



Feasibility Analysis of Improving the Internship Course (MGT480) Placement Rate of University of Toronto Mississauga Commerce students

for Professor Rafeal Chiuzi, MGT480 Course Director and Megan Tamane,
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Megan Tamane
Professional Development & Internships Coordinator
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Dear Ms. Tamane:

Attached is the report, Feasibility Analysis of Improving the Internship Course (MGT480) Placement Rate. As we discussed earlier, the report analyzes the current marketing strategy for attracting employers and the matching process. On top of that, it provides cost-effective solutions for improving the placement rate and the overall experience of this course. I appreciate your time and support throughout the research.

In order to compete with graduates across Canada, UTM has opened an internship course for students to gain real work experience. However, due to limited employment opportunities, only around 20 students can benefit from this course every semester. I believe taking actions to increase the placement rate is crucial in allowing more UTM students to gain valuable experience and landing a full-time job position upon graduation.

According to the primary research, the current marketing strategy and student support in place have a few flaws. In order to increase the placement rate and provide better experience for UTM students, I have included recommendations in the conclusion section of the report.

I thank you again for your time. It was my pleasure to analyze the current marketing strategy and student support of UTM Internship course. I can be contacted by cathyliu@gmail.com for any questions or inquires.

Yours Sincerely,

Cathy Liu

Cathy Liu

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INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, a lot of the Top-Tier universities offer co-op programs that help prepare students starting off their career. These programs provide exposure to the real working environment and allow students to explore where their passion lies. With the ever-changing evolution in technology, the job markets for fresh graduates are getting more and more competitive.

Students in the Commerce program are expected to excel in multiple aspects such as academic performance, networking skills, soft skills, relevant work experience, and extracurricular activities (case competitions). Although UTM has not offer co-op programs at all for the past decades, it recently opened an internship course that matches around 20 qualified students with employers in relevant sectors, while providing guidance, support, and evaluations along the way. This course has attracted many students, but only around 20 students get placements for each semester.

The internship course (MGT480) has provided great opportunities for students to explore the job market and provide valuable experience which increase the likelihood of landing a full-time position in the industry. However, this program is not attracting enough employers. This could be a result from decreasing demand in commerce-related positions, competition from other universities, or lack of marketing activities to connect with employers. As a result, it is extremely competitive to be accepted into the course and find a placement. Upon graduation, those students who does not have much relevant work experience will struggle to find suitable full-time positions.

Compared to graduates from universities with co-op programs, students from UTM are at a disadvantage. Some students are capable of finding their own summer internships whereas the majority of students are either unaware of the benefits of internships/co-ops, not able to find relevant internship positions, or did not have enough resources to help land an offer. If the MGT480 Internship course is able to match more students with employers, UTM graduates will likely compete well against graduates from other universities. Taking my personal experience as an example, after my very first internship at UTM, I was able to find a second internship quickly, and I eventually received a competitive full-time position right upon graduation.

This report analyzes the current hiring process for the Internship course, as well as the student support provided throughout the term. The following topics are reviewed and investigated, and recommendations will be provided at the end of the report.

1. Information of the current matching process and the challenges of improving the placement rate
2. Strengths and weaknesses of the current student support
3. Feasible solutions to improve the replacement rate and student satisfaction
4. Costs and consequences of implementing the solutions

The following research methods are used to collect data and information from current or former UTM MGT480 Internship Course students and the course coordinator.

1. An interview with the current Course Coordinator, Megan Tamane, will be used to gather information on the current matching process and collect feedback on the challenges on improving the placement rate. The interview will also collect information on current student support and mentorship available for students.
2. A survey will be conducted by current and former MGT480 students on student support and mentorship, as well as any recommendation for improvements.

The data section had confirmed that the placement rate is relatively low for the internship course. Furthermore, many students believed that improvements can be done in order to improve the overall course experience.

DATA

Current Marketing Strategy for finding suitable employers

After interviewing with the current Course Coordinator of MGT480, Megan Tamane, I have gathered some valuable information. The current marketing strategy in finding employers are quite diverse. The first way is through partnerships with large corporations like Walmart and IKEA. However, only less than 10 positions per semester is provided by these corporations since they tend to hire across universities in Canada and UTM has a relatively smaller student base. The second way is to connect with small to medium firms through LinkedIn and form new partnerships on a yearly basis. However, many of the early-stage companies may not survive the following years, imposing challenges for the office to maintain long term relationships with those firms.

