

INSPIRE – Integrating Service Learning in Peace & Conflict Studies Internships

Lena Runge, Stéphane Voell,
Kerstin Zimmer and Thorsten Bonacker

INCOPS Report #4

Integration of Work-based Learning in
Peace, Conflict and Security Studies (INCOPS)



Co-funded by
the European Union

INSPIRE – Integrating Service Learning in Peace & Conflict Studies Internships

Project INCOPS, Intellectual Output 4

Authors: Lena Runge, Stéphane Voell, Kerstin Zimmer and Thorsten Bonacker

© 2023 INCOPS

Cite as Runge, Lena, Stéphane Voell, Kerstin Zimmer and Thorsten Bonacker (2023).

INSPIRE – Integrating Service Learning in Peace & Conflict Studies Internships.

INCOPS Report #4.



**Co-funded by
the European Union**

Disclaimer: The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents, which reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use, which may be made of the information contained therein.

Integration of Work-based Learning in Conflict, Peace and Security Studies (INCOPS)

Erasmus+ Strategic Partnerships

2020-1-DE01-KA203-005661

The integration of practical experiences into university curricula has become a standard across various disciplines and study programmes. However, there is often still a gap between theory and the training of analytical skills on the one hand and practical experiences, which students gain at workplaces and during internships, on the other hand. Peace, Conflict and Security Studies are no exception in this regard, even though scholars and employers have stressed the necessity for a closer integration of theory and practice. This is of particular importance for programmes that aim to qualify for a career in the field of peacebuilding, foreign and security policy, or conflict resolution. INCOPS proposes a more comprehensive and systematic approach to overcome existing limitations. INCOPS develops and apply a tailored concept of the Work-based Learning approach to systematically integrate theory and practice in university teaching and curriculum development with a particular focus on the role of internships and voluntary work.

Project Partners:

University of Marburg (DE), Center for Conflict Studies [coordinating institution]

Babeş-Bolyai University (RO), Centre for International Cooperation

University of Coimbra (PT), Faculty of Economics

University of Coventry (GB), Centre for Trust, Peace, and Social Relations

University of Kent (GB), School of Politics and International Relations

Utrecht University (NL), Centre for Conflict Studies



**CENTER
FOR
CONFLICT
STUDIES**

Philipps-Universität Marburg, Center for Conflict Studies

Stéphane Voell (Coordinator), Ketzerbach 11

D-35037 Marburg, konflikt@uni-marburg.de

Content

Summary	4
Introduction	4
The INCOPS Project	5
Service Learning	6
Service Learning in Peace & Conflict Studies Internships	8
<i>Monthly online meetings</i>	9
<i>Preparation phase</i>	10
<i>Support phase</i>	10
<i>Reflection and integration phase</i>	11
<i>Communication platform</i>	12
<i>Evaluation of INSPIRE</i>	13
Experience report	14
<i>Setting up a pilot programme at the University of Marburg</i>	14
<i>National and international context</i>	15
<i>Best practices and challenges</i>	15
<i>Pilot support structure – discussing ethics and security</i>	16
Conclusion	16
Literature	17

Summary

One of the results of the “Integration of Work-based Learning in Conflict, Peace and Security Studies (INCOPS)” project was the INSPIRE programme. INSPIRE (Integrating Service Learning in Peace & Conflict Studies Internships) intends to transform the integration of Work-based Learning (WBL) activities in Peace, Conflict, and Security Studies (PCS) courses by incorporating Service Learning. The programme aims to enhance students’ internship experiences by fostering the integration of internships into study programmes.

INSPIRE encompasses three conclusive phases: the preparation phase, the support phase, and the reflection and integration phase. These phases form comprehensive and fruitful internship experience, blending elements of “service” and “learning”.

The preparatory stage is flexible and commences upon students’ expression of interest to undertake an internship. Students have the chance to acquire significant knowledge, attend talks and receive input from present interns, become informed regarding varied career paths and internships through alumni experiences, and obtain advice from peers on best practices. An essential component of the preparation process entails utilizing a shared learning platform, which grants entry to information, discussion forums, and blog entries from interns.

The INSPIRE support phase contains a monthly online event that acts as a meetup for three categories of PCS students. The first group comprises students presently carrying out their internships, who share their hands-on experience. The second group is constituted of students who have not yet commenced their internships and are seeking direction after initiating communication with providers. The third cohort is composed of students who have completed their internship programs and are reflecting on their experiences alongside their peers. As a result of students’ geographical dispersion during their internships, the online delivery mode is preferred. Also, a student tutorial format is favoured with internship

coordinators contributing to facilitate peer-to-peer conversations.

The reflection and integration phase begins after completing the internship, although reflection starts earlier. This phase consolidates learning, starting with an internship report, whose format varies by university. We suggest using an ungraded learning portfolio, including a learning agreement, blog posts, and a final reflection, for evaluation. A crucial part of this phase is a conclusive meeting with the internship organisation to evaluate competencies based on the learning agreement. The phase ends with a qualitative assessment of the entire experience, involving former trainees in sharing insights with new interns, fostering personal reflection and preparing future participants.

INSPIRE provides a well-structured and all-encompassing method to incorporate Service Learning into PCS internships. By emphasising the three key phases of preparation, support, and reflection and integration, our programme strives to offer students a comprehensive and valuable internship experience.

Introduction

The Master’s programme in Peace and Conflict Studies at the Philipps University of Marburg celebrates its 20th anniversary next year. Since 2004, the compulsory internship abroad has been a cornerstone of the programme. During the internship, students have the opportunity to explore potential career fields and make valuable contacts with potential employers. However, until recently, the internship module has had little connection with the rest of the curriculum. In addition, the supervision of our interns was largely limited to one-on-one meetings with the persons in charge of the internships.

