Abstract

The objective of the research that was undertaken was to determine the most effective ways to encourage Bachelor of Business students to undertake an Industry Based Learning (IBL) marketing placement given recent changes to government policy relating to IBL. The paper begins by considering the current context in which (IBL) programs are being offered. It briefly examines the political, economy, and social factors that impact on IBL as well as looking at what some of the universities in Melbourne are offering their business students in the form of IBL, or coop learning opportunities.

A small number of past Marketing IBL students have responded to a survey about their IBL experiences and how it assisted them personally and career wise. Dresser and Keeling’s (2004) categorisations for the benefits of IBL have been used to assist in organising and classifying the graduates’ responses. In addition the academic achievements and graduate outcomes for Marketing students who have completed IBL have been compared with the outcomes for students who have not done an IBL placement.

The results from the external analysis have been combined with the results of the survey to develop a promotional campaign aimed at selling the advantages of undertaking an IBL placement, despite the user pay system that is being enforced upon universities by the changes in the government regulations.

Introduction

The external environment and its impact on higher education have changed in many ways. When one considers the external environment one needs to think quite broadly and incorporate a variety of factors such as the political, economic and social environments in addition to competitors. On the political front the Nelson Reforms are significantly impacting on university funding. In the future the funding model will include consideration of retention rates as well as graduate employability. Work experience in industry (WEI) is defined by Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) as work undertaken as part of a course of study. Under the new guidelines students can not be charged a student contribution amount (Camara n.d.) despite the fact that until now students have been charged the standard HECS fee for undertaking such placements as part of their course of study. However a tuition fee may be charged (post July 2005) as long as the ‘learning and performance is not directed by the provider, but support is received from the provider’ (DEST 2004).

There are increasingly pressures on students to have part time employment that will support them throughout their undergraduate studies. Many students have substantial work experience as well as substantial living expenses and growing HECS debts. According to McInnis and Hartley (2002) many full time undergraduate students are
spending more hours in paid employment than in the past, in order to sustain themselves during their studies. Students’ motivations for seeking paid employment vary and include reasons such as gaining relevant experience for employment after graduation as well as supplementing income from government benefits such as Austudy or the Youth Allowance. However McInnis and Hartley (2002) also found that a lot of students were in jobs with relatively low pay and that were not directly related to the course in which they were enrolled. On the other hand, when undergraduate students did find vocational jobs that related to their field of studies, they would try to complete their studies concurrently with full time work.

For many years, the second tier universities that have historical links with industry such as Swinburne University, RMIT and Victoria University, were the only ones to offer cooperative education, sandwich year or Industry Based Learning (IBL). Swinburne University of Technology has been a pioneer in IBL and has been operating IBL programs for over 40 years. The Faculty of Business, Hawthorn first offered IBL in 1988.

Monash University and the University of Melbourne have been offering students the opportunity to undertake a year of work experience over the last decade. However it is probably in the last 2 years that this has been happening more aggressively, with other universities such as Latrobe and Deakin also seeking to offer relevant work experience to their students. Providing IBL is not just a matter of getting students work but a matter of assisting students with some form of work-integrated learning. Not all universities provide student support through Coop or IBL managers and academic mentors, nor is there assessment which requires students to reflect on their learning experiences through the workplace.

In the Faculty of Business and Enterprise at Swinburne, Hawthorn, the IBL manager advertises vacancies from established employers and negotiates new positions through a range of strategies, also working individually with students who wish to try to secure their own placement. Once a student wins a placement an academic mentor is assigned to them for the duration of their placement. The academic mentor sets up a regular pattern of communication generally by email and phone, and visits the student in the workplace twice during a twelve month placement. A third visit is undertaken by the IBL manager to gather information about the student’s position and to reinforce the commitment of the Faculty in its duty of care to its IBL students. Where there are difficulties in a placement the IBL manager and/or the academic mentor visit the workplace to negotiate resolution of difficulties or conflicts. At the conclusion of a placement, the academic mentor assesses the workplace report written by the IBL student, and the result is entered on the student’s academic record.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Marketing jobs advertised</th>
<th>Marketing positions won</th>
<th>Proportion won</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2001/2</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>31.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002/3</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>51.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003/4</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>29.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004/5</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>47.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Number of marketing IBL positions advertised and won 2000-2005