MGT 480 Current Matching Process

Based on most recent data, around 120-150 students will apply for the Internship Course every semester. Less than one-third of these students are admitted into the course and only around 25 -30 students will actually receive offers from employers, whereas the rest will be forced to drop out of the course. Unsurprisingly, this process is highly competitive.

The initial screening is based on students' academic performance, relevant work experience, and extra curriculum activities. For instance, in order to be considered competitive, a student will need a CGPA of 3.3+ and some work experience. Students who have related work experience such as previous internship or co-op experience are considered to be highly

valuable. However, these are not official criteria since the course director and coordinator will look at the whole package.

Once a student gets into the course, the next step is to be matched with suitable employers. An employer will look at the profile (including resume and transcript) and then decide whether to schedule an interview with the particular student. When a student receives an offer, they are officially registered for the Internship course and will receive corresponding academic credits. For students who did not receive offers, they can look for opportunities from outside source as long as employer is willing to partner up with UTM.

Challenges on Improving the Placement Rate

The biggest challenge in improving the placement rate is the lack of available employers. This is because that students in this course are only obligated to work minimum 120 hours per semester, which is roughly 8-hours per week. Therefore, most students are managing full time course load with the Internship. This imposes great challenges in finding employers who are willing to take interns that work only 1 day per week.

Advantages of current student support

Apart from the actual working hours with employers, students are expected to write weekly reflection blogs on different topics such as challenges faced during work. In addition, employers are required to provide mid-term feedback to both the students and the course director, with the purpose of evaluating a student's performance.

Disadvantages for student support

Based on the survey, the rating for interview preparation support is summarized as below.

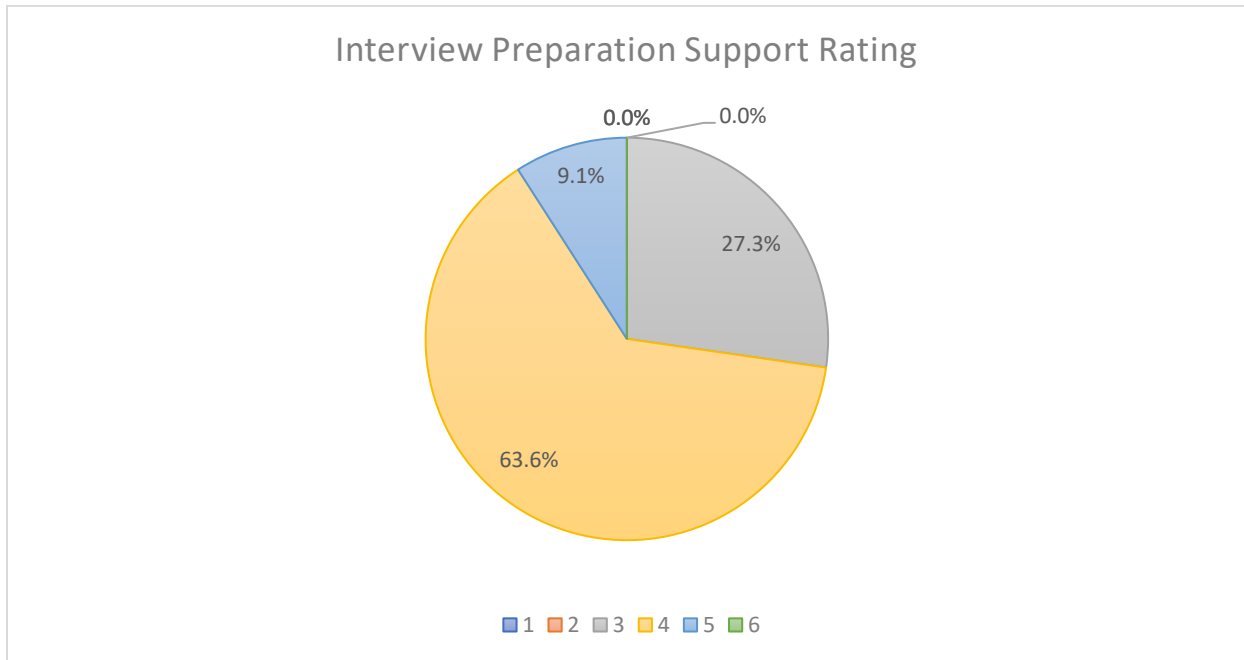


Figure 1: From a scale of 0 to 5, how would you rate the interview preparation support given by the course coordinator and instructor?

