INDUSTRY PROJECTS, DESIGN FOR THE COMMUNITY AND A WIL CREATIVE INCUBATOR ALL SYNERGIZE TOGETHER TO FORM A STRONG DEGREE PROGRAM WITH STUNNING CREATIVE OUTCOMES

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Abstract

Within the structure of Griffith University, located in Australia's Gold Coast, the Queensland College of Art (QCA) has implemented several ongoing and successful Work Integrated Learning (WIL) programs.

Our primary focus is to develop University/Industry Partnerships that benefit the students, the University and the Industry partners in ways that traditional student/employer relationships would not.

Our student focus is designed to prepare our Graphic Design, Digital Design, Fine Art, ePhotojournalism and 3D Design students for a "real world" environment, whilst still fostering excellence in their professional practice.

The five majors are collectively known as the Bachelor of Digital Media and one of the degree's University/Industry programs is an Industry Project subject. Students are mentored through a semester of work experience in local and international environments, with approximately 25% students gaining full- or part-time employment at the end of that period each year.

The film and television industry is one industry in particular where ongoing relationships have been developed and student's benefit from having world class experience and technology at their fingertips.

Another opportunity for University/Industry Partnerships is fostered through our Community Design program. Major public art and "real world" projects are developed in partnership with community leaders and industry bodies and students are then able to work in large, project-managed groups to develop exciting proposals, many of which get industry funding and are taken to market.

Two recent projects to come out of the Community Design program are "The Wild Animus project" and "Sierra Grand".

"The Wild Animus Project" involved sound and visual artists from San Francisco collaborating with our students to produce three public installation spaces to encourage interaction with ancient art and modern technology.

The "Sierra Grand" project combined public art and technology and utilized a wide combination of our students skill sets, unique to our degree program, such as fine art, 3D visualization, graphic design and fabrication.

A third program undertaken recently by the Gold Coast QCA was the development of a creative incubator within the University. "Liveworm Gold Coast" was established in 2007 as a professional WIL studio and creative incubator. The studio houses between 6-10 students at any one time and a variety of "real world" projects are undertaken with a support staff and creative director on-hand to facilitate the process.

Liveworm Gold Coast also serves as a creative incubator for the honors level students who develop a proposal over the course of their honors year, and are mentored to completion. Often these projects are developed to the point where they can be taken to market as design innovations, such as the "Flux Mug" by recent graduate Richard Neville,
which is now for sale in the Gallery of Modern Art in Brisbane. The honors year itself also supports University/Industry Partnerships between individual students and the wider design community. Honors student Jenna Read established a partnership with Czech designer Filip Blazek during a recent QCA research trip to the Czech Republic, and she is now being mentored through a process of bringing Filip's world-class collection of Velvet Revolution posters to Australia in the New Year.

One of Liveworm Gold Coast's most recent projects is the "Kombumerri" project. Last year, Griffith University signed a treaty with the local indigenous community-the Kombumerri people. This treaty is the first of its kind in Australia and Liveworm Gold Coast was commissioned to make a sculptural piece to recognize and celebrate this treaty. The project, due for completion in early 2010, has developed creative partnerships between Kombumerri elders, the students and the University over the last year, as well as industry partners, such as glass studios, lighting experts, shop fitters and sign writers. The resulting installation is a stunning outcome that merges history, sculpture, public art and information graphics.

Through a diverse range of programs, the QCA Gold Coast campus is continually providing over 100 Bachelor of Digital Media students every year with a rich and varied set of industry experiences. The University/Industry Partnerships are always rewarding for the students, the University and the community at large, and the industry experience; along with folio outcomes far outweigh anything the students could take away from a traditional degree.

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Keywords - WIL, Work Integrated Learning, industry placement, work experience, Gold Coast, Australia, creative incubator, Griffith University, QCA, university / industry partnerships, 3D design, graphic design, digital design.

