

The South Australian Parliamentary Internship Program at the University of Adelaide, Flinders University, and the University of South Australia: An Example of Cooperation on Work Related Learning.

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The South Australian Parliamentary Internship Program (SAPI) is jointly supported by the Parliament of South Australia and by the three South Australian universities: The University of Adelaide, Flinders University and The University of South Australia. While each university remains responsible for the internal administration of its own students, responsibility for overall coordination of the scheme rotates among the academic staff of the three universities. The unique nature of this program is that it is one of the very few courses which all three universities undertake together and on 25 October 2019 in the House of Assembly the SAPI program celebrated 25 years in which the history and contributions to students' learning were acknowledged. The program offers undergraduate students an opportunity to undertake sustained research and present their reports to Members of Parliament, to their peers and academic staff. The program is very effective in understanding policy and is an excellent example of work-related learning undertaken in collegiate and cooperative way. This comment provides an overview of the SAPI structure and performance in recent years.

¹ I wish to acknowledge Emeritus Professor Clem Macintyre for the interview on SAPI on 29/1/2020 regarding the program and its history, the students who contributed their reviews of the program, and my SAPI colleagues Dr Priya Chacko and Professor Andrew Parkin for their support and involvement in the SAPI program.

SOUTH AUSTRALIAN PARLIAMENTARY INTERNSHIP PROGRAM STRUCTURE

The South Australian Parliamentary Internship Program (SAPI) program is like several others operating in other Australian Parliaments and in several overseas legislatures. It is a collaborative venture between the South Australian Parliament and the three South Australian Universities, and it enables students who are selected into it to work with a member of the South Australian Parliament for a semester. It was established to allow students to gain first-hand experience of the workings of the Parliament and to appreciate the daily activities of those who work within the Parliament. Students are drawn from all three universities and come from a range of discipline backgrounds, but all will have had an introduction to the role of Parliament in their studies. Most students will come from the disciplines of Politics, History, Law, Social Work and Social Science.

The South Australian scheme began in 1995 with the original organisers being Professor Clem Macintyre (now Emeritus Professor), late Professor Dean Jaensch and Dr Adrian Vicary (now Adjunct Associate Professor). The program was endorsed by the various University schools and departments that followed. The reports enabled students to undertake sustained research, to write for a specific purpose and audience. The involvement and support of MPs and their offices have been critical to its longevity and success. Further Professor Macintyre indicated that students have gained employment in various fields and SAPI was an integral part of their learning at the undergraduate level.

The assessment is mainly but not solely based on a research report produced by the student on a topic of interest to both the Member of Parliament and the student. The final research report is of up to 8000 words and the topics varying. Often, they are about topical social/political issues. These have included housing, homelessness, biodiversity, women and discrimination, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues, mental health, gambling, juvenile crime, suicide, and aged care.

The research report for the MP for the purposes of the Internship focuses on the topic negotiated for research and written according to the requirements of the contract between student and MP. What all students have in common is that they have all had an introduction to the role of Parliament in their studies.

Apart from the report students have teaching and learning experiences at Parliament House on a Friday afternoon. In previous years they have been combined but in 2020 and 2021 due to COVID-19 these sessions have been in 2 rotations. The sessions have included:

- Introduction to SAPI program and to the Parliament house

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- Research Methodologies and Strategies
 - Consultations over 2 weeks. Before 2020 these were in the Parliament House Library. In 2020 and 2021 these were held by separate arrangements at the respective universities
 - Guest presentations over 2 weeks. Often these have included Members of Parliament
 - Oral presentations again over two weeks.

The orals were of particular interest as it enabled students to present their research just before the reports are due to their peers and academic staff. Often Members of Parliament or their delegated staff would attend to and their question-and-answer sessions of the research and possible avenues of debate.

At the conclusion of the program a copy of the research report goes to the academic coordinator, one to the MP sponsoring the placement (Parliamentary Supervisor) and one to the Parliamentary Library.