Together with five partner universities in Europe, where colleagues with whom we have been working for a long time reported similar problems, we set out to find solutions for a better integration of internships and studies. Together we developed INSPIRE (Integrating Service Learning in Peace & Conflict Studies Internships).

With INSPIRE, internship modules in degree programmes can be fundamentally changed. Students' practical experience will be more closely linked to the content of the course, the placement experience will be monitored and interns will have the opportunity to reflect on their placement as it is taking place. In addition, INSPIRE offers the opportunity to create a support structure for students on issues such as finding a placement, funding or research ethics during the placement using simple means.

This experience report, which is also a guide to the use of our approach, focuses on INSPIRE, i.e. the integration of Work-based Learning (WBL) in Peace, Conflict and Security Studies (PCS) programmes. Based on the practical application and reflection of our findings and recommendations from the previous project phases (Intellectual Outputs O1-3, O5), some insights on best practices and challenges have been gained, from which evidence-based guidelines are derived. To this end, the lessons learned report first provides some information about the project and the current findings to date. It also outlines the basic ideas of Service Learning as a guiding concept for the design and implementation of a new approach to support WBL in PCS programmes. In addition, the report will shed some light on the pilot project designed and implemented to promote the integration of theory and practice in PCS.

The INCOPS Project

The project "Integration of Work-Based Learning in Conflict, Peace and Security Studies" (INCOPS) examines the integration of practical experience into university curricula in PCS. Educators, students and employers have stressed the need for closer integration of academic skills with experience in organisations working in the field of peacebuilding, foreign and security policy or conflict resolution. The INCOPS project partners were investigating existing practices in this area with the aim of improving knowledge of the different types of WBL practices in PCS pro-

grammes. The final aim of the project is to develop concrete proposals on best practices and challenges for the application of WBL in PCS.

In a Europe-wide comparison, practices vary in the way PCS programme designs facilitate students' participation in work environments relevant to the field of study or integrate the empirical experiences they have gained prior to their PCS studies. Based on academic resources and the empirical experiences of our project consortium, we have defined WBL in the field of PCS in our working definition as

"an approach in higher education which aims to merge theory and practice. It entails students working in or with organisations in the field, gaining practical experience, while utilising and reflecting on their academic skills. Secondly, it yields an increase in educational resources, new impressions, networks, innovative ideas and critical reflection on the applicability of learnt theories. In addition, WBL brings together different stakeholders such as teachers, students and professional organisations" (Runge and Vértes 2021: 4).

This working definition was derived from the literature review, which examined different models of WBL approaches (cf. Runge and Vértes 2021). However, the concept of WBL itself proved to be little known among the course or programme coordinators we interviewed during the first phase of the project, although the majority of programmes in the PCS field already – intuitively or more consciously – apply practices that correspond to what we (and the academic literature) define as WBL. In the case of many institutions, these practices are often limited to work placements. Other forms of WBL include voluntary work, field research, simulations and other practices.

The various focus groups and qualitative interviews conducted in the second research phase of the project (O2, cf. Grundig et al. 2023) with students and representatives of organisations providing internships and volunteer work, as well as with university administrators, underlined that WBL in its various forms is generally seen as

a fruitful way of learning by all stakeholder groups:

“We consider WBL to be a central and useful component of PCS programmes. In our experience, and this has been confirmed by students and stakeholders, the transfer of WBL into university learning and vice versa is very beneficial. This is true for the students, who gain important practical experience and increase their chances for attractive job offers, as well as for the internship providers and volunteer organisations, who can involve motivated students with professional backgrounds in their work. University teaching also benefits from students being able to contribute their practical experience to teaching” (Grundig et al. 2023: 36).

However, the integration of WBL into PCS study programmes is associated with a number of challenges for each stakeholder group. For example, while students often struggle to find appropriate placements and funding in the pre-internship phase, from an academic perspective the de-prioritisation of skills reflection and development to meet employers’ needs is questionable. Focusing on internships, voluntary work and integration into different existing practices of WBL, the interviews provided useful insights into the different needs of different stakeholders, discussed solutions and good practices and reflected on their applicability in different contexts.

On this basis, four recommendations have been formulated:

- The development of shared expectations between stakeholders is a key factor in ensuring that all stakeholders benefit. This includes a balance between employers’ needs, students’ interests and universities’ requirements for skills development.
- A formal framework to accompany the pre-, during and post-internship phases is important to realise the full potential of WBL experiences. This includes adequate preparation, support and reflection of the experiences gained in the WBL activity by both the university and the work placement organisation.

- The integration of WBL experiences in the classroom seems to be a productive way of linking WBL with academic learning. This includes the opportunity for both students and work providing organisations in the field to bring their experience and expertise to the classroom, which promotes the integration of theory and practice in PCS study programmes.
- The integration of theory and practice could benefit from the development of a network and long-term relationships between universities, students and organisations active in the field. This includes the incentive to institutionalise a support structure based on shared expectations.

Service Learning

As part of INCOPS, we worked on different concepts for the sustainable integration of internships into teaching. The fourth work package of INCOPS (O4) consisted of a pilot phase in which key findings from our Erasmus+ project were tested with a group of students. The pilot was based on the idea of Service Learning. This is a method that combines social engagement (“service”) with academic content (“learning”). In INCOPS, the focus was on “learning”: work in the placement was combined with course content and continuous support was provided.

