Creating new internship opportunities: engaging employers to see the value in humanities and social sciences

Jonathan Y. H. Sim is an instructor in the department of philosophy at the National University of Singapore. He regularly hears employers and people in the corporate sector lamenting the lack of employability of students with degrees from humanities and social sciences. This is despite the fact that businesses are coming up with creative ways to fill gaps in their talent pool, and the invaluable skill sets that students from these disciplines bring to the workplace.

A project I initiated has provided profound insights on how they can apply the skills from their majors in ways that are both relevant and impactful. Students were pleased with the chance to take up roles they would not have ordinarily considered, and made the no-to-low wage challenge feasible. Overall, I believe these challenges and innovations make them as good as, if not better than, some students from more “practical” subjects, and this is also the opinion of the students themselves. Companies have discovered that internships with humanities and social sciences students were a great opportunity to fill temporary roles not typically filled by humanities and social sciences students. These collaborations have proven mutually beneficial. They allow participating students to see concrete examples of how students found connections and applications between the academic disciplines they study and their work. This helped me gauge the extent of their learning but also nudged students towards deeper reflection on their academic interests.

To help students find opportunities, I decided it would be worthwhile to experiment with an internship module. As a result, I created a new programme that the organisation may not have considered. I regularly speak to employers, explain the value my students can bring to their company, and ask them to offer temporary roles not typically filled by humanities and social sciences students. As a result, humanities and social sciences students are not typically considered for many roles, despite my credentials as a university educator. Employers were generally interested in this opportunity and were usually open to discussion. I could also vouch for their character, including attributes such as independence, creativity and critical thinking. Having worked with the students for one semester already, I was aware of their achievements and willingness to learn.

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Benefit to organisations and students

I was inspired by the idea that starting a new programme would provide opportunities for growth in one’s students by providing them with opportunities for challenge and self-reflection. The programme leverages on the increasing number of graduates who are uniquely equipped with a broad analytical perspective and diverse skill sets. The programme provides on-the-job training to enhance employability and helps to close the gap between academia and the corporate sector.

I teach a module on data analysis and philosophical reasoning to hundreds of students in humanities and social sciences. Starting an internship module for these students was an excellent opportunity to provide them with a unique and challenging experience. The programme helped to bridge the gap between academia and the corporate sector, and provided students with the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in the workplace.

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