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# RESEARCH REPORT: ADDRESSING LA TROBE UNIVERSITY'S INTERNSHIP ISSUE

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## Issue identified

The pandemic has caused many media and communication organisations to shut down or postpone internships, and the remaining internships that have gone remote are scarce. Undergraduate students may graduate without completing an internship and be less employable, a negative outcome that is opposite of La Trobe's core objective of student employability, and a failure to achieve stated objectives and adhere to stated values. Therefore, threatening the loss of trust in students, a key stakeholder group.

**Research question:** To investigate existing communication and administrative barriers preventing undergraduate students being empowered with knowledge concerning the process of sourcing and authorising remote internships during pandemic restrictions?

## Focus group Key Findings

- PR Students are unlikely to read or make use of emails regarding internships, *"they have sent emails maybe, but I don't really read them"* because opportunities are circulated by the journalism coordinator and are largely irrelevant to the PR major.
- Students find La Trobe's website difficult to navigate to find specific information about sourcing internships, with many students unaware of opportunities and resources like workshops.
- Students are uncertain if they need to complete an internship as a requirement of graduation. R3 *"Because I do PR as a major, I don't think you have to do [an internship] to complete your degree".* R1 *"you don't?"* R2 *"I thought you do?"*
- Respondents were confused about co-ordinating self-sourced internships with the university to be credited as part of the degree and were unsure of where to seek further information. *"I don't really know what the Uni offers to help you with internships."*

See Appendix A for focus group questions.

## Survey Key Findings

- 92.31% of respondents (50% 'strongly agreed', 42.31% 'agreed') said discipline coordinators should circulate emails regarding discipline specific internship opportunities.
- 92.31% of respondents (53.85% 'strongly agreed', 38.46% 'agreed') said internship opportunities should be discussed in relevant classes.
- 96.16% of respondents (53.85% 'strongly agreed', 42.31% 'agreed') said information about who to contact about internships needs to be clearer.
- Two undergraduate journalism students highlighted the confusion and communication issues La Trobe is currently having around internships *"I feel that there has been no discussion whatsoever about internships this year despite many still being available remotely. I've sourced one myself and have informed the uni about it, however got no response about whether it's a good internship to take up which defeats the purpose of informing the uni of any work placement you take for insurance purposes."*

See Appendix B for survey questions and Appendix C for complete survey data.

## Research Methodology

The focus group was an informal research method that was used as part of the survey planning process to inform the development of key messages within the identified issue (Weintraub and Pinkelton p.150). The analysis of focus group data was intuitive and the results were interpreted in the context of the issue, immediately and verifiably (Weintraub and Pinkelton 2015 p. 145), and strove to provide enlightenment in development of key messages, using selected quotes (Krueger 2002 p.16). Key messages were developed in accordance with Mendelsohn's three assumptions for success and McGuire's hierarchy of effects (as cited in Weintraub and Pinkelton 2015 pp. 263-266). The survey was a mixture of convenience and purposive non-probability sampling (Weintraub and Pinkelton 2015 pp. 91-92). An internet survey provided a low cost and time effective data collection method designed to determine the most effective key messages for the communications campaign through a matrix rating scale (Weintraub and Pinkelton 2015).

## Recommendations of key messages

Although 53.85% of survey respondents said any current lack of communication about changes to internships is understandable because of the pandemic, respondents indicated dissatisfactions with La Trobe's current communications regarding internships. However, students also indicated a strong belief in personal responsibility; 100% of respondents said that students should read emails sent by La Trobe faculty. Below are some recommended key messages.

- Discipline coordinators should circulate emails regarding discipline specific internship opportunities, and lecturers and tutors should discuss those opportunities and the necessary skills in class.
- The process of self-sourcing and securing (negotiating and organising for credit) internships should be made more prominent as part of the media and communications degree, *"if they put more importance on [internships] we would be more aware."*
- An information 'subject' on the LMS should be created for students aggregating resources and information relevant to their degree concerning interning at La Trobe for credit.

## Areas of risk

- Currently pandemic restrictions are on schedule to ease. However, if another wave forces metropolitan Victoria back into lockdown the media and communications industries will suffer further. Therefore, the few remaining internships will likely dry up leaving key messages redundant.
- Student motivation: many driven and ambitious students will utilise the changes proposed in the recommendations to take advantage of any opportunities available, however many will not. A lack of personal responsibility of students to act may influence success.
- A lack of enthusiasm from La Trobe's council and policy makers responsible for allocation of resources may not deem this issue to be significant enough to deem it a priority for University funding.

## References

- Krueger, A. R. (2002). *Designing and conducting focus group interviews*. University of Minnesota. <https://eiu.edu/ihec/Krueger-FocusGroupInterviews.pdf>
- Austin, E. W., & Pinkleton, B. E. (2015). *Strategic public relations management : Planning and managing effective communication campaigns*. Taylor & Francis Group.

## Appendix A

### Focus Group Questions

- What do you know about La Trobe's interning opportunities?
- Where would you look to find more information about interning?
- What concerns do you have about sourcing an internship, or an industry placement, during the pandemic?
- What do you think about La Trobe's communication on the changes to remote interning due to the pandemic?
- How do you feel about finding information on La Trobe's website about sourcing remote internships?
- What needs improvement?
- What concerns do you have about sourcing an internship, or an industry placement, during the pandemic?
- Who, if anyone, at university has encouraged you to start learning about sourcing and completing internships as part of your undergraduate degree?