This report is based on the concept of Service Learning, which is an essential element of WBL and is becoming increasingly popular in PCS, especially outside Europe and in conflict-affected countries. Elmhurst University defines Service Learning as “an educational approach where a student learns theories in the classroom and at the same time volunteers with an agency (usually a non-profit or social service group) and engages in reflection activities to deepen their understanding of what is being taught” (Elmhurst University 2019).

Service Learning is characterised by four fundamental features.

- Students' social engagement addresses a real (social) need and allows students to make a relevant contribution to society through their activity.
- Service Learning is linked to teaching, i.e. social work issues are related to issues in the study programme.
- There is continuous monitoring of the process by the educators, so that the social contribution and the learning process can be reflected and evaluated at the end.
- Service Learning always takes place outside the university.

Furthermore, three forms of Service Learning can be distinguished.

- "direct services", i.e. students are in direct contact with the community.
- "indirect services", where the social activity takes place without direct contact with the community.
- "advocacy", i.e. students support the community in public

The concept of Service Learning is widely used in the US education system, where it combines social engagement and institutional learning (cf. University of Trier 2022, cf. also Schank et al. 2020). In this combination, learning is linked to taking responsibility and being accountable in society (service) (cf. Seifert and Zentner 2010: 11).

While Service Learning closely links institutional learning with social engagement, the concept must be distinguished from "community service" and "community-based learning". The first alternative describes voluntary engagement that takes place either within the structuring framework of the educational institution or completely detached from it. The second alternative designates institutionalised learning that is deepened through practical experience. Therefore, Service Learning goes beyond both alternatives in terms of scope and mutual exchange.

The main objective of Service Learning is to involve students in projects or activities that address social needs and challenges and are delivered by non-profit organisations. In addition, a

key aspect of Service Learning is the need for stakeholders to agree on common objectives, learning outcomes and benefits for all involved, in particular the students and the host organisation. The guidelines and tools developed in O1-O3 contribute to an operational framework for Service Learning in this phase.

This should benefit all stakeholders in a role-specific way. Universities and organisations providing internships may benefit as external cooperation is strengthened and educational institutions are more integrated into the social network, which may lead to a more coordinated approach between theory and practice. The roles of students and teachers could change through this process, as learning becomes more project- and action-oriented. Students may benefit from the social and personal skills they acquire. This is often linked to improved learning performance, as Service Learning increases motivation, trains problem-solving and other skills (Seifert and Zentner 2010: 12). Society can benefit because Service Learning aims to strengthen civic engagement and democratic structures in a sustainable way, as studies show that people who get involved in volunteering early in life tend to remain socially engaged throughout their lives (Seifert and Zentner 2010: 13).

It was not entirely surprising that the Marburg team in INCOPS suggested Service Learning as a conceptual framework for INCOPS. There is already some experience there. For example, the University of Marburg advises students who want to get involved in social work. It works together with the volunteer agency of the city of Marburg. In this context, Service Learning projects have been developed at the interface between the university and the city (cf. Möller and Rundnagel 2018).

The Marburg Center for Conflict Studies (CCS) has been working with Service Learning for more than ten years. The aim and content of a "Service Learning" seminar offered by Kerstin Zimmer in the summer term 2012 and winter term 2012/13 was to promote civil peace and civil peace education in schools (cf. Zimmer 2015). The seminar was continued in the summer term 2013 and winter term 2013/14 with a new group of students. The course was designed as a two-semester project seminar for students of Peace

and Conflict Studies and Sociology, as well as for students of Teacher Education, some of whom teach Politics and Economics at grammar schools. In interdisciplinary groups, students developed and tested teaching concepts, units and handouts in cooperation with external partners. The assessment consisted of a project report. The extended “community” concept of the project included partners from both schools, i.e. teachers, students (from grade 9, in all types of schools) as well as civil society actors. In terms of content, the Service Learning seminar initially responded to current needs in the area of peace education in Germany, as peacebuilding as an educational goal is anchored in all German school laws, but in practice is only marginally addressed in school curricula and is often overshadowed by classical security policy.

In social science courses, key competences for students are the acquisition of subject knowledge as well as the attainment of competences for their own learning and problem-solving strategies. The special feature of Service Learning seminars is that students take on a task in a real-life situation and assume responsibility for this situation by getting involved in civil society. Courses at the CCS aim not only to broaden students’ professional horizons, but also to develop their social, personal and methodological skills. Students acquire valuable additional qualifications in areas such as communication, conflict management and project planning. A further aim is to develop an awareness of social problems and responsibility, as well as knowledge of the possibilities for active participation in the community. The accompanying university seminar offers a systematic preparation and follow-up of the students’ activities, using a variety of reflection methods and instruments, since successful learning processes require reflection loops. These include professional reflection, self-reflection and reconnection with abstract concepts and content. The exchange with other seminar participants should lead to placing the experience in a wider context.

Three levels of learning or competence acquisition can be distinguished in Service Learning seminars:

- academic expectations (knowledge, application, understanding, etc.)
- service-related expectations (e.g. empathy, ability to work in a team), and
- personal development expectations (acting responsibly and considering the consequences for the community).