Table 1 shows that the number of marketing IBL placements in the Faculty has remained fairly steady over the last 4 years. However the number of positions won by
Swinburne Hawthorn students has varied, but is generally less than 50% and as low as 30%. If Swinburne is unable to provide students to fill vacancies even loyal employers will approach other universities.

Classroom learning needs to be supplemented by real work experience in order to adequately prepare students to become effective employees (Ram 2004). Various IBL programs can provide work experience opportunities, but IBL is now in the mature phase of the product life cycle (Coll and Eames 2004). The issue of the continued viability of IBL is not a new one (Freeman 1998, Atchison and Gotleib 2004, Coll and Eames 2004) especially in light of changes in the external environment that impact on universities, businesses and students. Coll and Eames (2004) talk about marketing of IBL both internally within the educational institution and externally to funding providers such as government. The authors of this paper felt that in the current environment it is very important to encourage quality students to consider applying for and undertaking an IBL placement and this provides the focus for the current paper – how does one successfully market the IBL program?

Benefits of IBL

Wilson (1989) reviewed literature published during the first 25 years of IBL and found that the research concluded that participation in IBL programs assisted students in 1. developing realistic career goals, 2. completing their courses, 3. achieving better academic results, 4. improving self confidence and knowledge of the workplace and work related skills, and 5. obtaining higher starting salaries. Kay (2004) identified the benefits of IBL to students as the opportunity to develop workplace skills, career directions, personal growth, job skills, income and networks. Furthermore Dressler and Keeling (2004) undertook a review of research relating to the benefits of IBL to students and developed a summary of outcomes for students who complete an IBL program. Four key areas of benefit are identified: academic benefits, personal skills benefits, career benefits and work skill benefits. As this is the model that has been used to analyse the data for this paper, the four key benefits are explained below.

Academic benefits mean that improvement can be seen in various areas such as commitment to educational goals, putting theories into practice, attachment to the university, improved students motivation to learn, ability to solve problems and performance in the classroom. Personal skill benefits improve generic skills such as independence, communication skills, decision making, confidence, teamwork, ethical behaviour, and taking responsibility. Career benefits provide students with the opportunity to improve their career planning and decision making, the opportunity to experience discipline related career areas, impacts on job search and quality of position after graduation, as well as improving career progression and salaries. Work skill benefits give students the ability to improve their work related skills such technological skills, understanding organisational culture, networking and building relationships, assuming a functional role, communicating in the business environment and understanding job requirements. This allows students to develop strong work ethics and confidence in their own ability that new graduates rarely possess (Dressler and Keeling 2004).

Weisz (2001) claims that co-op programs allow students to integrate work experience with their academic learning thereby facilitating deep learning. She undertook a study
of business students (economics and finance) and found that student grades did in fact improve significantly after completion of a co-op year with fewer students adopting a surface approach to learning. In addition Weisz (2001) found that 90% of students who had completed IBL had found discipline related work within one month of actively seeking employment compared to 19% of non IBL graduates.

Methodology

In order to understand the benefits to students of IBL from the students’ perspective all Marketing students who undertook an IBL placement between 1997 and 2003 were contacted in September 2004. A total of 142 Swinburne Bachelor of Business graduates were invited to participate in an on-line survey consisting of several open ended questions. The aim of the survey was get an understanding of how completing IBL had benefited students. A total of 18 usable responses were received. The response rate was somewhat disappointing; however the responses that were received were detailed, and provided rich data for analysis.

