with their university, community and professions in empowering ways. The program is open to all Business students regardless of study program, attendance mode or background and the level of involvement of individuals is dependant on their initiative and willingness to challenge themselves.

## Structure of program

The Business Advantage Program consists of a range of elements including structured development modules, external development programs, student associations and support for student projects/ideas, and an e-newsletter promoting development opportunities.

The development modules form the core of the program and consist of a series of short courses (4-6 weeks, 2 hours per week duration) focusing on generic skills such as leadership, teamwork, public speaking, entrepreneurship, self assessment, career planning and community engagement.

The module format is very interactive, using external facilitators and guest speakers, group discussion, reflection and experiential activities. The programs provide participants with an introduction to the topic at hand, and a safe, open and interactive environment in which to explore the issues with their peers. Participants are then encouraged to continue to develop their interest in the topic through personal action plans.

Structured experiential activities, such as the Young Achievement Australia (YAA) Business Skills Program and participation on student association or project committees, gives participants an insight into business practices. These activities usually provide opportunities to take on different roles and to apply discipline knowledge to a project or activity where outcomes and goals must be achieved. Learning occurs at deeper levels and great strides can be made in the development of soft skills which are critical to future work success.

## Special features

Feedback from participants suggest the programs provides great value not only in skill and knowledge development but also in bringing a diverse range of students together outside of the pressures of formal academic activity. Essentially, Business Advantage provides 'community spaces' where like-minded people can share ideas and extend their networks. The program has led many participants to explore or pursue new career paths that they may not have originally considered, as well as putting their talents and skills to use in a broader community context through volunteering or community service initiatives.

There is also anecdotal evidence that the program is particularly helpful to first year students in initiating new friendships and contacts in a challenging, new environment. Additionally, participants value the opportunity to hear from, and work with, guest speakers from industry, government and community sectors. These guest speakers have also benefitted through their interactions with "Y" generation, thereby giving them an insight into the thoughts, values and interests of their future employees.

## Future work

There is much scope to expand the program to include more learning experiences and advanced modules/activities. There is also interest from other disciplines/faculties who see benefit in providing this additional skill training to their students in preparing them for the work place. However, expansion is limited by resourcing available to support the program both in terms of financial funding and human resources.

## Additional Insights

The Business Advantage Program is a unique model combining service-learning principles and skill development which has the added benefits of building 'community' and engagement amongst students. Many long-lasting friendships and collaborative networks have formed as a result of the program and these will no doubt be of benefit to graduates as they build their careers in their chosen professions.