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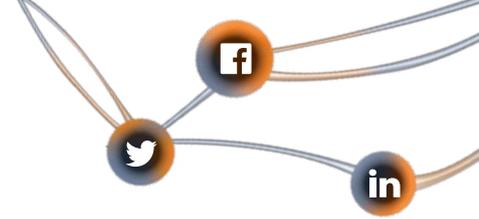
FROM INDUSTRY PROJECT TO A CAREER IN INDUSTRY: HOW BUSINESSES ARE FINDING FUTURE STEM LEADERS

Teams of Masters students from the University of Melbourne work collaboratively to deliver innovative thinking and tangible solutions to their industry partner, giving students a chance to experience real-world challenges, while providing the industry partners access to some of Australia's best and brightest minds. VivaZome Therapeutics even employed a student after the project finished!



VivaZome team presenting a poster at the 2020 Australasian Extracellular Vesicles Conference (AEVC). The people in the photo are [from left to right]:

1. Craig Newton, Non-Executive Director
2. Xenia Sango, Clinical and Regulatory Consultant
3. Monika Janinski, Project Officer and Regulatory Affairs Officer
4. Ian Nisbet, Chairperson
5. David Haylock, Chief Executive Officer
6. Louise White, Quality Consultant



Monika Janinski was a Master of Biotechnology student at the University of Melbourne when she participated in an industry project with VivaZome Therapeutics (an Australian biotech company developing and commercialising exosome-based therapies). Today she works at VivaZome as Project Officer and Regulatory Affairs Officer.

For almost a decade, graduate students in the Faculty of Science at the University of Melbourne have been demonstrating their skills and knowledge in the STEM sector through industry projects. Master's level students in the areas of Biotechnology, Data Science or Environmental Science are required to complete the Industry Project subject. The Industry Project allows students to spend a full academic year working in teams of 3-5 as consultants on a business problem or challenge defined by their assigned host organisation.

The projects offer students a unique opportunity to gain practical, meaningful experience of the STEM workplace, build long lasting relationships in their field, and progress towards their degree. The industry partners gain access to the best and brightest new talent in the sector - a dedicated team working on a research or problem-solving project - and a chance to engage with the University's world-class technology and research.

Ian Nisbet, Chairman of VivaZome, is currently hosting his seventh (and VivaZome's fourth) Biotechnology Industry Project with University of Melbourne students. As Ian's career has moved him between roles and different organisations, he has carried his enthusiasm for hosting industry projects with him.

Ian initially thought the Industry Project seemed like a useful program for small companies to tap into, allowing them to get work done on a project of interest. "I hoped that we would get a few useful insights as well as helpful reference materials from each project," he says.

But the outcomes of the Industry Projects exceeded his expectations. Ian says the Industry Project teams delivered results that were more in-depth than he anticipated, with detailed presentations and, in many instances, the data and reference materials have become valuable assets integrated into company strategy. And the Industry Project provides even more tangible, long-term benefits, as former student and now VivaZome employee Monika Janinski can testify.

Monika was particularly interested in learning how her interest in life sciences could be translated into tangible health benefits, and the chance to work on an Industry Project was a key part of her decision to enrol in the University of Melbourne's Master of Biotechnology course.

"I saw it as a bridge to professional employment," Monika says. "I knew that employment experience is generally both the most important aspect that employers look for, and the most difficult to obtain for students entering the workforce."

She says the experience gave her extra confidence, showed her the crucial importance of proactive, professional communication, provided a chance to build real relationships at VivaZome, and helped her decide the company would be a good fit for her.

"I felt comfortable with everyone and felt that they were very friendly, welcoming, and enthusiastic."

“ For Ian, discovering and building relationships with talented students like Monika has been one of the key benefits of the Industry Projects. “It is interesting (as an outsider) to observe how the students work together, who asks the best questions, who naturally takes on a leadership position, etc. In Monika’s case, what impressed us was her quiet confidence, her organizational skills, her enthusiasm to learn.”

While not everyone gains direct employment through an Industry Project, Ian says he is still in contact with a number of the students who he has worked with over the years. "I've given several references when they've applied for positions with other companies and they touch base every so often to let me know what's happening with their careers."

As an industry host, Ian also has access to the wider University of Melbourne community. He met Professor Mark Rizzacasa at a University function, which led to an on-going collaboration: "I spoke with Mark at the breakfast and, resulting from that conversation, Mark has been a consultant for the company, not VivaZome, for the past 2 plus years."

Ian encourages any organisation who thinks they could benefit from an Industry Project to get involved. "The outcomes are worth the effort," he says.

The University of Melbourne currently has 51 active projects across the 3 Master courses, Biotechnology, Data Science, and Environmental Science. Some industry partners are hosting projects in multiple courses, as their business needs cut across these different fields of study.

If your organisation can value from engaging with future STEM leaders, and you are interested in partnering with the University of Melbourne on an Industry Project, please contact David Rogers (david.rogers@unimelb.edu.au), Manager, Careers and Industry in the Faculty of Science.

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