

School of Commerce,  
Division of Business  
University of South Australia  
Student Information Kit

# Commerce Work Practicum 2009



School of  
**Commerce**

## Experience. The Difference.

Welcome to Commerce Work Practicum for 2009. The practicum is a non-paid 150-hour project supervised by both a UniSA Academic Supervisor and a host organisation. Participating in a practicum provides you with the opportunity to apply the theories of your discipline in a practical and actual business setting whilst also obtaining 4.5 unit credits towards the elective [course BUSS 3051](#). It also gives you the chance to develop valuable workplace skills that will greatly enhance your employability.

By taking a work placement you will develop a greater insight of the business environment and begin identifying the career path that most suits you, while making valuable industry contacts along the way. You will be assessed on the investigation and analysis of the assigned project work you have undertaken for the host organisation.

This booklet is designed to assist you in making the most of your practicum experience. It includes details of how the practicum works, as well as tips on preparing for practicum, acclimatising to the workplace and ensuring the practicum is all that you planned for it to be.

Please take the time to read this document carefully. A practicum can be an excellent opportunity for personal and professional growth, and with the right knowledge and preparation yours will be too.

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## 1. Contacts

### **Course Coordinator**

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## 2. What is the Commerce Work Practicum?

The Commerce Work Practicum involves a student undertaking a non-paid 150-hour project within a host organisation under guidance of both a UniSA Academic Supervisor and a Host Organisation Practicum Supervisor. The project will be negotiated according to the host organisation's requirements, but will also ensure the academic content and requirements are satisfactory to the UniSA Academic Supervisor.

The practicum will count towards a 4.5 unit business elective ([BUSS 3051](#)).

The project will involve a set of 'deliverables' negotiated between the UniSA Academic Supervisor, the host organisation and yourself and will typically entail the preparation of a 3000 word report and a presentation to the host organisation's management (see section 12 for details of assessment). The nature of the project itself will focus on a particular area of inquiry or business issues the organisation would like see pursued such that the work undertaken and the report prepared will improve knowledge and aid business decision-making in the particular area. (See section 4 for details of working arrangements)

## 3. Objectives

### Commerce Work Practicum

On completion of this course, you should be able to:

- Identify the functions of the organisation where your practicum is based
- Evaluate different approaches to business and organisation
- Plan and carry out a guided project
- Synthesise the results of the project
- Communicate the findings of the research appropriately

### Personal and Professional

'Experience. The Difference.' The motto of UniSA sums up why your practicum is so important. In addition to the course objectives it is beneficial to consider your own personal and professional objectives.

Some of these might include:

- *Improving your résumé and distinguishing yourself from other graduates in the job market.* The job market is competitive and practical experience is highly regarded.

- *Putting academic work and theoretical understandings into practice in a work environment.* This is your chance to integrate the theory with practice and develop a sound understanding of what you have learnt in your program. It can also reinvigorate your interest in your chosen field.
- *Learning more about a particular industry, role or company before entering the labour market.* Practical experience assists in defining your career path. You get the opportunity to ‘try-on’ a potential job to see what parts of it you like and don’t like, as well as any areas you have strengths in or need to improve.
- *Developing a network of industry contacts.* In today’s job market, networking is a vital skill to have. A work placement gives you the opportunity to get your foot in the door of your chosen industry. Approximately 60-80% of jobs are never advertised; they are filled by people who network! This is a great opportunity to start your own professional network.
- *Developing specific non-academic skills, for example:*
  - Project management skills
  - Teamwork skills
  - Communication skills
  - Customer service skills
  - Knowledge of a particular software

Through simply participating in your practicum you will achieve many of these objectives at a basic level. By engaging in active reflection and analysis of your development throughout the practicum you will be able to increase your understanding and your competency in the skills you learn to a much higher level.

### **Host organisations**

It is also beneficial to remember that host organisations have their own objectives. You can positively contribute to these and develop an understanding of value can be created in an organisation by employees. Practicum is a two-way exchange, and you are an essential part of this. Objectives may include:

- Pursuing and analysing an area of enquiry to assist in business decision making
- Bringing up-to-date knowledge and skills to their organisation or area.
- Screening a potential employee.
- Providing a professional development opportunity for existing staff to gain some experience in a supervisory or leadership role.
- Satisfaction in knowing they are helping to prepare future members of the workforce for employment.

## 4. Entering and working arrangements of the Commerce Work Practicum

### **Prerequisites**

Students are selected for practicum based on merit. You must have a minimum GPA of 5 for the core courses of your program. Given the minimum requirements are met you can contact the course coordinator (see page 4) expressing your interest to participate.

