

Internship courses: What's in a name? **Theme: Pedagogic development**

Internship courses attract increasing student interest. They differ markedly from our staple courses, and we need to understand more about how they work and how they can be further developed. Graduate School internship course coordinator Catia Gregoratti from the Department of Political Science and Lisa Eklund from the Department of Sociology (also teaching at Graduate School) were recently granted some Faculty funding to start this important work. Here are some of their findings.



Catia Gregoratti



Lisa Eklund

We all know of colleagues in our respective departments who coordinate one or more internship courses. From our pedagogical trainings we may also associate internship courses with the notion of *experiential learning*, but few probably know how many internship courses we have within our Faculty or even what an internship course entails in practice. What exactly are the courses that our students follow while undertaking the internship? What are their learning outcomes? And what teaching and learning activities are used to support students' learning?

These are just some of the questions that informed a pedagogy research project that we jointly carried out in 2016 with financial assistance from the Faculty of Social Sciences (henceforth the Faculty). In what follows, we outline some of the main research findings that emerge out of a mapping exercise and a content analysis of all the syllabi of all the internship courses within the Faculty, three focus groups as well as a survey sent to students who did not undertake an internship. With this article we hope to pique some curiosity in what is a substantive but often not very visible or much talked about area of pedagogical work.

Armed with some precious research time, support from Graduate School, as well as superb voluntary research assistance from Lyudmyla Khrenova, our project commenced with a broad mapping of internship courses offered within the Faculty. The earliest syllabi we could find were two syllabi approved by the Board of the Department of Political Science back in 2007. In 2016, the Faculty offered 42 internship courses with one programme director indicating that at least two more were "under development". The profile of coordinators and teachers on these courses is gendered. According to the data we have collected, most courses are taught by women (59 %). Moreover, staff teaching on the courses are often employed as senior lecturers (63 %), while professors are the only staff category not represented. Like Ross Perlin – the author of the widely acclaimed book *Internship Nation* – we can't help but wondering if there is a distinct lack of prestige associated with developing and teaching on internship courses.

The content analysis of 35 publicly available syllabi revealed common patterns but also what we deem to be important silences. The vast majority of syllabi state that it is the responsibility of students to identify a host organisation. Learning objectives tend to converge around the aim of "applying theory to practice", while some syllabi go further and talk about "linkages between theory and practice", suggesting a cross-fertilisation between the two. What theories the students should take to the internship or how to allow for theory-practice linkages can hardly be inferred from the syllabi alone, as only a handful specify clear TLAs or course literature. Another important observation that transpires

from our study of the syllabi is that most courses seem to take place immediately before the thesis course, but only one syllabus explicitly encourages students to think of the internship as an experience that can enable thinking around the formulation of a thesis topic, a research question, or even data collection.

The second step of our project involved a closer and more focused study of the set-up of internship courses in or closely related to Development Studies, which is the study area where much of our (the authors of this text) teaching and research takes place. To this end, we organised three focus groups respectively with support staff and teachers, bachelor students and master students. The discussions with support staff and teachers highlighted the very diverse ways in which internship courses can be set-up and the different TLA that can underpin them. Some courses are tightly structured around a course that runs in parallel to the internship and asks students to conduct for example a project evaluation, while others are more laissez-faire, simply expecting the submission of a summative report at the end of the internship. The majority of the courses however structure TLAs around a set of reflection papers followed by a larger writing project in the form of a report. Other important points transpiring from these discussions pointed to difficulties in promoting collaborative learning across the whole internship class as well as the flexibility that teachers have to exercise when students are unable to find the time to complete assigned coursework.

