

## Engineering Education Fostering University Industry Relations

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**Abstract** - It is a fact that even some engineering professors work in researches with the industry; it is interesting to note that the industry has little or no interest in investing in the training of engineers to work in the industries during under-graduation level. Their perception still does not show that it is an investment. The communications between engineering schools and industry has evolved however it is still very humble. Another fact is that university professors, who are often judged primarily by their performance as researchers, do not have time to develop relationships and resources beyond their teaching materials at their disposal. Likewise, they do not necessarily have the time to make the high levels of coordination that many university and industry engagement initiatives require. Industry engineers also have problems with the availability of time, especially during the workday - for example, it is difficult for many to devote half a day to an activity as a workshop for trainees. Often there is no money available to develop the types of initiatives that are likely to have the greatest impact. Even when funding is available to establish a new initiative, long-term financial sustainability remains problem. This paper intends to show a program that might work as a first step for engineering schools and industries to develop relations and work together in the formation of engineers ready for industrial work environment. It is the result of a research developed by the engineering research team of COPEC – Science and Education Research Council.

### IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF ENGINEERING COURSES AT THE PRESENT

Presently engineering courses are full of important core subjects, however it is necessary to innovate and find ways to embed the curricula with important topics to attend the current global trends. Once engineering skills are internationally portable, leading to international mobility, which engineering can easily provide, and it is, in fact, an increasing trend. Intercultural skills, knowledge of languages and cultural prejudice management are very important, because opportunities are broad less and it is important to be able to adapt to any different cultural environment.

Another fact, which is not new, is that many engineering students have a lack of knowledge about what being an engineer really means. The first 3 years are particularly intense and hard. A possible way to improve their perception about the profession is to implement a new kind of course, more enticing and dynamic. This is one of the proposals of COPEC's engineering education research team: - to embed a course with a more interesting activity for students, sooner, in the first year. It is a short-term workshop in order to show students the possibilities of performing as engineers in a global environment – a project developed for a private university in order to reduce retention rate among students of engineering courses.

The idea is to have during the first 3 months' period, in the second semester of the 1st. year, provide the students have different classes, which are more dynamic, due to the mix of site visits, lectures, project proposals, travel period and project presentation. It is a very dynamic experience

that provides students a clear view of what it is to be an engineer and what their possibilities for the future are.

The final goal of this project is to provide a sophisticated period to implement integrated environments for teaching/learning systems. It is in fact a way to reduce the evasion of engineering courses, showing a glimpse of what it is to be an engineer and the wide varieties of opportunities worldwide.

### **COPEC - SCIENCE AND EDUCATION RESEARCH COUNCIL PERSPECTIVE**

This is an organization of about 18 years of existence a multi-disciplinary organization that is a leader on advance science and its application to the development of technology serving society. It started its activities sixteen years ago and since then this organization has made a major contribution to the development of science and education, working to increase the best practices in several research fields.

Integration activities promoted by COPEC provide a qualified coordination and building partnerships, because COPEC is an organization that brings together scientists who share the mission of promoting and developing science, technology and education.

The objectives of COPEC are to promote professionalism, integrity, competency, and education; foster research, improve practice and encourage collaboration in different fields of sciences.

Contents, tools and services provided by COPEC, through courses, publications and consultations, with national and international experts, contribute to the promotion of the professional who wants to be privy of new achievements and service of men to technology.

COPEC enjoys respect and recognition internationally characterized by the open discussion, the free exchange of ideas, respectful debate, and a commitment to rigorous inquiry. Its IIE – International Institute of Education – is a bold and resilient source of innovation in higher education [1].

### **CONTEMPORARY ASPECTS OF EDUCATION**

Work environment worldwide has changed drastically, and today millions of professionals are also unemployed, even in advanced economies. On the other hand, businesses in economically advanced countries claim that they are often not able to find workers with the required skills. It is a fact that, this is a symptomatic dysfunction due to the structural changes that are transforming the nature of work and reshaping employment opportunities. This shows that organizations and policies are not keeping up with the changes in business practices and new technologies are defining what kind of jobs will be created and where they will be located. So there is a need for companies to redefine how and where different tasks have to be carried out, requiring new skills and new employer and employee relationships [2].

It is also important to attempt that globalization has been expanding access to low-cost talented professionals and creating a greater need for workers with higher levels of education and specific skills in order to perform in advanced economies. Under-skilled workers are disappearing, due to automation and low-cost labor markets abroad. In this world scenario, education and training should be seen as vital economic priorities by governments. However, it is still possible to observe the neglect of some nations, perhaps due to the lack of political interest, other than electoral.