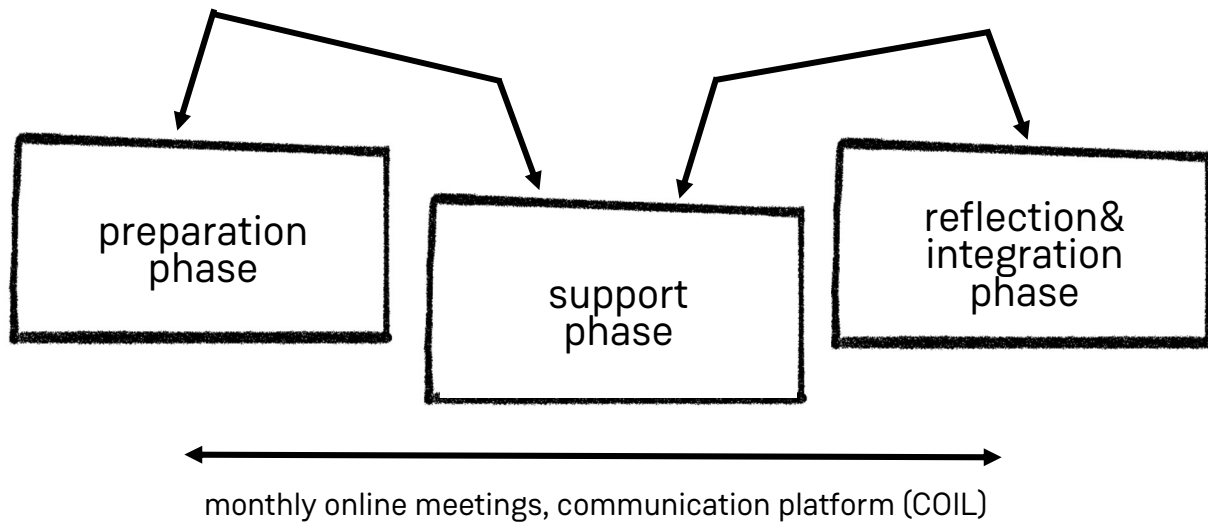
The Service Learning seminar was integrated into the curriculum of each programme in different modules, some of which were even compulsory seminars. As students received different numbers of ECTS points for the course, the workload within the interdisciplinary teams varied.

Transparency and agreements, as well as continuous balancing, enabled a constructive handling of the situation. Adapted to the study regulations of Peace and Conflict Studies and Sociology and Social Research, the study and examination work consisted of an exposé and a final report. The report was written as a group performance and contained the individual steps of the work process, the results of the work and a section for reflection. The seminar had to be completed with a mark. It should be emphasised that the grade did not assess the work in the area of “service” as such, but rather the learning performance.

Here it becomes clear that with the Service Learning experiences at the University of Marburg we are building on knowledge and practical experience in the field. The relevance of preparation, follow-up and continuous support for students is already clear here. However, the formats described at the University of Marburg are “classic” Service Learning processes. They did not yet include internships. We have taken this step in INCOPS.

Service Learning in Peace & Conflict Studies Internships

Although the primary focus of Service Learning is on integrating volunteering into teaching, in the case of INCOPS the partners identified Service Learning as a specific form of support structure for study-related internships and possibly



other forms of WBL. We propose INSPIRE (Integrating Service Learning in Peace and Conflict Studies Internships) as an approach to synchronising internship experiences with study programmes. INSPIRE is framed by the following intended learning outcomes:

By the end of the placement module, students will be able to...

- *evaluate career opportunities before graduation and reflect on their own interests and skills in this context.*
- *discuss the learning objectives of the placement with the placement provider before the placement and evaluate their achievement after the placement.*
- *gain initial work experience and develop job-specific social and communication skills*
- *relate and critically evaluate the content of studies to the work in the placement.*

This rationale is based on the four main characteristics of Service Learning mentioned above. For example, as shown above, the social relevance of the activity and a real social need must also be considered. Therefore, the placement should revolve around socially relevant issues and promote social contributions. However, the impact of Service Learning through the placement can be threefold: either direct, indirect or

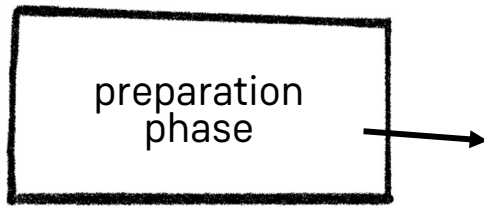
in the form of advocacy. Furthermore, the Service Learning inspired internship must be integrated into the reflective process of the study programme, its content and the student's skills. In the Service Learning approach, students reflect on their internship or volunteer work in the context of institutional learning, linking their experience to the content of their studies. In short, it is necessary to link the placement to teaching and learning. This makes a continuous process of support and guidance equally important.

Although the exact details of the process need to be developed jointly by all relevant stakeholders – university, internship providing organisations and students – this concept provides some suggestions in the following section.

The INSPIRE program consists of three distinct phases that collaborate to provide a thorough and productive internship experience, combining aspects of both “service” and “learning”. The initial stage is the preparation phase (1), followed by the support phase (2), and ultimately, the reflection and integration phase (3).

Monthly online meetings

INSPIRE is centred around a monthly online event that serves as a meeting point for three groups of PCS students. The first group consists of students currently undertaking their internships, who shall be given the opportunity to share their practical experience. The second



- start possible at any time
- orientation and internship planning
- peers report on their internship experience
- learning agreement

group comprises students who have not yet begun their internships and are seeking guidance after making initial contact with providers. All students who are required to complete an internship as part of their degree programme are invited to participate at any point. The third group comprises students who have finished their internship and reflect on their internship experiences with others.

Due to the local dispersion of students during their internships, online delivery is preferred. A student tutorial format is favoured, allowing for peer-to-peer discussions with some input from internship coordinators. It is essential for the tutorial to function as a moderated platform for the exchange of ideas.

Regular attendance in the course ensures the internship phase is consistently integrated into the degree programme. Nevertheless, participation is not mandatory. During their internships, students establish connections with both peers and educators in their field of study, enabling them to remain engaged with their degree programme. Furthermore, the university collaborates with students to effortlessly combine internships with their academic pursuits.