### **Finding a Host Organisation**

The Course Coordinator through the School of Commerce will be developing a network of host organisations willing to participate in the Commerce Work Practicum. Practicum placements will therefore be limited.

The Course Coordinator will ensure that you have met the GPA requirement, and additionally will determine whether there are any host organisations and available UniSA Academic Supervisors that correspond with your program area (i.e. Commercial Law, Banking and Finance, Accounting, Property and International Business).

### **Working Arrangements**

The working arrangements of the practicum are negotiated between the student, the host organisation and the UniSA Academic Supervisor.

### *Working Hours*

You are expected to do approximately 150 hours work with the host organisation over a 15-16 week period – the equivalent of the work effort you would put into a usual semester-based 4.5 unit course. This may be taken as a set number of hours per week for the 15-16 weeks, or the number of hours may vary from week to week with some weeks of longer hours and some weeks of less.

The nature of the work practicum involves the undertaking of a mutually-agreed research project within an organisation culminating in the preparation of a report and a presentation to the host organisations management personnel. (See sections 6 and 12 for further details.)

### *Location*

It may be possible to undertake the practicum in part at home or university, in addition to the host organisation. This is to be negotiated between you, the UniSA Academic Supervisor, and host organisation. It is desirable that some time is spent 'on location' within the host organisation – either in concentrated periods or in a less intense but more frequent basis. Learning about the everyday aspects of an organisation, forming strong networks with people, and feeling like a part of an organisation can only really occur if you are physically located at the organisation.

### *Travel and Related Expenses*

Travel and other expenses related to getting to and from the location of your placement will be your responsibility. Travel and expenses related to the activities of your placement will normally be discussed in the preparation stage of the placement and will be included in the 'Student Work Practicum Agreement' and in the 'Letter of Understanding'. If there are any unexpected costs or travel you should discuss these with your host organisation as soon as possible.

### *Drivers License*

It might be an expectation of the host organisation that you have a current driver's license. If you do not have a license, ensure you discuss this with the host organisation preferably prior to commencement of practicum to see if alternative options are available.

### **Agreements**

When a host organisation is arranged, a 'Student Work Practicum Agreement' and a 'Letter of Understanding' will be formed between the host organisation, the UniSA Academic Supervisor and you. These are overseen by the Course Coordinator.

The agreements will outline the scope of the project you will undertake as well as details such as location, hours, and anything else relevant to the practicum.

## 5. Confidentiality and intellectual property

Most organisations will have requirements of their employees around confidentiality and intellectual property. You will be expected to abide by any policies of the organisation regarding these issues.

Confidentiality may involve ensuring you do not share information and details about clients outside of the organisation without express permission and authorisation.

Intellectual Property includes any ideas, concepts, client databases, or information that is developed and/or owned by the company. The project you undertake for an organisation may require you to sign an intellectual property agreement. It is advisable to discuss this with the Course Coordinator (see page 4).

## 6. Preparing for practicum

The focus of your practicum will be a defined project within a host organisation. This may mean that you will be in contact with less people and deal with fewer aspects of the organisation than if you were an actual employee. It may be tempting to learn only about those aspects of the organisation that directly relate to your project, however in doing so you will limit your learning experience significantly.

It is highly recommended, and even necessary for your assessment, to become familiar with your host organisation as a whole. Knowing about the organisation should assist you in feeling more at home when you first arrive, as well as speeding up the learning curve on practicum. Use the following list as a guide for researching your organisation before your practicum begins:

- Location and contact details
- Industry; main services/products
- History
- Ethos and goals
- Ownership
- Recent and future projects
- Corporate structure
- Details of key personnel
- Any holding or subsidiary organisations
- Partnerships (global and local)
- The social, political and economic environment in which the organisation operates
- If relevant, the organisation's global context

### Workplace Arrangements

When starting any new position it is important to know about the organisation's workplace arrangements, as these will assist you to understand the organisation's expectations of you. The following questions serve as a guide to what you need to know. It is advisable to discuss these items with your Host Organisation Practicum Supervisor at your initial planning meeting.

1. What are the starting and finishing dates of your placement?
2. With whom will you be working in the organisation? Will you be working with anyone outside the organisation?

3. Are there any confidentiality or intellectual property policies that you need to follow?
4. How will your progress be monitored? (For example, by regular meetings, goal setting, milestone completion).
5. What resources will be made available for you in the workplace? (Computer, desk, telephone, photocopier).
6. Will you be required to provide any resources yourself? (Computer, specific computer program, camera). Can you readily access these resources?
7. Will you be required to undertake any work away from the workplace? (Research, surveying, designing etc.)
8. What is the dress code?
9. What will your work schedule be?
10. Do you need to be aware of any particular security arrangements for buildings and what are the arrangements for parking?