SAPI STRUCTURE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ADELAIDE²

At the University of Adelaide students undertake the program as a 6-unit course in which has requirements of a minimum of 6 units at a level 3 at an undergraduate study. The vacancies are based on placement availability and need to enrol by 30 April. The outcome of the program is for students to work in a political environment, manage research at a complex level meet professional standards and skill enhancement which will be of professional value. The assessment is the Research Report of 80% and the Research Proposal of 20%. Dr Priya Chacko is the Academic Supervisor at the University of Adelaide.

² University of Adelaide, 'Department of politics and International Relations', 2021. Accessed at: <https://www.adelaide.edu.au/course-outlines/108143/1/sem-2/>.

SAPI STRUCTURE AT FLINDERS UNIVERSITY³

For students at Flinders University through the College of business Government and Law, it is similar situation as selection is merit based with the Grade Point Average needing to be 5 and it is studied as a 9 Unit option. An option exists for students to participate at 4.5 Unit but at an Honours level. Interest in the program must be finalised by April and students tend to be in their later stages of their study. Professor Andrew Parkin is the Academic Supervisor at Flinders University and has been the SAPI Coordinator for the three universities since 2021.

SAPI STRUCTURE AT UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA⁴

The SAPI program at the University of South Australia is through the academic unit of Justice and Society and is available to a small number of Bachelor of Social Work, Bachelor of Social Science (Human Service) and double degree Bachelor of Social Science (Human Services) and Bachelor of Psychological Science and Bachelor of Social Science (Human Services) students in second semester of the study year as a final Field Education placement. Further all students who are in this program will need to meet the all the requirements of Field Placement.

Assessment consists of a final research report in addition to the Field Education Placement requirements. This includes requirements of the professional bodies – Australian Association of Social Work and the Australian Community Workers Association.

Social work and social science students have received an introduction to the role of Parliament in various courses in the degrees such as *Governance and Citizenship in Australia*, *Australian Social Policy* and *Policy Practice* as well as in other courses. In addition, they are experienced in interpersonal skills, working with groups, and

³ Flinders University, 'South Australian Parliamentary Internship Program', 2021. Accessed at: <https://www.flinders.edu.au/college-business-government-law/sa-parliamentary-internship>; Flinders University, 'College of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences', 2021. Accessed at: <https://handbook.flinders.edu.au/topics/2022/POLI3007>.

⁴ University of South Australia, 'Social Work & Human Services Welcome to Field Education Information Site for Students', 2021. Accessed at <https://lo.unisa.edu.au/course/view.php?id=5522>; University of South Australia 'Bachelor of Social Science (Human Services)', 2021. Accessed at: <https://lo.unisa.edu.au/course/view.php?id=5522§ionid=241416>.

undertaking research. They will thus share a common background with students from other disciplines as well as bringing to the Internship their experience of disciplinary understandings which differ from other students. University of South Australia students enter the Internship with the opportunity of learning about the role of an institution which is of crucial importance to Australian society and to human service provision. During this experience, they, like other students in the Internship, they learn more about how politics works and how policy is made at this level. The understanding gained from this learning experience adds significantly to students' awareness of the political context of human service practice. But, in addition, students will have an opportunity to contribute to the work of the Parliament by presenting a report based on a research project.

Students who are interested in participating in the Internship Program need to have achieved a GPA of at least a credit in their previous studies. During April students who are interested are invited to contact SAPI Coordinator – who has sent email notices to all students. A final decision is made, and the names forwarded to the Field Placement Team and to the SAPI Coordinator. Students are asked to nominate political party of preference if they have one

The final decision will be made by responsible Academic staff and in recent years it has Associate Professor Deirdre Tedmanson and Dr Cenz Lancione.

VIEWS FROM STUDENTS

The following comments from past students identify the positive learning experiences the students achieved in the program.