Preparation phase

This phase for INSPIRE is adaptable and starts when students express their interest in starting the internship experience. They can participate in the online events to gain valuable knowledge. During these events, students have the opportunity to hear presentations and contributions from current interns, learn about diverse career fields and internships through alumni experiences, and obtain peer-level advice on best practices.

A crucial element of the preparation process is the use of a shared learning platform, which offers access to information, discussion forums, and blog entries from interns. Online discussions on this platform are moderated by a student tutor or another teacher, ensuring an interactive and supportive learning process.

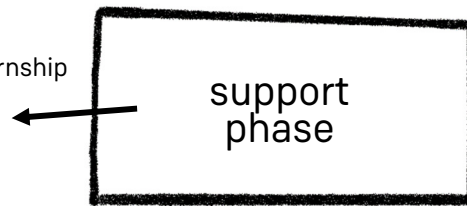
A fundamental aspect of the preparation phase entails drafting a learning agreement. Nevertheless, this accord negotiated and signed by the internship provider and student is not a conventional employment contract. Instead, it lays out the prospective learning outcomes, specifically the competencies that the student should acquire by the end of the internship. This agreement functions as a kind of memorandum of understanding and is generated following a brief exchange between the student and the organisation regarding their mutual expectations. It serves to connect the internship to the study programme content and facilitates future reflection.

Students receive both content-related and process-related support from universities during this stage. This may involve having one-on-one conversations with the internship supervisors, especially during the preparation of the learning agreement, to guarantee that the requirements and anticipations of all stakeholders are satisfactorily addressed.

Support phase

The support phase of the INSPIRE programme indicates a substantial shift in the interpretation of the internship in the degree course. Previously, it was typical to withdraw from the university fully for the length of the internship. With INSPIRE, however, a continuous communication

- stay connected to your university during your internship
- nexus of practical experience and study content
- writing blog posts about internship experience
- continued participation in online meetings



channel remains open with the sending university, which ensures a constant connection between studies and internship.

An important aspect of this phase is the monthly online meetings to which interns are invited. During these meetings, they can share their experiences during the internship, either by making their own contributions or through discussions with others. The linking of study content with practical experience is the central feature of these support meetings. The extent of application of degree programme topics in the internship, the influence of said topics on internship work, and their helpfulness in different situations are discussed. Furthermore, experiences during the internship that do not align with or contradict degree programme content are considered.

Although a separate reflection phase is planned, this period marks the beginning of an intense interrogation of the internship experience. On one hand, this occurs through discussions during accompanying meetings. On the other hand, interns are invited to compose blog entries about their work on the learning platform. These entries should highlight the connection to course content. Moreover, they provide a chance for fellow students to read and comment, promoting further dialogue.

In cases of significant challenges during the internship, students can avail themselves of personal consultation hours with their internship

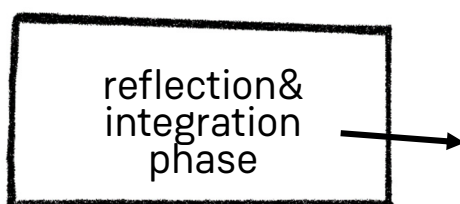
supervisors. These sessions provide individual counselling and support to guarantee that students receive the finest possible experience from their internship.

Reflection and integration phase

The reflection and integration phase within the INSPIRE programme officially commences upon completion of the internship, although in reality, the reflection process begins gradually during the preceding phases. Although this phase is artificially distinct from the previous ones, its purpose is to consolidate and enhance the learning and experience process. Reflection begins with submitting the internship report, which form may vary depending on the universities.

We suggest to consider use an ungraded learning portfolio for the evaluation of the internship module. The portfolio comprises a learning agreement, a set number of blog posts, and a final reflection. The latter allows for discussing and contemplating on all aspects of the portfolio.

Another essential aspect of this phase involves a conclusive meeting with the organization that provided the internship. During this discussion, the competencies gained will be evaluated and discussed based on the learning agreement. This meeting provides a significant opportunity to review and deliberate over the abilities and knowledge acquired during the internship period.



- begins with submission of the report/portfolio
- short report in monthly meetings or with video
- reflection should include relevance of study content during internship
- evaluation of the entire process

At the conclusion of the INSPIRE process, a qualitative assessment of the entire individual process is conducted (cf. below). This evaluation facilitates reflection on the learning experience and enhances integration of the knowledge acquired.

Crucial to the integration and reflection phase is the involvement of previous trainees in the accompanying event. Here, interns have the chance to share their experiences, informing and inspiring the next generation. This exchange cultivates personal reflection and supports the training of future interns.

Communication platform

The form and need of an INSPIRE communication platform is shaped by the impossibility to conduct regular, accompanying offline events. Full-time internships allow little time for additional events, and many students, like those from Marburg, may have to complete their internships outside of Germany. Nevertheless, exchange opportunities and a platform to store, share and exchange information are needed, even if students are not present in the classroom simultaneously. INSPIRE's foundation is based on an online communication platform.

The original plan for INCOPS was to develop a distinct platform that would be shared among the consortium partners. This decision was made prior to the outbreak of Covid-19 when knowledge on e-learning alternatives was still scarce. However, the pandemic triggered a substantial change, as people suddenly became adept in online learning. New e-tools were developed and existing ones were integrated into teaching. This led to the realization that there was no need for a new platform as the existing tools are effective. It was also recognized that conforming to local conditions and data protection regulations is essential in order to utilize e-tools efficiently and compliantly.