### **Understanding the Project**

In addition to the general questions above you may need to know information about the project you will be undertaking prior to the commencement of your practicum. Some questions you could ask include:

1. What is the background to this project? Why has the organisation commissioned you to complete this work?
2. What are the working and supervisory arrangements between the host organisation, your UniSA Academic Supervisor and yourself?
3. What are the objectives of this project? Which objective has the highest priority?
4. What tasks will you be required to perform in order to achieve the objectives? Is there any assumed knowledge?
5. Do you need to complete any background reading or research prior to commencing your project?

### **Personal**

Undertaking a practicum may impact on aspects of your personal life. It is important to consider if there are any issues that need to be addressed prior to starting your practicum. Some of the areas to think about include:

- *Care of children, elderly or other people:* if you have responsibilities for the care of other people, will you need to change or make alternative arrangements?
- *Regular employment:* are you able to take leave from your regular employment or can you continue whilst undertaking practicum? You need to ensure you also have time for yourself to rest, otherwise you run the risk of burning out.
- *Travel:* how will you get to the practicum location?
- *Medical/Disability:* are there special modifications or services that you may need to assist in fulfilling the requirements of the project and/or to physically access the organisation? See the section on Useful Resources (page 22) for more information.

## 7. Your first day

By following the suggestions for preparing for your practicum, you will be in an excellent position to confidently begin your first day of practicum. It is normal to feel a little nervous, but be reassured by the fact that you have a good understanding of the organisation you are going into and the expectations the organisation has of you. It is also helpful to keep in mind that the confidence we see in others is often how they are acting rather than how they are feeling. Even if you don't feel confident, acting as though you do can make a big difference.

On your first day you will likely be provided with an induction. This should incorporate being introduced to your colleagues, being provided with information on Occupational Health and Safety, and learning about the organisation's facilities and day-to-day expectations.

Once you have completed the induction, use the following checklist to make sure everything you need to know has been covered:

- You know when working hours and lunch breaks are
- You have been introduced to staff and their roles have been explained
- You know where your work space is
- The organisation's structure has been explained to you
- The refreshment and recreational facilities have been pointed out to you
- You have been made familiar with the dress code
- Communication facilities (telephone, e-mail, post etc) have been shown to you
- You have been made aware of any strategies for managing personal difficulties, including organisational problems, workplace conflict and stress
- Car parking or public transport arrangements have been explained to you

### *Health and Safety*

- You know what to do in an emergency
- You are aware of first-aid arrangements and accident reporting procedures
- You are aware of fire procedures
- You know the relevant Occupational Health & Safety regulations
- Safe handling procedures have been demonstrated to you
- Protective clothing arrangements have been explained
- You have received instructions on equipment use

Remember, you have the right to leave the workplace of your own accord if you reasonably believe your health and/or safety is under immediate threat. If you do leave the workplace notify the Course Coordinator immediately.

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## 8. During the practicum

### Maximising the Practicum Experience

Your practicum has been arranged for you to learn and develop new skills and to practice applying the theory of your program to a practical project. Your practicum has defined goals and objectives to support this aim. It is important to keep this in your mind during your practicum. You are not at the organisation to 'fill-in' a gap, be the designated 'coffee-maker', or to run numerous errands for others. Your organisation will be well aware that this is a learning opportunity for you, and it is unlikely you will be expected to take on menial tasks unrelated to your program of study.

### *Learning and Reflecting*

Commerce Work Practicum, unlike some other practicum opportunities, has assessment requirements that are not directly assessed within the workplace (these will be outlined later). It is essential, however, for both your own personal and professional development and for preparing for your assessment tasks, that you take an active role in your learning on placement.

The following are some possible strategies for learning and reflecting while on your placement:

- Objectives: ensure your objectives (both course and personal/professional) are clearly defined and keep them accessible at your practicum (refer to page five for more information on objectives).
- Theories and knowledge bank: develop a 'bank' of knowledge and theories that you have learnt during your studies and applied during your practicum. This will greatly assist you in seeing how theory and practice blend, but will also assist you in determining which theories suit you and how, if at all, they might be adapted to different situations.
- Working skills: observe the working routines and practices of your colleagues, and how they approach things like problem solving, communication and prioritisation. This may assist you in determining or adapting your own routines and practices.
- Reflective journal: you are not required to keep a reflective journal as part of the course; however it is strongly advisable that you do so anyway. Your journal will assist in monitoring your progress, making your self-evaluation easier, identifying strengths and weaknesses in your practice, and will make a useful reference when you do the assessments required for the course.

