

Research Application Summary

Lessons and experiences from RUFORUM/ IFS internship attachment

Kwesiga Kamugisha, A.¹, Nambi, E.² & Oluca, S.³

¹Faculty of Economics and Management, Makerere University, P. O. Box 7062, Kampala, Uganda

²Faculty of Management, Makerere University Business School, P. O. Box 1337, Kampala, Uganda

³Faculty of Agriculture, Department of Food Science & Technology, P. O. Box 7062,

Kampala, Uganda

Corresponding author: kwesigaapollo@yahoo.co.uk

Abstract

Three undergraduate students who had just completed their studies have been attached to RUFORUM Secretariat as interns for six months. During this period they worked under six different units to gain work experience. The interns indicate that they had learnt to report to duty on time, multi-task and have gained professional experience.

Key words: Field attachment, graduate students, International Foundation for Science, internship, RUFORUM Secretariat

Résumé

Trois étudiants de licence qui venaient juste de terminer leurs études ont été attachés au secrétariat de RUFORUM en tant qu'internes pendant six mois. Au cours de cette période ils ont travaillé dans six différentes unités pour acquérir l'expérience professionnelle. Les internes indiquent qu'ils avaient appris à remplir leur tâche à l'heure, à faire plusieurs travaux et avaient acquis une expérience professionnelle.

Mots clés: Attachement sur terrain, étudiants de licence, Fondation Internationale pour la Science, internat, Secrétariat de RUFORUM

Background

Internships are available in different arrangements based on the organizational structure and flexibility. This paper provides an insight of the experiences of three interns at the Regional Universities Forum for Capacity building in Agriculture (RUFORUM) Secretariat. RUFORUM is a network of 25 universities in Eastern, Central and Southern Africa. It functions through a regional Secretariat based in Kampala, Uganda. There are currently three interns at the Secretariat. The three interns are from different educational backgrounds and all were interested in acquiring professional skills that would better their future employment. All the three studied at Makerere University for first degrees in Developmental Economics, Business Administration (Accounting option), and Food Science and

Technology, respectively. The interns work under different units, two at the Networking, Advocacy and Grants Unit (NAG) and one at the International Foundation for Science (IFS) and Finance and Administration. Occasionally they share responsibilities amongst themselves to assist the other departments. This is done to broaden their perspectives and professional skills. This paper presents lessons learnt during the internship, and makes recommendations for future attachment of interns at similar organizations or RUFORUM itself.

The RUFORUM Secretariat is housed in Makerere University main campus in Kampala, Uganda. Currently RUFORUM houses the International Foundation for Science (IFS) Hub for East Africa. RUFORUM builds capacity of young scientists through supporting graduate training and offering internship to graduate students. Both IFS and RUFORUM aim at strengthening skills of young scientists and participation of women in science for development. As such, both organizations have programmes and activities for imparting skills for effective research for development targeting especially young scientists. The RUFORUM Secretariat is organized into five departments namely; Networking, Advocacy and Grants; Finance and Administration; Training and Quality Assurance; Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation; and Information and Communication Technology. The IFS Hub office, serves as the sixth unit.

Experiences, Lessons and Challenges

The interns were engaged in, among other things, creating a Grants databases for the NAG Unit, drafting letters to grantees, organizing RUFORUM and IFS conferences and workshops, arranging books of accounts for auditing, preparing accountability reports, and from time to time, the interns interacted with the individual unit managers and the entire Secretariat.

As interns at the Secretariat we were exposed to many activities, enabling us gain many experiences and lessons. At the Secretariat, an Intern gets to interact with the managers themselves which is quite rare in many organizations. This provides a motivating atmosphere, encourages hard work and better results.

Among the lessons are the following;

- Time keeping - As interns we have learnt to keep time for reporting to work and developed willingness to work extra

time in case there are any assignments that have not been done during the working hours.

- Multi-tasking – due to the volume of work at the Secretariat, one is expected to work on a number of activities more or less concurrently, and still meet deadlines.
- Improvement on computer skills – As a result of continuous use of computers, the interns have improved on their computer application skills in MS Word, Excel and Access.
- Because of working with different units and managers, with different working habits, we have developed interpersonal communication for working under different settings and personalities and professional relationship development.
- At the Secretariat, there is limited space for work stations which therefore necessitates the staff to share the limited space in order to carry out the day to day operations of the organization.
- Participation in organizing events, and even being allowed to communicate directly with universities has helped to build our confidence and communication skills.
- We sat in several meetings and learnt about development challenges in the region and in African Universities. We also have been exposed to different communication techniques used by scientists.
- We have also learnt to some extent what it takes to make things work. It requires dedication, and perseverance and strong leadership which mobilises team work.

Recommendation

Through RUFORUM's internship program, we as young scientists and graduates at the beginning of our careers have gained work experience and improved our professional skills. Other organizations are encouraged to adopt the concept of internship so as to elevate the confidence and the professional experience of graduates as they start their careers in the respective fields. Internships should be recognized as a basis for regular capacity building.

Internship promotes capacity building and strengthening skills of young graduates and this gives them an insight of what lies ahead of them. The interns should also be given opportunity to ask questions concerning the kind of work that they are doing. The internship program should be paid due attention since despite the fact that the skills of the interns are improving, there is also an increase in the organizational productivity and thus reducing the work load among the employees of the organization. RUFORUM serves as a good example on this matter.

Kwesiga Kamugisha, A. et al.

Acknowledgement

We thank the RUFORUM Secretariat and IFS East Africa Hub for offering us opportunity to gain professional work experience. The staff at the Secretariat have provided a conducive atmosphere for learning.