On their part, students who went on an internship suggested that their main motivation for doing an internship was to get work experience in “the real world” – a widely repeated phrase. Most students reported having found the internship on their own with different levels of support from the University, teachers and social networks. Across the board our focus group participants indicated they had learnt something, even if this learning strayed away from the learning objectives laid out in course syllabi. When eliciting reflections some students recalled having “applied the tools learnt at the University”, however many also spoke about “self-discipline”, “taking responsibilities”, and “working in an organisation”. Inevitably, discussions also pivoted on the amount of work students are asked to perform throughout the internship. One student for example recollected “fighting deadlines”, while another remembered feeling wedged between the demands of the internship host and the University. We also dared to initiate a discussion on what an ideal internship course would look like. Many students seemed to want a University with the capacity to better vet internship hosts and have dialogues with them on a regular basis. During the internship they also longed for better spaces to share experiences and enter into

dialogue with each other, and many resorted to communicating with each other on social media platforms such as Facebook.

And what about students who haven’t enjoyed the privilege of doing an internship and enrolling in an internship course? To find out what the obstacles for undertaking an internship were, we also conducted an online survey among 72 students registered in the Bachelor’s programme in Development Studies (BIDS) and the three programmes offered by the Graduate School who had not undertaken an internship. We excluded the Master’s programme in International Development and Management (LUMID) because internships are a mandatory component of the programme. Among the 45 students who responded, 71 % initially wanted to take an internship course. Reasons deemed “very important” or “rather important” for not doing so are captured in Figure 1.

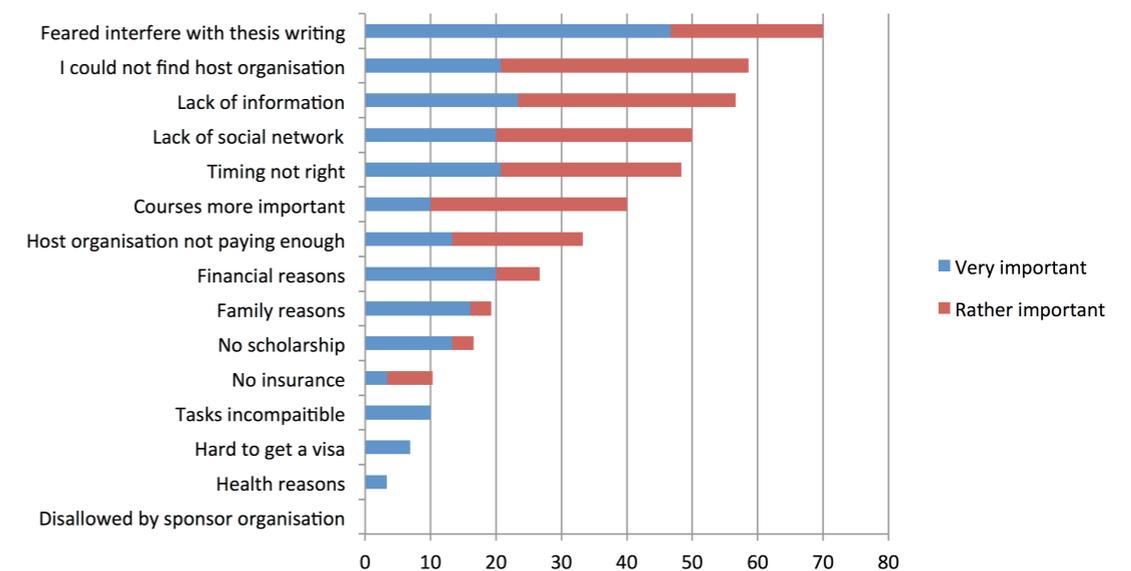


Figure 1. Reason for not undertaking an internship (per cent giving the answer)

As seen from Figure 1, fears that the internship would interfere with the thesis was the most commonly stated reason for not undertaking an internship, combined with not being able to find a host organisation and lacking information and a conducive social network. Interestingly, and against a background of literature that often labels these students as those who “can’t pay to play”, financial reasons do not feature as highly as we originally expected.

Figure 2 illustrates the number of hours students spent looking for an internship. While almost half the student spent less than 10 hours looking for internships,

17% spent close to a week and another 17 % spent more than a week. One student even commented: “I’m not sure [how many hours I spent], but I have some regrets: it influenced my studies negatively”.

As seen from Figure 3, in the end 40 % never contacted an organisation, another 40 % contacted 1-5 organisations and 17 % contacted 6-10 organisations. One student contacted 20-25 organisations to no avail. These data suggest that the responsibility for finding a host organisation falls heavy on some students.