## 9. UniSAs expectations

UniSA has expectations of its students while they are on practicum. While on practicum you are required to conduct yourself professionally and in a manner befitting a representative of UniSA, the organisation and yourself. This includes:

- Conducting yourself in a professional manner in all their dealings with your Host Organisation Practicum Supervisor, other staff and the organisation's clients
- Adhering to the terms and conditions of employment as agreed at the commencement of the placement
- Undertaking the work agreed to the satisfaction of both your UniSA Academic Supervisor and Host Organisation Practicum Supervisor
- Dressing appropriately for the workplace
- Arriving punctually for work and any meetings you need to attend
- Reporting any absence from work as early as is reasonably possible.

All UniSA programs and courses have been designed to develop seven Graduate Qualities (see <http://www.unisanet.unisa.edu.au/gradquals/> for more information). You will be expected to be able to demonstrate these in your practicum.

You will be:

1. Able to operate effectively with and upon a body of knowledge of sufficient depth to begin professional practice
2. Prepared for life-long learning in pursuit of personal development and excellence in professional practice
3. An effective problem solver, capable of applying logical, critical, and creative thinking to a range of problems
4. Able to work both autonomously and collaboratively as a professional
5. Committed to ethical action and social responsibility as a professional and citizen
6. Able to communicate effectively in professional practice and as a member of the community
7. Able to demonstrate international perspectives as a professional and as a citizen.

For further information on the University's expectations, please refer to the 'Practicum, Field and Clinical Placements' policy at [http://www.unisa.edu.au/policies/manual/2009/4\\_practicum\\_field\\_clinical\\_placements.pdf](http://www.unisa.edu.au/policies/manual/2009/4_practicum_field_clinical_placements.pdf)

You can also contact the Course Coordinator, Ron Donato and/or your UniSA Academic Supervisor who is overseeing the specifics of the practicum project.

## 10. Troubleshooting

Sometimes, regardless of the preparation you have made for your practicum, you may come across issues or questions that concern you. You may find the following tips useful in resolving issues, but if there is any matter that cannot be resolved by these methods, or you would like further advice or support, contact your Course Coordinator as soon as possible (see page four).

Problem	Solution
<p>You have a question or concern about the nature of your work placement.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consult your Student Work Practicum Agreement and, if necessary, your Letter of Understanding to see if the issue is covered there.</li> <li>• Use your UniSA Academic Supervisor as a sounding board for any questions or concerns that may be inappropriate or unwise to ask your Host Organisation Practicum Supervisor.</li> </ul>
<p>You are unable to complete the work required of you.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confirm the requirements of the task and the skills needed to complete the work required of you with your Host Organisation Practicum Supervisor.</li> <li>• Check that you have all the information and equipment necessary to complete the task.</li> <li>• If you are having difficulty meeting deadlines, ensure you are working on tasks in order of priority, and alert your Host Organisation Practicum Supervisor if you have been allocated extra tasks by other members of staff.</li> <li>• Find out if there are any strategies you could be using to improve your time management.</li> </ul>
<p>You are injured during the placement.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be sure you follow the organisation’s occupational health and safety procedures.</li> <li>• Your Host Organisation Practicum Supervisor will ensure that you receive appropriate medical attention.</li> <li>• Contact your Course Coordinator regarding insurance matters.</li> </ul>

<p>There is conflict between you and a colleague or colleagues.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Locate and adhere to any policy or procedures the organisation has on how to handle such situations.</li> <li>• Try to resolve the matter diplomatically with the colleague/s concerned, but if you are unable to do this, approach your Host Organisation Practicum Supervisor.</li> <li>• Remember you are representing the university and are obliged to conduct yourself in a manner consistent with the terms of your Student Work Practicum Agreement.</li> </ul>
<p>You have a grievance with the host organisation, or wish to leave the placement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In the first instance you must contact the Course Coordinator to discuss any difficulties you are experiencing and courses of action that may be taken.</li> <li>• Keep in mind that under the Student Work Practicum Agreement you may only withdraw from the workplace after consultation with, or approval from, the Course Coordinator unless the issue involves an immediate threat to your health and safety.</li> </ul>

### **Harassment and Discrimination**

It is against the law to:

- Discriminate on the grounds of sex, marital status, pregnancy, family responsibilities, sexuality, race, disability, political or religious belief and/or age
- Sexually harass someone either physically or verbally.

If you feel that you are being discriminated against and/or harassed whilst on practicum, you are strongly encouraged to contact the Course Coordinator or an Equity Contact on your campus

(go to: <http://www.unisa.edu.au/hrm/contacts/equity.asp> for a list of contacts).