Findings

Of the students who completed the survey:
- 72% had completed Marketing as their major Business discipline (13 students)
- 13 out of the 18 students had completed a placement of at least one year.
- Over half of the respondents claimed they had some sales and/or marketing related work experience prior to their IBL placement.

The responses to the questions posed in the survey have been classified according to Dressler and Keeling’s model (2004).

Academic benefits

If IBL did not have any academic benefits one would wonder why universities put so much time and effort into providing IBL programs. Respondents found several academic benefits from completing an IBL, however they commented more on the other three benefit areas. Graduates said that the IBL placement allowed them to practise what they had learnt so far in their courses - the theory started to make more sense when put into practice. They also felt that IBL made it easier to finish their degree when returning to Uni because they had had the hands/on practical experience.

It has been suggested that students do at least a grade better after completion of IBL as they understand the concepts taught better and can apply them to their ‘real world’ experiences offering opportunities for deep rather than surface learning (Weisz 2001). When looking at the results for students graduating from the Bachelor of Business (Marketing) at Swinburne University of Technology (Hawthorn) between 2000 and 2003 the following can be observed. For students who have completed either a six or twelve month IBL placement (n = 18) the average mark prior to IBL is 71.7 increasing to 75.3 after the placement. This difference is significant at 0.05 (p = 0.000) when a paired two sample means t test is performed.

For Business students who did not do an IBL placement (n = 148), the average marks for the first two years have been compared with the average mark in the final year of studies, based on the assumption that IBL is taken at the end of the second year. The
average mark for the first two years of the course for students who have not undertaken IBL is 63.8, increasing to 67.1 in the final year. This difference is significant at 0.05 (p = 0.000) when a paired two sample means t test is performed.

When comparing the two cohorts (those who have completed IBL with those who have not) using a t test for two samples, there is a significant difference in students’ performances both before and after IBL when tested at 0.05. (Pre IBL: $\mu_{\text{non-IBL}} = 63.8$, $\mu_{\text{IBL}} = 71.7$, p = 0.000. Post IBL: $\mu_{\text{non-IBL}} = 67.1$, $\mu_{\text{IBL}} = 75.3$, p = 0.000.)

It is interesting that the both cohorts perform significantly better in their final year of studies than in the first two years and although there is a significant difference in overall performance of the IBL students when compared to the non IBL students, overall the patterns of improvement are not significantly influenced by the IBL experience. However this conclusion needs to be treated with caution, as the sample sizes for the two cohorts are very different and many students’ results could not be included in the analysis as incomplete records were received from the registrar. On the other hand one could argue that in order to go from a pass grade average to a credit grade average (as is the case for the non IBL graduates) is not as challenging as going from a credit grade average to a distinction grade average (for the IBL graduates) although both cohorts improved on average by about 4 marks.

**Personal skill benefits**

Respondents said that IBL assisted them by developing their communication skills, getting real experience that could not be learnt from a textbook, learning on the job, putting the theory into practice, interacting with people in a professional environment, and learning basic office etiquette. IBL enabled graduates to get other marketing jobs as they had experience about which they could confidently talk in interviews. IBL also gave students the opportunity to identify what they liked doing and did not like doing in a work situation, as well as the confidence to take on new risks and challenges in their post graduation professional roles.

**Career benefits**

Respondents were able to identify many career benefits. Employability logically falls into this category but will be dealt with separately below. Participating in and completing an IBL placement gave students the opportunity to gain practical experience and to understand the flexibility of thinking required in the ‘real world’.

IBL also gave students exposure to the diverse marketing roles in industry and to the real marketing skills that aren’t taught in the undergraduate degree, such as project management and interpersonal skills. Respondents felt that IBL gave them a chance to see exactly what goes on within their professional fields of interest, to develop relationships with experienced professionals and generally learn the ropes within a relatively protected environment. One graduate also commented that it was valuable experience working in a smaller organisation, since large organisations do not always provide the breadth of experience that smaller organisations can provide.