Figure 1 shows that most students believe that the interview preparation can be improved in some extent. More than 63% rated the interview preparation support as 3 out of 5 (yellow), and more than 27% students voted 2 out of 5 (grey). We can conclude that everyone who took the survey believes that this course should provide more interview preparation activities.

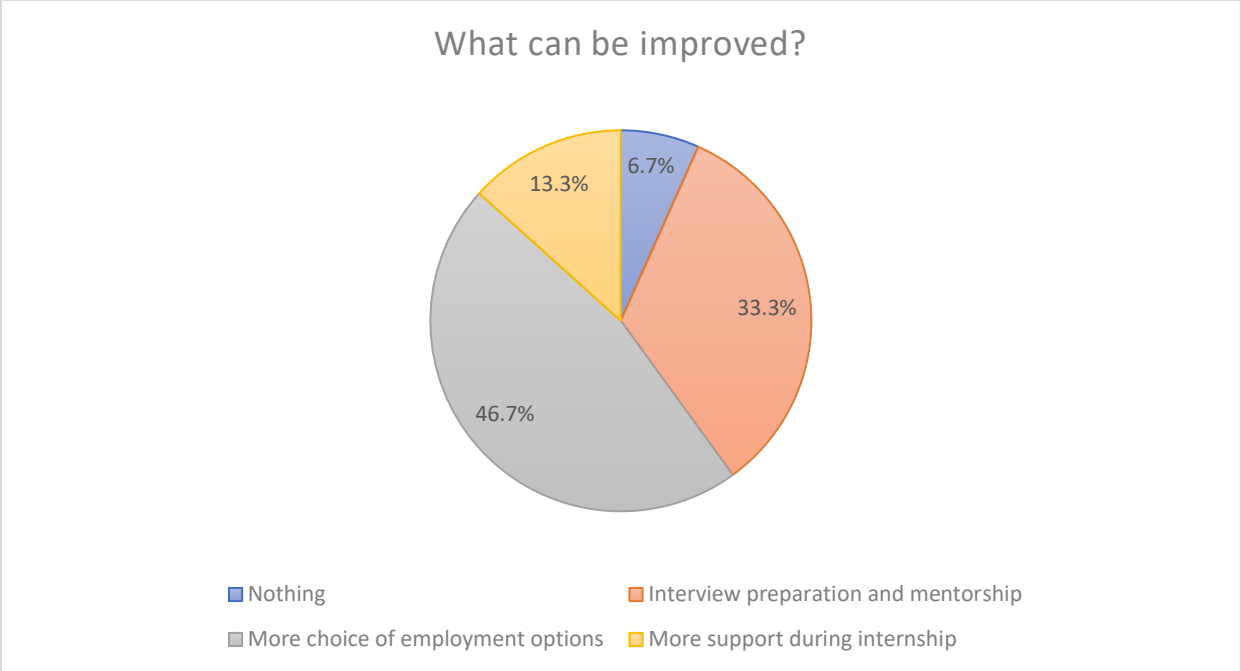


Figure 2: What are some areas that you think could be improved for a better learning experience?

Furthermore, Figure 2 illustrates the breakdown of areas which should be improved the most. Based on Figure 2, more than 46% of students believe that the employment options are very limited, which ties back to the motivation of this investigation. Around one-third of students who took the survey seek improvement in interview preparation and mentorship.

Suggested Improvements for Attracting More Employers

The potential solutions should seek to improve the placement rate through attracting more employers, which is likely improve the diversity in the type of employers and positions. One solution is to increase the number of working hours as a way to attract more employers. As analyzed above, the main reason for lack of employers is because of the short working hours. Therefore, increasing working hours per week can effectively attract more employers to partner

up with UTM. The cost associated with this solution is that students will need to manage a heavier workload.

Attending more start-up conferences in Toronto would provide connections with early-stage companies who are more likely to hire less experienced students. If this is correctly implemented, we can expect more students to be admitted into the course even if they do not have prior work experience. The office will need to hire an assistant for marketing related activities if the current office human resource cannot support the activities.

Suggested Improvements for Student Support

At the same time, the course should provide more mentor support and interview preparation. Students should be encouraged to schedule practice interviews before their actual interviews, which should increase the chance of landing an offer and improve the placement rate. The cost associated with this solution is the additional time invested by the course coordinator for the mock interviews.