A communication platform, like ILIAS or Moodle, is suggested for the INSPIRE programme, serving as both an information repository and enabling asynchronous communication. Students can obtain information on internships, requirements, vacancies, contacts, and experi-

ences through blog posts at any time, with forums and comment functions available for exchanging internship-related information. This platform requires consistent monitoring and moderation by educators to guarantee effective communication.

The monthly online support event is a significant component of INSPIRE, furnishing an extra avenue for discourse. Participation in this voluntary event is not meant to overburden students on placement, but instead serves as a forum to exchange ideas and discuss personal experiences, best practices, and challenges.

It is crucial for INSPIRE to establish a connection between the internship experience and the degree programme, e.g. through the development of a learning agreement. This agreement outlines the intended learning outcomes of the internship, as agreed upon by the organisation and intern. Reflection on the correlation between the internship and the course content occurs through the use of blog posts on the learning platform and complements the involvement of other programme students who actively engage in commenting on the posts. Together, the blog posts compile a portfolio that acts as a tool for reflection and replaces previous reporting methods.

Additionally, interns are invited to present their experiences during the event, which addresses the interplay between study content and practical application. These presentations commonly occur post-internship, facilitating the exchange of experiences even after the practical phase's completion. In cases where there is a significant volume of experience reports, it would prove beneficial to record them in brief videos and upload them to the communication platform.

The safety and confidentiality of the communication platform hold prime importance. Strict access control is necessary to ensure that materials within the platform, such as blog posts and videos, can only be accessed by authorized users. The decision to make portfolios featuring the blog posts available to organizations where students have completed internships is left to the students' choice.

As part of O3 (cf. Curran, Taka, Grundig 2023), it was recommended that the communication

platform for INSPIRE be developed with an international focus. This strategy was logical given that INSPIRE originated from a European collaborative project, and universities like Marburg and Kent provide collaborative study programmes. Instead of creating a new learning platform, the proposal is to use a Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) approach for effective international collaboration.

The COIL framework brings together educators and learners from different Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and countries in an online space where they engage in collaborative learning processes. COIL establishes a fair team-taught learning setting where instructors from two cultures collaborate on a shared syllabus that highlights experiential and collaborative learning. COIL can enhance student experiences, foster cross-cultural comprehension of the challenges, opportunities, demands, and skill development involved in WBL journeys through processes of skill development and self-reflection, as well as the integration of theory and practice in WBL processes. COIL enables the integration of diverse online tools, including video or photo sharing platforms, chat applications, and task management tools, encouraging students to reflect and exchange perspectives beyond the confines of assessment and formalised learning, even beyond their immediate placement experience. COIL should be seamlessly incorporated into the existing workload of trainers and educators, as it necessitates additional time and resources for preparation and engagement. Moreover, it is crucial that technical solutions are suitable and flexible to meet the requirements of both students and trainers. For instance, challenges such as limited access to hardware and language barriers, as well as ethical and legal dilemmas related to the protection and confidentiality of data, may arise.

Evaluation of INSPIRE

The implementation of a new teaching and learning programme, like INSPIRE, requires a thorough evaluation to ascertain its effectiveness and relevance. We conducted detailed discussions with various stakeholders, which in-

cluded students, teaching staff and the organization providing the internship, and developed INSPIRE accordingly. Our approach was modelled on certain fundamental principles of Service Learning, and there is already a well-established history of its evaluation. These tools will be adapted for use in INSPIRE educational arrangements (cf. for example Altenschmidt, Miller and Stickdorn 2009; Müller, Kleinser and Berti 2020).

Evaluation is essential to ensure quality, with a primary objective of assessing if the intended learning outcomes are being achieved and if the chosen methods are suitable. Quality assurance is important in upholding high academic standards and guaranteeing that the course material remains pertinent and captivating for pupils.

Student evaluations play a crucial role in incorporating the student perspective. Providing students with an opportunity to voice their opinions and share their experiences is of the utmost importance. The feedback received is invaluable in measuring the perception of the course among those it aims to educate. The insights gathered from these evaluations can lead to significant enhancements in course content and teaching methods, thus creating a more effective and pleasurable learning experience.

It is imperative for evaluations to include the student perspective. In addition to tutoring support, evaluations provide students with a platform to share their opinions and experiences in an objective manner. This assists in comprehending and enhancing the course from the students' standpoint.

Since COVID impeded the planned pilot of INCOPS in its first year, it posed a significant challenge. Therefore, the assessment of INSPIRE is possible only post the project's conclusion.

In the INCOPS team, we have devised an evaluation procedure for INSPIRE. The evaluation will have varying focal points depending on the location. It is crucial to maintain a reasonable workload for evaluations, which may entail utilising different evaluation tools of each location.

A combination of formative and summative evaluations is proposed for INSPIRE. Formative evaluations conducted throughout the course can consist of student blog entries documenting their experiences and reflections, thereby

providing continuous feedback and supporting their personal and professional development.

Subsequently, summative evaluations appraise INSPIRE's overall effectiveness at its conclusion. This could entail conducting a comprehensive evaluation of internship activities and conducting surveys for both students and organizations that provide internships.

By customising Service Learning questionnaires for INSPIRE, the evaluation process can be streamlined. These questionnaires can be tailored to meet the specific needs of INSPIRE, with emphasis on program structure, self-assessment of competence acquisition, and collaboration with internship organisations.

Ensuring anonymity in evaluations presents a considerable challenge, particularly in situations akin to Marburg, where students commence and conclude their internships at different times. To maintain anonymity and promote feedback, the optimal survey timing must be ascertained.

The evaluation of novel teaching-learning arrangements, such as INSPIRE, is a complex undertaking that necessitates careful observation and preparation.

