Overview of the New Authentic Practicum Model

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A. Overview

This proposal presents the case for the re-definition of the Practicum model at the Arthur Lok Jack GSB to improve the relevance and rigour of the Practicum as the capstone project. The Practicum is an Action Research project that directly targets problems and development challenges in organisations. The project is presently selected and conducted by individual students who are supervised by a school-selected Practicum Supervisor. This proposal is designed to:

- Provide a rationale for the re-definition of the Practicum model as an authentic problem-solving project
- Describe the proposed processes in the re-defined model

B. Background

The Practicum is a capstone requirement for students in the IMBA, EMBA, EMBA In-Company, MHRM, MM, IMBDI, MBA SEM and MPMM. The Practicum is six credits across all programmes. It is presently a 6-month Action Research project that is initiated near the end of the programme. It is intended for students to integrate their learnings across the programme and apply their competences to solve a real organizational problem. Students select a project in a company to which they have access. They develop a practicum proposal and submit this to the Practicum Officer who identifies an appropriate Practicum Supervisor from amongst the internal and adjunct faculty. The school has found that in the process students are only able to get to the stage of gathering and analyzing data and making recommendations. This is inconsistent with the original intention of the Practicum to serve as a problem-based model of learning. This proposal to change the Practicum Model was developed collaboratively by faculty of the Arthur Lok Jack GSB and the Faculty of Social Sciences. Notes of the joint meeting are included at Appendix 1. Faculty strongly supported the proposed transition to a more authentic practicum model.
C. Arthur Lok Jack GSB Authentic Teaching and Learning Platform

Philosophy
The following statement encapsulates the teaching and learning philosophy of the business school:

We believe...
Business education is pragmatic and Reconstructionist. In a rapidly changing world, where knowledge is created and changed every day, the focus of education must be on the process of learning in the acquisition of knowledge. The learner seeks to understand points of view, bringing together beliefs from various sources of knowledge. In an environment of fierce competition, constant innovation and creativity, students must focus on the “how to know” rather than the “what to know” as they address problems, challenges, opportunities and issues to innovate in business and management and positively impact society.

Design and Management of Teaching and Learning
The design of academic programmes and courses is underpinned by the philosophy of the school. Faculty develop courses and experiences that include knowledge of both the science and practice in the field. Courses build on the fundamental disciplines and engage students in learning experiences that allow for the development of knowledge, skills and attitudes in the area of study. Courses must include scientific and behavioural fundamentals as well as technological innovations related to the work processes. The model describes the relationship between theory and practice in the varied activities that move progressively along the continuum of authenticity.
The continuum of learning experiences demonstrates the close alignment of the problem-based learning model proposed as the Practicum and the authentic experiences of organizations. It is expected that the new practicum model will yield defensible solutions to real problems and provide practical guidelines to opportunities in organisations.

Authentic learning requires that students look at problems in a holistic manner. It will be extremely difficult for individual students to tackle the problems that will be of fairly large scope. The Practicum design requires that all students demonstrate an overall and general understanding of the organizational problem and solution but that they will bring various competencies and be able to contribute differently in specific parts of the project. This is the ultimate test of the co-operative learning strategy of the business school.

Cooperative learning is a successful teaching strategy in which small teams, each with students of different competency profiles, use a variety of learning activities to improve their understanding of a subject. Each member of a team is responsible not only for learning what is taught but also for helping teammates learn, thus creating an atmosphere of achievement. Cooperative efforts result in participants striving for mutual benefit so that all group members:

- Gain from each other’s efforts.
- Recognize that all group members share a common fate.
- Know that one’s performance is mutually caused by oneself and one’s team members.
- Feel proud and jointly celebrate when a group member is recognized for achievement.

Research has shown that cooperative learning techniques:

- promote student learning and academic achievement
- increase student retention
- enhance student satisfaction with their learning experience
- help students develop skills in oral communication
- develop students’ social skills
- promote student self-esteem
- help to promote positive relationships

D. Who is Involved

a. Executive in Residence at Arthur Lok Jack GSB: Serves as the overall Manager of the Practicum and partly responsible for liaising with companies to identify problems and align groups with practicum projects. They may also serve as First Examiners. Students continue to have the main responsibility for identifying possible projects but these must meet the approval of the Executives in Residence.

b. Practicum Officer (GSB): Serves as the administrator for practicum and is responsible for receiving proposals, acquiring approvals from the EIR, assigning advisors and providing support to students, advisors and EIRs

c. Practicum Supervisor (First Examiners): Full-time or adjunct faculty at Lok Jack GSB
d. Company Supervisor (Second Examiner). Persons identified by the company to supervise the students. They must meet UWI qualifications criteria to be appointed as a Second Examiner. Senior personnel in the Company without the requisite qualifications may be appointed at the discretion of the UWI. If there is no eligible person to serve as Second Examiner within the Company, the Second Examiner will be appointed from amongst the faculty.

E. The Proposed Practicum Model

The Practicum Team will conduct the exercise in three phases:

Phase 1: Initial data-gathering, analysis and recommendations

Phase 2: Intervention and early assessment

Phase 3: Conclusion and continuation

a. Project Selection

In preparation for this new practicum process, the School hired two (2) former C-Suite executives in the position of Executive in Residence. They will work with local and foreign companies to identify projects which would be advertised to eligible students. Students will also be allowed to identify possible projects but these must meet the approval of the responsible Executives in Residence. The Executive in Residence must ensure that the project assigned to students was not previously undertaken as a group project.

b. Practicum Team Selection

The Executives in Residence will decide on the composition of the Project Team using criteria that include:

- Students’ interests
- Students’ background & experience
- Academic performance in the programme

The Practicum Student Team will be comprised of a maximum of three (3) students selected from within a single programme or across programmes. In exceptional circumstances, students
may opt to undertake the Practicum as an individual, depending on the nature of the problem and will be allowed to do so pending approval from the Executive in Residence.

The team selected will develop a proposal under the guidance of the Practicum Supervisor and the Company Supervisor

c. Practicum Supervision

The Executives in Residence will have overall responsibility for the Practicum. Individual projects will be supervised by either full-time or selected, adjunct faculty and a Company Supervisor. Adjunct faculty that possess industry experience and have great familiarity with industry and sector practices. They are therefore well-positioned to provide on-site and practical advice to students in the implementation of the project. The Company Supervisor will guide and facilitate the project team’s activities. The supervision process will be mainly clinical but will include instructional support and consulting advice as required. Practicum Supervisors will be provided with consulting training through the Certificate in Authentic Business Education. This programme will be mandatory only for Practicum Supervisors and will be offered to Company Supervisors if requested.

The supervision process will be as follows:

i. Following the approval of the Student Team (ST) and assignment of the Practicum Supervisor, the ST arranges the first meeting with the Practicum Supervisor and Company Supervisor. At this meeting, the team agrees on an action plan with timelines. They will also be briefed on the culture, practices and other nuances of the company.

ii. Students must keep separate journals of all meetings, visits, communication, achievement of tasks, milestones and other relevant project details. Entries must be made bi-weekly and signed off by the Practicum Supervisor. The Practicum Supervisor will also keep a journal that will provide support to the final assessment and contribution of each student.

iii. Student Teams will make three (3) presentations to the Company at the end of each phase of the exercise. The Practicum Supervisor and the Company Supervisor will score the presentations.