## Appendix B

Efforts were made to survey at least 20 media and communications students, the survey closed with 26 respondents. The survey was taken by the strategic communications research subject cohort and journalism. La Trobe journalism students were also emailed directly for responses to the survey. Due to the limitations of research methods used, results are not generalisable across the entire population.

### Survey Questions

#### Key messages supporting research hypothesis

- La Trobe needs to communicate with students more clearly about the changes to internships due to the pandemic.
- La Trobe's website is difficult to navigate and information needs to be made more accessible to students.
- Discipline co-ordinators should circulate emails regarding internship opportunities, specific to what students are majoring in.
- Internship opportunities circulated by discipline co-ordinators should be discussed in relevant classes.
- The process of self-sourcing internships for credit should be discussed by lecturers or tutors in the context of industry areas the subject is relevant to.

- Information about which staff members students should contact regarding discipline-specific internships needs to be clearer and easier to find
- Completing an internship should be made a more prominent aspect of the media and communications degree.
- Lecturers and tutors should emphasis skills that will be highly valued by employers when students apply for internships.

### **Key messages against research hypothesis and supporting La Trobe's current communications strategy**

- Students should read emails sent by the ASSC and other faculty that contains relevant information that about internships.
- The existing communications of the university provide enough relevant information to the current conditions posed by the pandemic.
- The existing information provided by the university on self-sourcing internships is relevant to the working from home conditions caused by the pandemic.
- Any current lack of communication about changes to internships is understandable because of the pandemic.
- The pandemic provides students with the opportunity to overcome adversity and use existing resources related to internships in adapting to the shift to virtual placements.
- If students are unsure about self-sourcing internships, it is their responsibility to find the relevant information.

### **Appendix C**

- What is your age?
  - 18-24 73.08%, 19 respondents
  - 25-34 7.69%, 2 respondents
  - 35-44 19.23%, 5 respondents
- Please specify your gender
  - Male 30.77%, 8 respondents
  - Female 69.23%, 18 respondents
- Please specify your major
  - Digital Marketing (1 respondent)
  - Strategic Communication (3 respondents)
  - Strategic Communication/Psychology (1 respondent)
  - Communications (1 respondent)
  - Public Relations (6 respondents)
  - Journalism (6 respondents)
  - Media and Communications (2 respondents)
  - Sports Journalism (1 respondent)
  - Psychology and Anatomy (1 respondent)
  - Marketing and Public Relations (1 respondent)
  - Public Health (1 respondent)

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Completing an internship should be made a more prominent aspect of the media and communications degree.	61.54% 16	23.08% 6	11.54% 3	3.85% 1	0% 0
Lecturers and tutors should emphasize skills that will be highly valued by employers when students apply for internships.	61.54% 16	30.77% 8	7.69% 2	0% 0	0% 0
Students should read emails sent by La Trobe faculty that contains relevant information about internships.	61.54% 16	38.46% 10	0% 0	0% 0	0% 0
Internship opportunities circulated by discipline coordinators should be discussed in relevant classes.	53.85% 14	38.46% 10	7.69% 2	0% 0	0% 0
The process of self-sourcing internships for credit should be discussed by lecturers or tutors in the context of industry areas the subject is relevant to.	53.85% 14	34.62% 9	11.54% 3	0% 0	0% 0
Information about which	53.85% 14	42.31% 11	0% 0	3.85% 1	0% 0

staff members students should contact regarding discipline specific internships needs to be clearer and easier to find.					
Discipline coordinators should circulate emails regarding internship opportunities, specific to what students are majoring in.	50% 13	42.31% 11	7.69% 2	0% 0	0% 0
La Trobe needs to communicate with students more clearly about the changes to internships due to the pandemic.	42.31% 11	26.92% 7	26.92% 7	3.85% 1	0% 0
La Trobe's website is difficult to navigate and information needs to be made more accessible to students.	34.62% 9	26.92% 7	23.08% 6	15.38% 4	0% 0
It is students' responsibility to use La Trobe's existing resources about internships, and their own networks to self-source internship opportunities	15.38% 4	34.62% 9	19.23% 5	26.92% 7	3.85% 1
The existing communications	11.54% 3	34.62% 9	23.08% 6	19.23% 5	11.54% 3

of the university provide enough relevant information to the current conditions posed by the pandemic.					
The existing information provided by the university on self-sourcing internships is relevant to the working from home conditions caused by the pandemic.	11.54% 3	7.69% 2	42.31% 11	30.77% 8	7.69% 2
Any current lack of communication about changes to internships is understandable because of the pandemic.	11.54% 3	42.31% 11	11.54% 3	23.08% 6	11.54% 3
If students are unsure about self-sourcing internships, it is their responsibility to find the relevant information.	11.54% 3	38.46% 10	26.92% 7	15.38% 4	7.69% 2
The pandemic provides students with the opportunity to overcome adversity and use existing resources related to internships in adapting to the shift to virtual placements	7.69% 2	46.15% 12	19.23% 5	19.23% 5	7.69% 2