1 WHAT IS WORK INTEGRATED LEARNING?

"Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) in its broadest sense is often described as an attempt by educators to provide a ‘schooling-to-work’ pathway to support the employability of graduates."

At Griffith University we see it more as an opportunity to develop University / Industry partnerships that benefit the students, the University and the Industry partners in ways that traditional student / employer relationships would not.

At Griffith University’s Queensland College of Art (QCA), the Bachelor of Digital Media degree offers design students three WIL streams or opportunities. These are: Industry Projects; Community Projects and on-campus Creative Incubator.

1.1 Industry Projects

Students from three of the five majors (Graphic Design, Digital Design and 3D Design) have the chance to participate in an Industry Project subject. Students are mentored through a semester of work experience in local and international environments, with approximately 25% of students gaining full- or part-time employment at the end of that period each year. "A major benefit of a WIL program is the increased employability of students, and this matches well with the present trend whereby students expect a pay-off from their investment in education."

QCA Gold Coast have fostered relationships with industry partners, such as Billabong, Photon Digital FX and Unit clothing, and every year students undertake work experience and subsequent employment with these industry partners, giving students an invaluable first step into the workforce.

A. Billabong Australia

Jay Woods, Mark Bunyan and Ashleigh Brennan are three students who undertook a semester of work experience and then went on to subsequent employment with Australian surf-wear giant Billabong. Jay has been promoted through the ranks already with the view to starting his own design company, based on his experience with Billabong (Fig. 1).
B. Unit Clothing

Ben Marks, Krystie Sargent and Kah-Seng Lo are three students who undertook a semester of work experience with Unit Clothing and then went on to subsequent employment with clothing manufacturers, Unit Clothing. Because of her experience with the motocross brand, Krystie then had a
folio and experience to land a job in the US with Bamboo Sk8 and is now a successful practising artist in America (Fig. 2).

Fig. 2 Krystie Sargent (left) and Ben Marks at Unit

1.2 Community Projects

Students from three of the five majors (Graphic Design, Digital Design and 3D Design) have the chance to participate in a Community Design subject. Major public art and “real world” projects are developed in partnership with community leaders and industry bodies and students are then able to work in large, project-managed groups to develop exciting proposals, many of which get industry funding and are taken to market.

A. The “Wild Animus” Project

“The Wild Animus Project” involved sound and visual artists from San Francisco collaborating with our students to produce three public installation spaces to encourage interaction with ancient art and modern technology. 30 students were involved in the project and were divided into three teams to build three separate installations. The students learnt invaluable project management; time management; safety and collaboration skills. These skills are impossible to learn in a purely classroom context, and invaluable for real-world situations. The success of their installations were measured by blue tooth digital downloads on site and the overall response to such an unusual project was overwhelming (Fig. 3).
Fig. 3 Part of the Wild Animus installation
B. The “Sierra Grand” Project

The “Sierra Grand” project combined public art and technology and utilized a wide combination of our student’s skill sets, unique to our degree program, such as fine art, 3D visualization (Fig. 4), graphic design and fabrication. Again a group of 30 students were involved in the project and were divided into four teams to propose ideas based on light, water, metal and time. Two of the proposed works: Holger Krieg’s “Contemporary Clock” (Fig. 5) and Ashleigh Brennan’s “Sun Dial” (Fig. 6) were accepted by the developers and taken through to completion and installation on site. All of the students developed their proposals to a professional finished standard, made formal presentations to the client and worked with structural engineers to ensure the validity of their ideas. Again these skills went well beyond the normal classroom context.

Fig. 4 Josh Kerr’s proposal “Hydra-Cubes” for the Sierra Grand development, located on Australia’s Gold Coast, consisted of animation, 3D modelling and rendering.
Fig. 5 Holger Krieg’s successful proposal “Contemporary Clock” for the Sierra Grand development, located on Australia’s Gold Coast
1.3 Onsite Creative Incubator

A third program undertaken by QCA Gold Coast recently was the development of a creative incubator within the University. "Liveworm Gold Coast" was established in 2007 as a professional WIL studio and creative incubator. The studio houses between 6–10 students at any one time and a variety of "real world" projects are undertaken with a support staff and creative director on-hand to facilitate the process.