A participant in one of our focus groups voiced a poignant concern: “internship courses were squeezed into several programmes as afterthoughts”. While we do not have arguments for or against this contention, what our research reveals is that internship courses have mushroomed and are likely to be part of Faculty programmes for the foreseeable future. Moreover, whether successful in securing an internship or not, an overwhelming number of students in Development Studies wish to secure an internship, spending a considerable amount of time looking for a host. How do we move forward from here? First of all, we think the learning objectives of these courses should be clearly discussed with each student prior to and during the internship. Secondly, we need to consider what demands may be placed on students who are working full-time and reportedly struggle to find the time to complete coursework. Lastly we may wish to reflect on whether the learning management tools we have at our disposal – e-mails, Live@Lund or LUVIT – can effectively be harnessed to create e-classrooms. We believe that these issues should continue to animate our collective thinking and pedagogical discussions across departments and programmes.

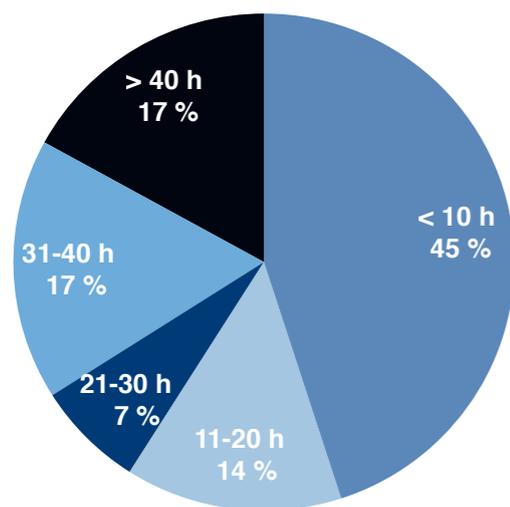


Figure 2. Hours spent looking for internships

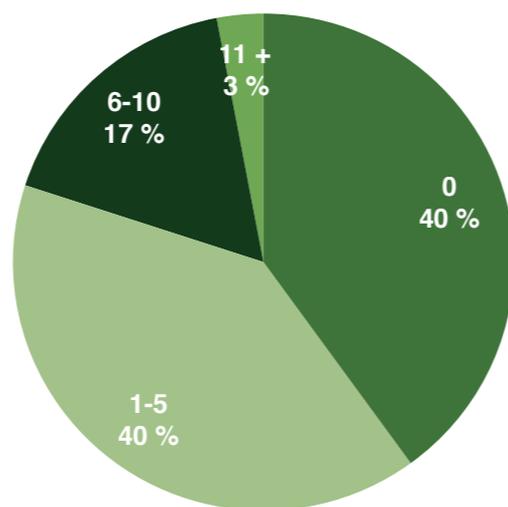


Figure 3. Number of organisations contacted

Extract from the formal course syllabus regulating SIMR41, Social Science: Internship, 30 credits – the main Graduate School internship course.

Learning outcomes

On completion of the course, the student shall be able to:

- demonstrate a thorough practical knowledge about activities and work procedures of the organisation where the internship takes place
- demonstrate a deeper understanding of earlier parts of the education within the programme
- demonstrate an ability to use appropriate theories and methods in conducting applied studies
- communicate results of learning and research processes to different kinds of recipients within given time frames, both in writing and orally

Course content

The student spends one term in a relevant organisation and is during this period continuously engaged in the organisation’s activities, working with qualified tasks related to the programme (Global Studies, Development Studies or Social Studies of Gender) and conducting an independent study. The student should be guided and supported by a supervisor appointed by the organisation in which the internship takes place.

Course design

The student is required to write an independent study of the organisation and its work practices in English, with explicit reference to earlier parts of the education within the programme and to relevant literature. The study is to be discussed and examined at a seminar.

Assessment

As a compulsory part of the course the student shall:

1. Present an introduction to, and description of, the internship.
2. Present an outline of the topic for the independent study