Respondents were asked to comment on how their IBL placement had affected their employment choices. IBL assisted in clarifying not only that marketing was the preferred career but also which aspects of marketing would be sought in a graduate position. This is consistent with the findings of McPhee and Mouzakis (2004).
Prospects were also enhanced for some respondents who obtained promotion fairly early on in the company where they had done their IBL placement and stayed on for a graduate position.

Employability
The respondents indicated that:
- 67% continued to work with the IBL employer in some capacity after the formal completion of their IBL placement (12 out of 18),
- 78% had been offered their first graduate job BEFORE completing their degree (14 respondents), and
- 17 out of 18 respondents indicated that they were currently employed with 15 of the 17 respondents in either marketing or marketing-related positions.

The GCCA (Graduate Careers Council of Australia) conducts a destination survey of graduating tertiary students a few months after completion. Table 2 shows partial results for the 4 year period 2000-2003 (Green et al 2004).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discipline</th>
<th>Working Full time</th>
<th>Working part time</th>
<th>Seeking work</th>
<th>Unavailable for work</th>
<th>Further study</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BBus</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BBus(Accounting)</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BBus(HRM)</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BBus(Marketing)</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Employment status for graduating Business students

It is interesting to compare the results for the IBL students with the general cohort. For the BBus and BBus(Marketing) about 63% of students were in full time employment (and this was not necessarily discipline related employment) whereas of the IBL students, 78% had been offered their first graduate job before completing their degree and 88% of those currently employed (94% of the sample) were in marketing or marketing-related employment. This is significantly higher than for any other cohort in the GCCQ survey. These findings are consistent with those of Weisz (2002) and Bowes and Harvey (1999) as well as research regarding IBL in other discipline areas for example McPhee and Mouzakis (2004).

Graduates were asked about their graduate employment prospects since IBL and how the IBL experience affected the prospects. In general respondents agreed that prospects were enhanced and IBL gave them a distinct advantage over graduates with no course-related work experience. One student commented that although IBL gave a definite advantage in competing for the first graduate job, having done IBL would not be of particular advantage five years on. Others commented that the actual benefit is having relevant experience to talk about in graduate interviews and the skill set and confidence to progress through a professional career faster than if there had been no IBL experience.

Work skill benefits
Undertaking a professional work experience placement should give students many opportunities to develop a variety of work skills. Respondents found that the IBL
placement allowed them to improve their business acumen, build relationships, understand the culture and structures of the workplace and industry, and learn accepted ‘standards of practice’. One respondent wrote that IBL ‘gives you the opportunity to make contacts in the business arena, utilise skills learnt at uni, (make the) transition from theoretical to practical skill, and develop work ethics’.

Furthermore students said that IBL provided them with the opportunity to gain business maturity within the workforce which one cannot get through studying; it prepared them for employment and opened their eyes to what is expected of an employee. Gaining an understanding of how the business world works, learning how to relate to people in all sorts of positions and industries were other benefit of the experience. Students found the whole process of applying for IBL jobs, preparing a resume, and being interviewed beneficial.

General comments
The final question of the survey asked graduates if they had any further comments. Fourteen students chose to provide a response and all of these were extremely positive and included several references to the fact that IBL provided them with a very valuable experience and that it should be mandatory for all students, however it appeared that not all undergraduate students were aware of the program and its benefits.

Discussion
The question remains ‘How do we market IBL to marketing graduates?’ Kotler et al 2004 says that different people seek different benefits from the same product and therefore we must keep this in mind when developing our marketing campaign.

Evidence has been provided for the following:
• Due to changes in government policy from July 2005 students will need to pay $3000 to undertake an IBL placement. Therefore it is important that the Faculty shows students the return on their investment and highlights the many and varied benefits of undertaking an IBL placement.
• The number of marketing IBL positions advertised remains stable around 60 placements per annum. Despite changes in the external environment businesses value and support the IBL program.
• A limited number of graduates have provided unsolicited evidence to show that the benefits from undertaking a placement are multifaceted and include academic, personal, career and work skill benefits. This is consistent with published research.
• IBL gives students experience in the work force which allowed them to better understand the various roles and associated responsibilities which assisted them when applying for permanent positions.
• Students who have undertaken IBL placements are more likely to gain employment faster and in marketing related positions than students who have not undertaken a placement.

