



From student to information professional

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The approach to professional experience undertaken by students in the Bachelor of Applied Science in Information Studies, in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Technology, Sydney, centres on a strand of four professional studies subjects, each one semester in duration, with the final subject undertaken when students are enrolled in their final semester of study.

The approach is one of self-directed learning within a framework of career planning. A career planning approach puts a student's professional and practical experiences in a framework of understanding generated by the student, rather than one imposed from outside, and enables them to see information practice not as the routine application of specialist knowledge and skills, but a field which is constantly questioned and modified by those who work in it. A career planning approach also enables students to begin to see themselves in their future role as early as their first year of study. It is a process with a starting point but no finishing point.

The professional studies sequence aims to enable students to transform formal knowledge to practice in a multi-dimensional information environment; to develop

skills and personal attributes essential to the professional information worker; to develop a sense of themselves as professionals; to promote critical and reflective inquiry into information practice, and to give them an opportunity to develop a professional portfolio through the process of career planning.

Each of the four subjects of the strand is designed from a learning perspective rather than a teaching perspective, where students are viewed as self-directed learners, increasingly open to change and seeking new challenges as they incorporate themselves into the information profession, rather than as novice information professionals being inducted into the competencies of an area of practice under the direction of a teacher or supervisor. In the four subjects, students are gradually introduced to the notion of self-directed learning and to the world of information work.

Professional studies I seeks to develop students' knowledge of the information industry by observation and analysis of actual professional environments. Its specific objectives are: to enable students to understand the information and communication environment and the information profession in a variety of provision contexts; to recognise

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the relationship between theory and practice in information work; to observe and analyse the roles of information professionals; to begin to explore the personal and professional values affecting information work, and develop an understanding of the roles and responsibilities involved in self-directed, experiential learning and being a reflective information practitioner. In this subject, students develop a program of activities in the form of a learning contract to explore chosen aspects of information provision, including site visits and discussions with information professionals. Through a consultative process, students establish their own objectives and devise a program of activities to fulfil their objectives.

In Professional Studies II, students build on their knowledge of the information environment and professional value systems observed in Professional Studies I, and commence work on identification of their own aspirations and values in relation to a career in the information industry. Students have opportunity to explore career paths, and develop a career plan within a context reflecting their individuality. The plan reflects career goals and related objectives, and articulates learning activities suitable to meeting their objectives, as well as establishing criteria for evaluating their performance,

and appropriate practitioners to evaluate their performance.

In Professional Studies III, students carry out the activities they have planned in the learning contract developed in Professional Studies II. Through this process, students develop knowledge of specific areas of professional practice, and have opportunity to apply their own knowledge, skills and value systems to practice.

In Professional Studies IV, students negotiate, plan, carry out and evaluate a major professional information project in an information agency or organisation. It is a problem centred approach, and seeks to enable students to identify problem areas in professional practice, and to propose, implement and evaluate acceptable solutions, and to document the process. The project itself and its documentation takes approximately 200 hours to complete. Students work independently on a chosen project, guided by an academic supervisor, practising information professional, and a peer-support group.

A significant outcome of this career planning approach is a professional portfolio of knowledge and skills, experiences and examples of work, references, reports, evaluations, drawn together from the entire program of study. ■

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