Although governments need to invest in the entire system, which builds workforce skills, in some places it is up to private initiatives to offer opportunities for young ambitious talented professionals, who can cooperate for a better future of generations to come. There is no better place than universities to offer these opportunities, pushed by the enterprises. It is important for nations to train highly skilled native-born citizens as well as to attract highly skilled immigrants in order to be competitive in a global scale and assure a future for the people [3].

Finally, government agents should be aware of the fact that, if there is no production system, there will be no financial resources to maintain the social assistance system. This idea of an innovative office will help to generate more quality services to improve industry service, as well as the production system, generating opportunities and jobs, which is a need everywhere in the world today [4].

### **A MODERN COURSE**

Engineering is a challenging and dynamic profession, however, unknown mainly among the younger population. Some very bright students are advised to pursue medicine or Engineering. For those who choose engineering, however, the first three years are not charming and do not show what it is to be an engineer. It does not show students the very important work that they might accomplish in their lives. How much they will help human beings in daily life and how much engineering is important for the world and mainly the world people live today.

The proposed course promotes and allows students to get to know what it is to be an engineer. It is a short-term workshop in order to show students the possibilities of performing as engineers in a global environment with the goal to reduce the retention rate in engineering courses.

It is a 3 months' period, during the second semester of the 1st. year, when students have different classes, which are more dynamic due to the mix of sites visits, lectures, project proposal, travel period and project presentation.

Besides the proposal of a project, which students have to develop, the course includes a short study abroad period, preferably in Europe. It happens in between the project proposal and the presentation of it after the trip, ending in October before the tests period.

The period abroad includes Technical, Academic, Social and Cultural activities, all very important to have a real experience, however brief, and to understand a little about the lifestyle, history and culture of a country, elected by COPEC's education team.

All activities are performed within two weeks of intense work, generally in September. During this period, students also have lectures, visits to companies, universities, as well as social and cultural activities, which will provide students with a great experience and discover a different world.

It is a very dynamic experience that provides students a clearer view of what it is to be an engineer and what their possibilities for the future are. Students acquire inputs and ideas that instigate their imagination.

The period abroad can be done in more or less days, according to the needs of the course proposal for the period. Activities can be changed to fit the availability of organizations and people involved, as well.

### **COURSE DEVELOPMENT**

The course is divided in three different phases that are:

Phase 1 – when students have lectures of industry, preferably, and are challenged to develop a project proposal in a specific engineering theme.

Phase 2 – when students go abroad for a short period.

Phase 3 – when students present their project proposal to a group of invited professionals who evaluate them.

The course is designed to introduce the world of engineering to the students and also to present them a bit of another culture, touring for several academic and business environments, developing cultural activities, exploring the history, experience local public services, where engineering plays an important role. It consists of an opportunity to improve the training of

engineering students, providing them with an excellent experience, by meeting the practice of engineering in many sectors as well as providing them an experience abroad.

The students are graded and the best project group is invited to have an internship in one of the enterprises of the region, or any other company that is interested in having some of these students for a training period.

**PERIOD ABROAD DETAILS**

In order to enhance the quality of students formation towards a broad perspectives for students the short period abroad includes lectures, visits to companies, universities, as well as social and cultural activities, which will provide students with a great experience and allow them to discover a different world (see Figure 1).

September 2016						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				1	2	1 <sup>st</sup> Day 3 Evening ✓ Leave for Abroad
2 <sup>nd</sup> Day 4	3 <sup>rd</sup> Day 5	4 <sup>th</sup> Day 6	5 <sup>th</sup> Day 7	6 <sup>th</sup> Day 8	7 <sup>th</sup> Day 9	8 <sup>th</sup> Day 10
<b>Morning:</b> ✓ Arrival ✓ Trip to main city ✓ Check in Hotel ✓ Rest time, unpack <b>Afternoon:</b> ✓ Walking tour to acknowledge the surroundings of hotel <b>Evening:</b> ✓ Dinner with typical food	<b>Morning:</b> ✓ Visit to University ✓ Lunch <b>Afternoon:</b> ✓ Lecture <b>Evening:</b> ✓ Free	<b>Morning:</b> ✓ Visit to enterprise ✓ Lunch <b>Afternoon:</b> ✓ Lecture <b>Evening:</b> ✓ Free	<b>Morning:</b> ✓ Trip to city 1 ✓ Visit to University ✓ Lunch <b>Afternoon:</b> ✓ Lecture ✓ Ride back to main city <b>Evening:</b> ✓ Free	<b>Morning:</b> ✓ Trip to city 2 ✓ Cultural walk ✓ Lunch <b>Afternoon:</b> ✓ Lecture <b>Evening:</b> ✓ Trip back to main city	<b>Morning:</b> ✓ Cultural Trip ✓ Lunch <b>Afternoon:</b> ✓ Visit to Churches ✓ Visit to small business <b>Evening:</b> ✓ Trip back to main city	<b>Morning:</b> ✓ Lecture ✓ Lunch <b>Afternoon:</b> ✓ City Tour in city 4 ✓ Trip back to main city <b>Evening:</b> ✓ Free
9 <sup>th</sup> Day 11	10 <sup>th</sup> Day 12	13	14	15	16	17
<b>Morning:</b> ✓ Free <b>Afternoon:</b> ✓ Free <b>Evening:</b>	<b>Morning:</b> ✓ Leave to Airport ✓ Get into airplane					