Currently, only employers are providing feedback for students. However, I believe this should be a mutual activity. The course should implement a review process for students to provide feedback/ratings for the employer and the overall internship experience through a one-on-one meeting with the course director. By the end of the term, students should be encouraged to fill in questionnaires that reveal more details about their experiences. The information collected can be quite useful for the later students. The cost associated with this suggestion is the

additional time investment by the course director and coordinator, as well as a heavier workload for students.

CONCLUSION

Summary and Interpretation of findings

UTM students are overall satisfied with the internship course because it allows them to gain real work experience and to acquire important skills. Most people believe that the internship course had helped them in landing a full-time position and will recommend other students to register. However, since this program is still quite new, there are some improvements that will enhance students' overall experience.

The current marketing strategy involves building partnerships with large corporations, as well as connecting with smaller firms through LinkedIn. As previously identified, there are two issues with the current strategy. Firstly, the short working hours will concern big corporations since they are reluctant to spend time to train new interns who can only work once a week. Secondly, small start-ups are less likely to survive in the market hence long-term partnerships are hard to maintain. Therefore, it is important to attract more employers in order to improve the placement rate.

In addition, students are not offered any type of interview preparation support, which makes most students nervous and not confident about their own interview skills. Providing mock interviews will greatly enhance students' confidence and increase the chance of landing an offer. Last but not least, students cannot communicate their feedbacks for employers and experiences other than posting the weekly blogs. Therefore, more mentor support and interview preparation should be implemented to enhance the overall experience and increase the placement rate.

Recommendations

The following are some cost-effective recommendations that can be potential solutions to the problem.

- increase the number of working hours allowed per week to attract more employers
- attend more Startup conferences and connect with early-stage companies who are more likely to hire less experienced students
- require students to attend practice interviews either in groups or one-on-one with the course coordinator before a formal interview
- implement mid-term review sessions with students for any complaints to employers or potential suggestion to improve overall experience

APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

I am a 4th year student of working on a technical writing project for English 301. I am also a former student of the Internship Course from University of Toronto Mississauga Commerce Program. The purpose of this interview is to obtain primary data for an analysis and investigation in support to provide recommendations for the course. The goal is to improve the placement rate and student support for the course. The Interview will take around 30min. Thank you in advance and your participation is greatly appreciated.

1. What is the current marketing strategy of MGT480 in finding suitable employers?
2. Around how many students are admitted each term?
3. What are some challenges for matching more students with employers?
4. What kind of student support or mentorship is the course currently providing?
5. What do you think is the most important qualities in order to success in an internship?
6. What are some areas that you think can be improved for a better course experience?

APPENDIX 2: SURVEY QUESTIONS

I am a 4th year student of working on a technical writing project for English 301. I am also a former student of the Internship Course from University of Toronto Mississauga Commerce Program. The purpose of this survey is to obtain primary data for an analysis and investigation in support to provide recommendations for the course. The goal is to improve the placement rate and student support for the course. The survey contains 7 multiple choice questions and should take less than 5 minutes. Your responses will be voluntary and completely anonymous. Thank you in advance and your participation is greatly appreciated.

From a scale of 0 to 5, please rate how organized is the pre-screening of course MGT480 (0 being not organized at all and 5 being very organized).

1. 0
2. 1
3. 2
4. 3
5. 4
6. 5

From a scale of 0 to 5, please rate how competitive is the course (1 being not competitive at all and 5 being very competitive).

1. 0
2. 1
3. 2
4. 3
5. 4
6. 5

How many interviews did you had before landing an internship placement?

1. Less than 3
2. From 3 - 7
3. More than 7

From a scale of 0 to 5, how would you rate the interview preparation support given by the course coordinator and instructor.

1. 0
2. 1
3. 2
4. 3
5. 4

6. 5

From a scale of 0 to 5, how useful/ helpful do you think this course is in preparing you for the first full-time job?

1. 0
2. 1
3. 2
4. 3
5. 4
6. 5

From a scale of 0 to 5, how likely will you recommend students to register for MGT480?

1. 0
2. 1
3. 2
4. 3
5. 4
6. 5

What are some areas that you think could be improved for a better learning experience (you can choose more than one answer)?

1. The course is perfect, and nothing can be improved.
2. Interview preparation and mentorship
3. More choice of employment options
4. More support during internship
5. Other (please specify): _____