Quality assurance, the perspectives of students, adaptability to challenges, diverse evaluation focuses, workload management, and maintaining anonymity are all crucial elements of an efficient evaluation strategy. By addressing these aspects, the INSPIRE programme can be consistently refined and customised to suit the requirements of all parties involved.

Experience report

Considering the results of the literature review (cf. Intellectual Output 01, Runge and Vértes 2021) the stakeholder interviews (02, Grundig et al. 2023) and the online learning tools (03, Curran, Taka and Grundig 2023), a pilot programme was set up at the the Center for Conflict Studies (CCS) of the University of Marburg as part of the fourth research phase of the INCOPS project. The pilot programme aimed to test INSPIRE, the support structure for the internship module inspired by Service Learning. The current MA programme in Peace and Conflict Studies at the

CCS includes a compulsory international internship of twelve weeks. The implementation of the pilot programme was also included in the discussions on the accreditation of this MA programme in Peace and Conflict Studies for the winter semester 2024/2025.

Setting up a pilot programme at the University of Marburg

The practical design of INSPIRE was inspired by the three-part structure of preparation, support and reflection outlined above. Three aspects were central:

- an online course (asynchronous) with extensive information and self-study
- an online exchange meeting (synchronous) and
- an alternative examination measure instead of a mere report.

Regarding the first aspect, an ILIAS course was set up for the students at the CCS to facilitate and decentralise the pilot programme. ILIAS is an open source online learning and content management system that provides a platform for course management, learning modules, tests and assessments, portfolios, surveys, wikis and blogs in an all-in-one e-learning solution. Students from Marburg can easily enter the course either directly via a shared link or indirectly by searching individually in ILIAS. The idea is that Marburg students enter the course at the beginning of their studies to have all relevant information available, regardless of when exactly they will complete the mandatory internship module. This specific ILIAS course provides information on various topics relevant to the internship module, contact details in case of questions and exchange platforms such as blogs and chat options. The ILIAS course can grow organically according to the needs of the students and the development of the module, as it is easily adaptable and adjustable.

With regard to the second aspect, the synchronous online meetings are designed to provide a platform for direct exchange involving both students and educators. The meetings take place on average once a month. Students can participate

at different stages of their internship experience and join the course and meetings when it is relevant to their studies. The core idea is that students participate at least once at each stage of their placement experience, namely before starting their placement, during their placement and after their placement. Although participation was not mandatory, most students attended the meetings regularly, even more often than the minimum requirement. In general, these online meetings focused on different issues, such as finding a placement or financing the placement. In several cases, we invited students who had completed their placement to share their experiences with the pilot programme participants. In other cases, we invited university staff who administer the placement module to take part in Q&A sessions. Overall, in the internship module, these meetings act as an important link between the students, their experiences in the internship organisations and the university or, in the case of Marburg, the CCS. At the same time, the students were actively involved in the development of the module by providing suggestions and feedback on the pilot project.

With regard to the third aspect, the assessment procedure has been changed. Whereas the module usually required a simple placement report of six to eight pages reflecting on the placement experience, in the pilot the reflection process is intended to be more comprehensive. The reflection process is to be supported in all three stages of the placement experience, the student's expectations, skills and learning, i.e. before, during and after the placement experience. The integration of theory and practice in different facets is key.

National and international context

The pilot programme at the University of Marburg focused mainly on the MA programme in Peace and Conflict Studies at the CCS. A total of about ten students regularly participated in the pilot project. In addition, several of these meetings were transnational online meetings, in which students from all six INCOPS partner universities (Cluj/Romania, Coimbra/, Coventry/UK, Marburg/Germany, Kent/UK, Utrecht/Netherlands) were invited to participate. About seven

students from the University of Kent and the University of Coimbra also participated in these transnational online meetings. These transnational online meetings are a great opportunity for all students to share their experiences and discuss similarities and differences in their challenges and successes. After getting to know each other a bit and learning about each other's study contexts, students usually talk about ideas for internships, tips for application processes or other helpful steps and experiences so far. In the pilot project at the CCS in Marburg, the transnational meetings are also intended to promote peer-to-peer exchange and help students to form networks.

Best practices and challenges

As the pilot at the CCS has only been running since February 2023 and the participating students have not yet completed all three stages of the support structure process, the assessment of best practices and challenges is not yet final. The pilot will continue in the coming months, growing with the ideas and needs of the participating students. However, the first lessons learned over the past few months are already being shared.

In terms of the achievements of the pilot project so far, the feedback from participants on the transnational meetings and peer-to-peer exchanges was extremely positive. Students valued the opportunity to meet students from other universities across Europe and to learn from each other's study programmes, internships and related challenges. Students often realised that they had a lot in common, regardless of where they studied. In addition, the online format allowed all participants to be very flexible in their participation. In addition, the regular participation of students – although not mandatory – showed us that students are really interested in discussing their expectations, experiences and lessons learnt from their practical experiences also in the university context. The format clearly showed the synergy effects of bringing all the students together in the online meeting on different issues related to the placement. In addition, the experimental nature of the pilot project

at the University of Marburg allowed for adjustments and the inclusion of needs and new ideas, which was a great advantage as the project grew with individual contributions.

In terms of challenges, several aspects could offer great potential if further developed. For example, our pilot programme only included internships as a form of WBL. Efforts to include volunteering or other forms of WBL could be strengthened and considered for further integration of theory and practice. However, especially with regard to volunteering, the arguments and counter-arguments gathered in the stakeholder interviews need to be considered. Furthermore, with regard to the students who have participated in the pilot project, the majority have so far been German students. In general, it might be worthwhile to invest in efforts to involve more international participants from the partner universities. For the CCS in particular, this means increasing the involvement of students from the Peace and Conflict Study Programme at the University of Kent through the double degree programme between Marburg and Kent.