Fig. 1. Schedule for 2016/2017

The duration of the course can be in more or less days according to the availability of the group of students. Some activities can also be altered to fit the goals of the course. It is, in fact, a very flexible part of the course.

Within the academic activities, students have classes and participate in activities in different universities.

Technical activities include visits to some companies of the visited country. The lecturers are generally very technical in content, being some of them about administration aspects of projects and business generated from them.

Visits to laboratories and research centers are the main activities, developed in a pre-established framework, in accordance with the objectives of the program. In general, they follow the main theme developed by the students’ groups in their project proposal. For example, “the development of senses for data collection in subway fluxes in rush hours”, one of the main themes developed by the groups in 2015.

During social activities, students have the opportunity to visit some local meetings with other students in a friendly environment.

Cultural activities provide students with concepts of history and art, as well as the way of life, including guided tours, visits to museums, and other related activities.

All proposed activities take place in a way that students can experience the educational environment, business, culture and lifestyle of the country.

The proposed course consists of an opportunity to improve the training of engineering students, providing them with an excellent experience abroad and to acknowledge the international career that an engineer can develop. Besides the technical knowledge they acquire in site.

The course has the reputation of being demanding, rewarding and intense, providing a challenging educational environment by following high quality standards. The course is also developed to provide to the participants some free time to relax and enjoy the city and all it can offer.

Accommodations are the best possible; students stay in comfortable hotels, with all facilities, in downtown areas of the cities [5].

## OBJECTIVES, GOALS AND EXPECTED RESULTS

The main objective of the course is to foster curiosity and passion for the engineering profession. Provide engineering students an opportunity to experience different environments in the chosen profession.

Furthermore, the course aims to:

- Improve the academic skills and leadership;
- Living in different cultures;
- Strengthen their career goals;
- Search;
- Travel;
- Global experience;
- View new opportunities;
- Enrichment of life [6].

The project goals are:

- Providing an international academic experience;
- Make the students feel what it is to be an engineer;
- Assist in the development of critical analysis;
- Provide the overall experience.

The expected outcomes of the extra academic classes are:

- Dynamism for undergraduate careers;
- Long-term friendships;
- Technical skills and knowledge;
- Experience different cultures and histories;
- Enrichment of life;
- Valuing the profession [7].

## PARTIAL RESULTS

2016 is the third year of this 1st year program and the results are as follows:

Table 1. 1st year effort program and the results.

YEAR	1 <sup>st</sup> . year students number enrollment in Engineering	*students number enrollment in the special course	% of enrollment rate
2014	213	68 students	31.92%
2015	225	77 students	34.22%
2016	236	95 students	40.25%

The College conducted a survey among the students participating in this program and the results are as follows:

Table 2. Survey among the students participating in the Program (2014-2016)

Questions	2014	2015	2016
Satisfaction with knowledge acquisition	56%	64%	72%
Satisfaction with international experience	62%	68%	69%
Satisfaction with acquired skills	65%	79%	81%

For the year 2017 (by the presentation of this work) the proposal is to have a complete chart with statistics about the retention rates acquired with this program so far. The decision relies in the fact that it is necessary at least three years of program to have significant data.

For 2018 the idea is to foster the number of students enrolling the program by means of scholarship for the best students in order to not only to enlarge the number of students going abroad but also to enhance the students level of study.

## CONCLUSION

Along history, universities have become international organizations, not only receiving students from all parts of the world, but also through international research partnerships and providing students opportunities. No doubt that this role has become imperative for countries in order to keep up with the challenging and global educational and research environment. Even industries can benefit from good engineers and that is why they have to get more involved in a measure that is profitable for all parts industry, students and university.

One good reason for industry/university relation as well as the enhancement and promotion of students' quality training and employability, brings financial resources, increases teacher's quality and promotes regional development, along with the future professional, no matter the field, but mainly in engineering.

This different course, in particular, promotes engineering programs, providing the students a glimpse of what it is to be an engineer and increases their possibilities of developing an international career as well as the enlargement of opportunities in the industry.

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