While the policies of the University do not automatically cover students undertaking placements, in the event that unlawful discrimination/sexual harassment or bullying is experienced the University will assist and support the student in investigating and resolving the complaint and in taking precautions to prevent any recurrence of the incident.

## 11. Concluding the practicum

When concluding your placement you want to leave a positive impression and open doors for possible further opportunities for work in the future. Addressing each of the following three areas will assist you in doing this successfully.

### **Dissolution of the Relationship with your Host Organisation**

This needs to be as seamless as possible.

On the last day ensure you:

- Hand in completed work
- Make the Host Organisation Practicum Supervisor aware of any uncompleted work, and where necessary hand over to employees who may be involved in its completion
- Return all equipment including tools, equipment, stationary, uniforms and access cards/keys
- Clear out your designated work space
- Farewell and thank other staff members for their assistance
- Ask any remaining questions you have about employment opportunities and working in the industry.

### **Capitalising on your Experience**

- Ask for a reference as soon as possible after the placement is finished. Delaying the risk of the Host Organisation Practicum Supervisor forgetting your specific tasks and duties, or even moving on from the host organisation. Keep in mind your Host Organisation Practicum Supervisor is under no obligation to provide you with a reference.
- Establish appropriate ongoing professional networks. Identify colleagues that you would like to remain in contact with professionally. Ask them if this is suitable for them also, and the best way to do this; e.g. by email, coffee every couple of months or so, etc.

### **Reflection and Evaluation**

You will have started reflecting and analysing throughout your practicum and it is expected that this will continue, for the purposes of this course, until after your assessment items are complete.

- Review your objectives, journal and any other relevant materials.
- Use the evaluation tasks to identify your thoughts on the practicum:
- Your new or improved strengths,
- Areas that you would like to develop or work on further.
- Address the assessment requirements for the course.

## 12. Assessment

The Assessment for this course is based on your ability to research, plan, evaluate and report various aspects of the project you will be undertaking as the focus of the practicum

### Assessment

Project proposal/outline	15%
Project (3,000 words – including executive summary for presentation to organisation)	60%
Presentation (to academic and organisational representatives)	25%

## 13. Evaluation

Evaluation of your practicum does not form part of the assessment for Commerce Work Practicum. You are, however, encouraged to complete the evaluation form below for your own benefit in terms of personal and professional development. It is a great tool for your own reflection rather than a report card. The evaluation form is available from [here](#).

Your host organisation will also be asked to provide feedback on how they believe you performed and developed through the practicum, and also how well they felt the University supported them in having you. The host organisation's feedback will not form part of the assessment, but will provide guidance in areas you are doing well in and areas you might need to improve.

## 14. Final tips

### **Before the practicum:**

- Attend all practicum workshops held by your school and Career Services
- Dedicate yourself to the process of the practicum
- Research your host organisation thoroughly
- Confirm the details of your practicum with the host organisation
- Familiarise yourself with your Student Work Practicum Agreement

### **During the practicum**

- Get to know your Host Organisation Practicum Supervisor
- Familiarise yourself with as much relevant company policy as possible
- Remember you are there to learn
- Be sure you know where to go if you have a problem
- Adopt a positive attitude
- Keep an up to date journal

### **After the practicum**

- Complete your evaluation thoroughly
- Conclude your relationship with the host organisation effectively
- Keep up your network contacts

## 15. Useful resources

### Careers Services

UniSA Career Services offer online information on a range of career related topics, including:

- Career planning
- Work experience
- Job search strategies
- Applying for jobs

For more information go to:

<http://www.unisanet.unisa.edu.au/careers/>

### Disability Services

If you have a disability you can contact the University's Disability Services for advice and assistance in developing a Disability Action Plan. Disability Advisers are very experienced in assisting students to address challenges they may face on practicum due to their disabilities.

For more information go to:

<http://www.unisanet.unisa.edu.au/learningconnection/student/defaultdisability.asp>

### Australian Job Guide

The Australian Job Guide (Department of Education, Science and Training) offers not just information on potential jobs and training. It also provides information on:

- Learning pathways
- Making career transitions
- Building your career

For more information go to:

<http://jobguide.dest.gov.au/>

### Job Juice - Starting Work

This website gives a range of advice and information about jobs and careers. In particular the section on starting work has some excellent tips and aspects to consider. While this website is for people starting paid employment, the strategies are applicable to starting practicum as well.

For more information go to:

<http://www.jobjuice.gov.au/get-that-job/job-search-tips/starting-work.htm>