It will be crucial to ensure that the online tool used (ILIAS) is easily accessible to all participants, as currently only students enrolled in Marburg have easy access, while all others need extra permission, which is also only temporary. Furthermore, the online tool needs to be maintained, which will require resources and capacities even after the end of the INCOPS project. In addition, it could be interesting to increase efforts to widen the range of stakeholders involved in the pilot by including organisations providing internships. This could help to build a network between universities, students and internship organisations as well as alumni.

Pilot support structure – discussing ethics and security

In the context of the pilot programme at the CCS, we took the opportunity to take up a theme from the fifth phase of research – “Ethics and Security in Work-based learning in Peace, Conflict and Security Studies” (05, cf. van der Borgh, Slooter and Hoogendoorn 2023). When students engage in WBL activities in PCS MA programmes, it is imperative to ensure that such activities uphold

ethical standards and prioritise the safety and well-being of participating students. In the report of the fifth phase of research, we argue that ethics and security considerations as an integral part of and in WBL should not only (and not primarily) be an “ex-ante” activity. Rather, it is important that students begin to reflect on ethics and safety before completing WBL activities and continue this reflective process during the practical experiences. In this respect, both the university supervisor and the placement provider have a crucial role to play in challenging and discussing the students’ ethical and safety assessments. As the conditions vary widely depending on the regulations of the university where the student is enrolled and the specific placement organisation, students are confronted with different rules and procedures regarding ethical and security clearance.

The online meetings in the pilot programme served as a great platform for students to intensively discuss the key principles of ethics as outlined in the report, including respect for persons, beneficence (do no harm) and justice, as well as perspectives on ethics, including violationist, situationalist, universalist and “anything goes” perspectives. In general, the pilot programme could serve as a platform to provide students with basic knowledge about ethics and safety and to prepare them to act ethically and safely in WBL activities. For this purpose, as recommended in the report of the fifth research phase, a reflective tool seems quite promising, in addition to keeping a log and writing a report after the WBL experience.

Conclusion

Overall, the following overview on INSPIRE summarise the key principles of Service Learning and the provisions and objectives of the three-part support structure. Based on the findings of the previous research phases of the INCOPS project and the practical experience of implementing the pilot programme at the University of Marburg, these evidence-based guidelines serve as an impulse for the optimal integration of WBL

activities in the field of PCS. They serve as general guidelines for the creation of a Service Learning inspired WBL module in PCS programmes. In addition, the guidelines are intended to inspire teachers with regard to the supervision of students' WBL experiences and the curricular connectivity of integrating practical experiences, as well as internship organisations with regard to supervision.

Literature

- Altenschmidt, Karsten, Jörg Miller, Wolfgang Stark 2009. Evaluation von Service Learning-Seminaren. In: Karsten Altenschmidt, Jörg Miller, Wolfgang Stark (eds.) Raus aus dem Elfenbeinturm? Entwicklungen in Service Learning und bürgerschaftlichem Engagement an deutschen Hochschulen. Weinheim: Beltz, 121-127.
- Curran, David, Miho Taka and Frank Grundig 2023. Technical Solutions to Work-based Learning in Peace, Conflict & Security Studies. INCOPS Report #3.
- Elmhurst University 2019. What Is Service Learning? In: <https://www.elmhurst.edu/blog/what-is-service-learning/>, accessed 07.12.2023.
- Grundig, Frank et al. 2023. Mapping Work-based Learning in Peace and Security Studies. INCOPS Report #2.
- Möller, Christina und Heike Rundnagel (eds.) 2018. Freiwilliges Engagement von Studierenden: Analysen, Konzepte, Perspektiven. Wiesbaden: Springer.
- Müller, Franziska, Petra Kleinser, Francesca Berti 2020. Qualitätssicherung und -entwicklung von Service Learning: Eine qualitative Evaluation an der Universität Tübingen. In: Marianne Merkt et al. (eds.) Hochschuldidaktik als professionelle Verbindung von Forschung, Politik und Praxis. Bielefeld: wbv, 197-209
- Runge, Lena and Sára Vértes 2021. Mapping Work-based Learning in Peace and Security Studies. INCOPS Report #1
- Schank, Christoph, Petra Biberhofer, Jantje Halberstadt und Alexander Lorch 2020. Service Learning als kompetenzorientierte Lehr- und Lernform. Instrumente der Hochschuldidaktik. Wiesbaden: Springer.
- Seifert, Anne und Sandra Zentner 2010. Service-Learning – Lernen durch Engagement: Methode, Qualität, Beispiele und ausgewählte Schwerpunkte. Eine Publikation des Netzwerks Lernen durch Engagement. Weinheim: Freudenberg Stiftung.
- University of Trier 2022. Service Learning – Lernen durch Engagement. In: <https://www.uni-trier.de/universitaet/wichtige-anlaufstellen/zentrum-fuer-lehrerbildung/forschungsprojekte/perle/was-ist-service-learning>, accessed 07.12.2023.
- van der Borgh, Chris, Luuk Slooter, Koen Hoogendoorn et al. 2023. Ethics and Security of Peace and Conflict Students during their Work-based Learning Activities. INCOPS Report #5.
- Zimmer, Kerstin 2015. Brücken bauen durch Service Learning. In: Mathias Bös, Lars Schmitt, Kerstin Zimmer (eds.) Konflikte vermitteln? Lehren und Lernen in der Friedens- und Konfliktforschung. Wiesbaden: Springer, 99-116.ome