A. Honours student projects

Liveworm Gold Coast also serves as a creative incubator for the honours level students who develop a proposal over the course of their honours year, and are mentored to completion. Often these projects are developed to the point where they can be taken to market as design innovations, such as the “Flux Mug” (Fig. 7) by recent graduate Richard Neville, which is now for sale in the Gallery of Modern Art in Brisbane. The honours year itself also supports University/Industry Partnerships between individual students and the wider design community. Honours student Jenna Read established a partnership with Czech designer Filip Blažek during a recent QCA research trip to the Czech Republic, and she is now being mentored through a process of bringing Filip’s world-class
collection of Velvet Revolution posters to Australia in the New Year. “Posters of the Velvet Revolution marks the 20th anniversary of the events that led to the fall of the communist regime in Czechoslovakia,”[3] and makes for an extraordinary opportunity for students to broaden their design horizons.

Fig. 7 Richard Neville’s “Flux Mug” was designed, proto-typed and taken to market, within the Liveworm Creative Incubator. It is now available for sale at the Brisbane Gallery of Modern Art.

B. The “Kombumerri” Project

One of Liveworm Gold Coast’s most recent projects is the “Kombumerri” project. Last year, Griffith University signed a treaty with the local indigenous community—the Kombumerri people. This treaty is the first of its kind in Australia and Liveworm Gold Coast was commissioned to make a sculptural piece to recognise and celebrate this treaty. The project, due for completion in early 2010, has developed creative partnerships between Kombumerri elders, the students and the University over the last year, as well as industry partners, such as glass studios, lighting experts, shop fitters and sign writers. The resulting installation is a stunning outcome that merges history, sculpture, public art and information graphics (Fig. 8).
Fig. 8 Proposed Kombumerri installation, designed to commemorate a treaty between Griffith University and the traditional custodians of the land. Believed to be the first of its kind in Australia.

2 CONCLUSION

Through a diverse range of programs, the Gold Coast campus is continually providing over 100 Bachelor of Digital Media students every year with a rich and varied set of industry experiences. The University/Industry Partnerships are rewarding for the students, the University and the community at large, and the industry experience—along with folio outcomes—far outweigh anything the students could take away from a traditional classroom degree. The high rate of employment as a direct result of their work experience (25% of graduating students in 2009) [4] as well as an increased level of confidence in all students who participated in the program is proof of the success of the QCA Gold Coast WIL program. [5]

What follows are some quotes from the students who have participated in the WIL program at QCA Gold Coast.

A. Ashleigh Brennan

“My freelance work at Billabong is the best Graphic Design experience I have had to date. It has given me a new understanding of the role of a graphic designer, drastically built upon my knowledge of the Adobe Creative Suite, and improved my communication skills. Most importantly, I have met people who have been successful in my profession and given me new goals to work towards.”[6]

B. Megan Harrison

“Liveworm has been a great place to work and learn throughout the semester. It has helped me further my design skills and knowledge of the industry and I now feel more comfortable in my position as a Graphic Designer. I have worked on a variety of projects and been in contact with real clients and
organizations, which has given me hands-on experience dealing with print specifications and producing outcomes that are print ready."[7]

C.  

Rebecca Stables

“When you work at Liveworm, you get to learn aspects of design that aren’t taught in uni courses. Things such as printing processes and costs, checking printed proofs and project management can be part of the projects you work on. You will find that everything takes much longer than you think it will, and how to be better at time management, a useful skill for all designers. I have learnt that designing is only a small part of what a real graphic designer does. I’m glad for the opportunity to learn things I wouldn’t normally have experienced while at university.”[8]

References


[8]  R Stables – written testimonial describing her work experience at Liveworm Gold Coast, 2009