The South Australian Parliamentary Internship was a unique experience which I am grateful to have participated in as a final placement. One of the elements of the internship I enjoyed the most was meeting in parliament to listen to a panel of politicians. This was an eye opener and extremely interesting to delve into the lives of Politicians to advance my political science knowledge. The creation of my report was such a satisfying milestone of my university studies, this internship advanced my academic writing to the next level, along with my critical thinking skills. Working in partnership with a member of parliament was a fulfilling task and formulating recommendations to conclude my findings was exciting to show my advance understanding of my researched topic. This opportunity

was such a diverse final placement experience and I highly encourage anyone considering it to choose this option.⁵

The South Australian Parliamentary Internship has been the foundation of my career in politics. I finished a Bachelor of Social Science (Human Services) and Bachelor of Psychological Science at Uni SA in 2020. My SAPI research report examined the mental health crisis in the northern suburbs. I spent a day a week in the Member's office, where I conducted meetings with various mental health practitioners in the field and undertook an extensive literature review to examine my topic. The result was ten policy recommendations to address the northern mental health crisis. I found SAPI furthered my sense of social justice and solidified my interest in working in policy.⁶

The connections I made while undertaking my research helped me to secure a paid political internship after Uni, which then led to an administrative traineeship with the now Premier Peter Malinauskas. I moved into health policy in mid-2021 as a Junior Policy adviser for the Shadow Health Minister Chris Picton. Recently I have moved to full-time into Chris' electorate office. I have also had opportunities to present my findings to other Members of Parliament and advocate for my research topic in public platforms.

Importantly, the groundwork learned through my research topic has given me a great base understanding of the South Australian health system, which has contributed to my success in my professional career.⁷

I absolutely attribute the foundation with SAPI to my success. Immersing yourself in this placement is much more than the words on paper – it includes the development of soft skills and relationship building. Even if pursuing a career in politics specifically is not your goal (which it certainly wasn't mine when I began!), I found it beneficial to contextualise the roles

⁵ South Australian Parliamentary Internship Program, 'Student Feedback: Talia', 2021.

⁶ South Australian Parliamentary Internship Program, 'Student Feedback: Eloise', 2020.

⁷ South Australian Parliamentary Internship Program, 'Student Feedback: Eloise', 2020.

that MPs and their offices play in delivering systemic change. I developed skills in professional conduct/standing, learned a great deal about regulatory frameworks, and gained first-hand insight into how complex change-making can be. That hasn't stopped me from wanting to make change, either. I highly recommend the South Australian Parliamentary Internship program to any student who wants to gain insight into public policy from a unique perspective.⁸

Participating in the S.A. Parliamentary Internship was the highlight of my years at Uni SA. Spending Friday afternoons in the Old Parliament Chamber, or in the House of Assembly, including access to the Parliament library, was a rare and valuable privilege. On those occasions political, guest speakers gave us greater insight to their party's, policy and procedure. The subject of my report as proposed by the MP Dana Wortley was 'The Transitional Impact of the NDIS on Providers Long-Term Viability'. Finding the human element to this issue gave me the impetus to undertake such a challenging assignment. The most interesting aspect of my research was meeting with Dana at Parliament House to listening to her concerns about the obstacles small providers faced as a consequence of the NDIS transition. Interviewing staff from struggling small disability organisations such as the Technology for Ageing and Disability S.A., helped me understand the difference a report could possibly make in giving these organisations or indeed individuals a political voice.⁹

In conclusion, SAPI offers selected undergraduate students a unique learning experience, in which can enhance their research skills, work in a different setting, and gain valuable knowledge of politics and policy. For the staff who have participated, either in leadership roles in coordinating and in teaching it has enabled them to teach and collaborate with colleagues from other universities. For the future SAPI remains an important example of cooperation of work-related learning.

⁸ South Australian Parliamentary Internship Program, 'Student Feedback: Eloise', 2020.

⁹ South Australian Parliamentary Internship Program, 'Student Feedback: Lindy', 2019.