It will be a challenge to create a campaign that will get the attention of the relevant students, which are those with a marketing major and credit grade average. To determine the most effective marketing campaign we will need to incorporate rational
and emotional appeal (Kotler et al 2004) that is appeal to both the students’ self interest and also stir up some emotions that will encourage applications. We will also need to be cognisant of the AIDA model – gain Attention, hold Interest, arouse Desire and elicit Action, however it is unlikely that this can all be achieved using one message or one medium. Committing to IBL is a high involvement decision for students and is unlikely to be made quickly, so when developing a marketing campaign it is important to keep in mind that students will need to be reminded about IBL and its benefits over a period of time – up to 18 months or more from becoming aware of the program to applying for the program. Table 3 provides an outline of the proposed campaign.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>When</th>
<th>What</th>
<th>Why</th>
<th>Who/how</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Open Day and Orientation</td>
<td>General information about the availability of IBL as an option</td>
<td>Create awareness</td>
<td>Print based</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientation</td>
<td>General information about the availability of IBL as an option</td>
<td>Create awareness</td>
<td>IBL coordinator to present to students en mass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>General benefits of IBL, eg improve confidence and workplace</td>
<td>and interest</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>understanding as well as employability prospects</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During first year</td>
<td>Article in newsletter, sent each semester to students. Perhaps a</td>
<td>Interest and</td>
<td>Print based</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>profile of a student currently on placement</td>
<td>desire</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End of first year</td>
<td>IBL flyer with options and details of benefits using academic, personal, workplace and career benefits to be sent with reenrolment packs – still quite general</td>
<td>Interest, desire and action</td>
<td>Print based</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During first semester of second year</td>
<td>Announcements on Blackboard (online subject platform – covering all stage 2 Marketing subjects) and students portal alerting students to IBL information seminars and general benefits of IBL</td>
<td>Desire and action</td>
<td>Electronic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During first semester of second year</td>
<td>IBL information sessions highlighting the benefits of undertaking IBL – specific details to be presented</td>
<td>Desire and action</td>
<td>Students who have completed IBL</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
During first semester of second year  
Resume writing and interview techniques seminar for eligible students  
Action  
IBL coordinator/Careers staff

During first semester of second year  
Individual appointments with eligible students to highlight specific benefits of IBL  
Desire and action  
IBL coordinator

Second semester of second year  
Notices sent to eligible students electronically via student portal advertising positions  
Interest and desire  
Electronic

General  
Posters around campus highlighting exciting student placements and general benefits of IBL  
Interest and desire  
Print based

General  
Notices on Faculty noticeboard and also sent to students electronically via student portal advertising positions  
Interest and desire  
Print based

Table 3: Proposed marketing campaign

The effectiveness of many of these activities can be measured. For example the number of brochures and information sheets distributed, attendance at information sessions and seminars, the number of enquiries fielded by the IBL manager, the number of interviews and appointments, and the number of applications received can all be recorded and compared to historical data.

Conclusion

This paper has highlighted some of the changes in the external environment that are making the tasks of offering IBL placements as well as appealing to students more difficult. Industry support remains strong for the IBL program and graduates have found the program invaluable, therefore there is clearly a demand to be met. However selling the IBL program has become and will continue to be challenging. It is important to sow the seeds early, ensure that all eligible students are aware of the program and the benefits of undertaking a placement, and that students understand that the rewards of completing an IBL far outweigh the costs.

References

Bowes, L. and Harvey, L. (1999), *The impact of sandwich education on the activities of graduates six months post graduation*. Centre for research into quality, University of Central England in Birmingham


