

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

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1. **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-world 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 have 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 people get placements for each semester.

The internship course (MGT480) opened recently has provided great opportunities for students to explore the job market and working environment, as well as providing 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 not enough marketing to connect with employers. As a result, it is extremely competitive to get 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 fairly easily, 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 from current and former MGT480 students on student support and mentorship, as well as any recommendation for improvements.

The data analysis in the later 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 course experience in general.

1. **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 Startup companies may not survive the following years, meaning that the office has to constantly seek for new employers.

**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 any extra curriculum activities. For instance, in order to be considered competitive, a student will need a CGPA of 3.3+ and with some work experience. Students who have related work experience such as previous internship or co-op experience are considered to be highly competitive. 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 and offer, 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 since very little employers 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.

**Improvements 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 since the majority voted for a rating of 3. However, if we look at figure 2 below, we will have a better idea on which areas should be improved mostly. Based on Figure 2, most students believe the employment options are lacking and a lot of them seeks improvement in interview preparation and mentorship.

**Figure 2: What are some areas that you think could be improved for a better learning experience (you can choose more than one answer)?**

The potential solutions should seek to improve the placement rate through attracting more employers to connect with UTM Commerce students and potentially 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 of 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. We can also attend more Startup conferences in Toronto, where we can easily connect 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.

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 passing rate of interviews and indirectly improve the placement rate. Currently, only employers are providing feedback for students. However, I believe this should be a mutual activity. Therefore, the course should implement a review process for students to discuss any issue about the internship with the course director and potentially rate the employer as well.

1. **CONCLUSION**

**Summary and Interpretation of findings**

The students from UTM are overall satisfied with the internship course because it provided the opportunity for students to work in the relevant industries and acquiring 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 areas that can be improved. First of all, it is important to attract more employers in order to improve the placement rate. The ultimate purpose is to allow more students to benefit from this course. Secondly, although most students have positive experience with the course, improvements can be made on the interview preparation and mentor support.

**Recommendations**

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

* increase the number of working hours allowed per week to attract more employers
* attend more Startup conferences and to connect with early-stage companies who are more likely to hire less experienced students
* require students to attend practice interview 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 or potential suggestion to improve overall experience