

FINAL PROJECT FAIR AS A PLATFORM FOR STUDENT INDUSTRY CONTACTS

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ABSTRACT

Since its foundation in 1994, the School of Engineering at Jonkoping University has a profile of strong industry involvement. The school has about 500 industrial partners in the surrounding region, contributing with professional skills and business relevance to the academic curriculum. We are now planning to further strengthen these bonds by initiating a final project fair, establishing the graduation as a public event and an academic festivity. The fair is planned as a staff initiative, with a small project team, and lot of the work done by the students. The university will use its industry partner network to promote the occasion. In the pilot version we estimate around 50 participating projects. In a few years, we hope to reach 200. There is a double agenda for this event. Primarily, we want to facilitate student industry contacts by establishing a platform. Secondly, we want to further market the university as a regional knowledge hub by hosting these activities and making them a public academic event. By the time of presentation, we will be able to show the actually outcome of the first fair, planned to be held May 31, 2012.

KEYWORDS

final project, outreach, industry contacts, curriculum

Jonkoping University and the School of Engineering

Since its foundation in 1994, the School of Engineering at Jonkoping University has a profile of strong industry involvement. The school has about 500 industrial partners in the surrounding region, contributing with professional skills and business relevance to the academic curriculum.

With close to 12000 students, Jonkoping University ranks number 12 in Sweden in size. The university consists of four independent schools; The International Business School, the School of Health Science, The School of Education and Communication and the School of Engineering. The School of Engineering has just over 2000 students in five departments offering five university diploma degree programmes, seven bachelor programmes, and four master programmes.

In order to further establish the university as a platform for student industry contacts, we are now introducing a yearly Final Project Fair, to be held at the end of the spring semester. This will be organized as a public event, where the students show the result of their final projects at a one-day poster session.

Public Events

Today, the school hosts two major public events; Open House and Industrial Partners Day, directed towards different audiences.

The Open House is held in early spring time, directed towards high school students in their last year, about to apply to university. Here, all departments inform about their programmes, and there are student guided public activities, showing what engineering studies are about. This is the first time the prospective students meet the university, and has become a very well appreciated tradition.

The Industrial Partners Day is a one day fair at the school premises, held in late autumn, where the industrial partners have a chance to present themselves to the first-year students. The companies frequently staff their stands with alumnis, showing the bonds between the regional industry and the university. After this, all students, in groups of three or four, are assigned to a partner company that they follow for two semesters, as part of their studies.

We are now planning to further strengthen these bonds with a final project fair, establishing the graduation as a public event and an academic festivity. There is a double agenda for this event. Primarily, we want to facilitate student industry contacts by establishing a platform. Secondly, we want to further market the university as a regional knowledge hub by hosting these activities and making them a public academic event.

Final Project

All students in the bachelor and master programmes finish their studies with a 15 ECTS credit final project. Students work two by two, occasionally in groups of three or individually. They are encouraged to seek an industrial partner for their final project, in order to assure the relevance of their topic, improve their problem solving skills, and promote contacts with their future employers. The topics varies between the different programmes, and students seek contact with a variety of hosting companies, including manufacturers, consultants, governmental or municipal departments, and professional organizations. In this way, the final projects illustrate the full scope of the CDIO initiative, covering the conceiving, designing, implementing and operational phases. Their final projects are presented at a seminar at the university, and at the hosting company. Starting this year, some of the diploma programmes are introducing a 7.5 ECTS credit final project within their programmes.

Final Project Fair

We start this project on a voluntary basis: All students making a final project during the spring semester 2012 have been invited to take part and exhibit their final projects as a poster session at a fair in the end of May. There is a gross number of around 250 projects produced each year. In order to be allowed to actually take part, they must have an assessed and approved (or pre-approved) project, presented at an internal department seminar three days before the fair. A limited number of students will be asked to give short public presentations about their work at an open seminar, running parallel to the fair. For the first fair in spring 2012, we calculate 50 projects to be exhibited. When established, the plan is to make this event a mandatory part of the curriculum, including a work shop in poster production.

The fair will be a one-day event, from 10 AM to 16 PM. Parallel to the poster session there will be a running open short lecture session in two lecture halls. A selected number of projects from each department will be presented as short public lectures, 20 minutes each.

Documentation

All exhibitors will be presented in a departmental presentational booklet. Over time, these yearly booklets will serve a double role as marketing material, giving a comprehensive overview of the character of the different programmes, and as a documentation of the educational activities in the school.

Every project will be presented on a 70X100 cm poster, designed by the students following a graphic template. The school will buy a number of these posters to use for marketing purposes in the future.

A QR code is included in the poster template, directing readers to a temporary on-line library with all displayed theses as draft versions. When finally approved, the QR code will direct to the university library archive, where all theses can be found as full-length electronic documents.

Planning Process

The project started as a staff initiative. There is a two-person project team, estimated to spend about 50 h each planning the work and guiding the process. From each of the five departments there is a contact person overseeing the planning process. There has been monthly project meetings from January to April. In May, there will be short weekly gatherings to make sure everything is on track.

The project has its own activity on the university learning platform, used for information and communication.

Student participation

Two graphic design-students are being paid to produce a graphic profile, poster session invitations, a poster lay-out and design the booklets. In the graphic profile, all departments have been given a signature colour to be used in all graphic material. On a black background, five ice cream pastels will signal the affiliation.



Fig 1: The graphic symbol for the fair, designed by two graphic design students. It has been used on invitational postcards, distributed to the university industrial partners

Two civil engineering students are planning the exhibition areas. The student union will help organizing the actual exhibition, and run a café during the fair. The participants are expected to produce a poster for the session, and a 110-word summary of their work to be included in the booklet.

The night before the fair all participants will take part in mounting the exhibition. We will use the main part of the ground floor in the university building. Participants will be grouped by programme, making it easy for visitors to orientate between the different departments and fields of interest.

Exhibition Infrastructure

In order to accommodate an exhibition like this on campus, the university has installed poster display systems in the corridors and in a chosen number of class rooms. These systems will be used also in the future teaching, for project presentations, critiques and exhibitions. A free standing four-sided poster stand has been designed in order to make better use of the floor space in the larger class rooms and the entrance space.

Outreach

The students are expected to invite their partner company to the fair. The university will invite its network of industry partners, making the fair a platform for student industry interaction on campus. We hope to create the same atmosphere of academic festivity around the final projects as we see when students start their first semester at the university. By hosting this occasion we aim to further establish the university and campus as the natural site for these contacts.

The regional high schools will also be invited, in order to show prospective students what could be the outcome of their studies at the School of Engineering. First and second year students within the university will also get a good overview what a final project is about, what has been done and what could be done.

Conclusions

We have modelled this project after successful precedents, like Halmstad University and our master programme in Product Design at Jonkoping University. Starting with this first pilot version, we aim to establish the fair as a yearly public academic festivity. In a few years, we hope that this fair will be a natural contact spot between industry and students. Taking part in the fair should be seen as an integrated part of the final project work, and employers should consider this one of their most important recruitment possibilities.

With a small staff team and a large proportion of the work actually done by the students themselves, we also aim to make the fair an important student occasion, where they feel the significance of their contributions. In three years, we hope to have 200 projects in a grand fair, where more than 400 students get the chance to meet their future employers.

Biographical Information

Kaj Granath is an architect and works as an assistant professor in the Department of Civil Engineering at Jönköping University, School of Civil Engineering. He is programme leader for the bachelor programme “Building Projects with Architectural Technology”. His teaching focuses on Urban Planning and Housing, and his research concerns the briefing process, with a special attention to Sustainability.

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