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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	3
Executive Summary	4
Introduction	4
Internship Objectives	5
Mission, Vision, and Strategy	6
External Environment.....	8
Internship Duration and Timeline.....	11
Job Responsibilities	14
Skills and Knowledge Acquired	17
Challenges Faced	21
Achievements and Contributions.....	24
Learning Outcomes	27
Observations	30
Mentorship and Relationship with my line manager	33
Recommendations	36
Conclusion	39
Reference List	41
Appendices.....	42
Appendix A- Internship Work Agreement and KPI's	42
Appendix C- NWU Brand Guidelines and Services	45
Appendix D- Feedback Testimonials	46

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Executive Summary

This report provides a comprehensive account of my internship as a Project Coordinator in the Brand and Design department at North-West University NWU. The internship spanned from January to October 2025, with formal commencement in June for academic purposes. The purpose of the internship was to bridge academic theory with practical workplace experience in marketing and design project management. Key objectives included managing the flow of design projects, facilitating communication between internal clients and graphic designers, and ensuring the successful delivery of marketing campaign content. Throughout the internship, I coordinated major projects such as the production of a new NWU brand video and several photoshoots for recruitment marketing. I was responsible for handling design requests, overseeing the revision and approval process, and maintaining brand consistency in all outputs. Through these activities, I developed crucial skills in communication, time management, and stakeholder coordination. I faced and overcame challenges such as tight deadlines and evolving client requirements by improving my planning and consultation techniques. The outcomes of the internship were positive: the projects I coordinated were delivered successfully, contributing to the university's marketing efforts and receiving favourable feedback. I also achieved personal growth, gaining confidence in project coordination and clarity in my career direction. This report concludes with reflections on the overall impact of the internship, insights gained about organisational practices, and recommendations for both the host department and future interns. The experience has reinforced my academic learning with real world practice and prepared me for future roles in marketing and project management.

Introduction

The purpose of this internship was to gain practical experience in managing design projects within a university marketing environment, applying academic knowledge in a real workplace while contributing value to the host organisation. I undertook my internship in the Brand and Design section of NWU's Corporate Relations and Marketing division, serving as a Project Coordinator responsible for facilitating the creation of marketing and branding materials. The goals of the internship were aligned with both my academic objectives and the needs of the department. On a personal level, I aimed to develop project management competencies, communication skills, and an understanding of branding strategy in a large organisation. From the organisation's perspective, my role was to support the timely and professional delivery of design outputs by coordinating between the "clients" university staff or departments requesting marketing materials and the graphic design team.

The scope of my internship encompassed a range of activities typical of a marketing project coordinator. This included receiving and interpreting design briefs, scheduling and prioritising design work, liaising with multiple stakeholders across the university, and ensuring that all produced materials adhered to NWU's brand guidelines.

I also participated in planning meetings, brainstorming sessions for campaigns, and on-site support during media productions such as video shoots and photoshoots. Throughout this report, I provide background on the organisation, detail the objectives set out for the internship, describe the tasks and projects I handled, and reflect on the learning outcomes and challenges. By documenting these experiences and insights, the report demonstrates how the internship has fulfilled its purpose as an integrated learning experience and contributed to my professional development.

Internship Objectives

At the outset of the internship, I established clear objectives in consultation with my line manager and according to the internship work agreement see Appendix A. These objectives were designed to guide my activities and measure my performance against key performance indicators KPIs. The primary internship objectives were:

Effective Project Management: To manage the end-to-end process of design projects, from initial client request to final delivery, ensuring projects are completed on time and meet quality standards. This included implementing organisational tools such as schedules or tracking sheets to monitor multiple projects concurrently and keep stakeholders informed of progress.

Enhanced Communication and Liaison: To serve as a communication bridge between clients *university departments or staff who request marketing materials* and the creative team of graphic designers and videographers. This meant clearly translating client needs into design briefs, conveying feedback between parties, and facilitating smooth collaboration. An associated goal was to improve my professional communication skills, both written in briefs and emails and oral in meetings and feedback discussions.

Brand Consistency and Quality Control: To ensure that all outputs posters, brochures, videos, social media graphics, etc. complied with NWU's corporate identity guidelines and quality expectations. This objective required me to become well-versed in the NWU Brand Policy and style guides, and to perform preliminary quality checks before final approvals. It also involved coordinating a limited number of revision cycles per project to manage quality without incurring delays.

Campaign Support and Content Management: To contribute to major marketing campaigns such as student recruitment drives and brand awareness initiatives by coordinating content creation and asset gathering. For example, one objective was to assist in organising a promotional brand video shoot and a series of photoshoots, managing logistics such as scheduling, location bookings, and permissions. Another related objective was to curate and manage the content photography and video produced during these events for future use in marketing materials.

Professional Growth and Networking: On a developmental level, I aimed to increase my understanding of how a large organisation's marketing department operates and to build a professional network within

NWU. By the end of the internship, I expected to improve competencies like teamwork, problem-solving in a real business context, and adaptability to organisational processes. I also set an objective to seek feedback on my performance regularly and reflect on areas for improvement, thereby cultivating a habit of continuous learning.

Each of these objectives was tied to specific KPIs or deliverables. For instance, effective project management was measured by the timely completion of projects within deadlines and positive feedback from my line manager on organisational skills. Communication effectiveness was gauged through feedback from both clients and designers on clarity and responsiveness. Brand consistency was monitored by ensuring zero breaches of brand standards in delivered work as verified by the department's final approver. Campaign support was evaluated based on the successful execution of the brand video and photoshoots milestones reached and the usefulness of the content produced e.g. number of high-quality images added to the university's media library. By setting and striving towards these objectives, I had a clear roadmap for my internship, against which I could later measure my achievements and learning outcomes.

Organisational Background

North-West University NWU is a leading public higher education institution in South Africa, known for its multi-campus structure and commitment to excellence in teaching, research and community engagement. Established in 2004 through a merger of previous institutions, NWU today operates as a unitary integrated university with three main campuses: two located in the North West province Potchefstroom and Mahikeng and one in Gauteng Vanderbijlpark. The university is one of 26 public universities in South Africa and is recognised among the top institutions nationally, it is ranked among the top seven universities in the country and also holds a respectable position globally ranked 922 out of over 20,000 universities worldwide as per recent evaluations (North-West University, 2020). NWU's student population is diverse and spread across contact and distance learning programmes, and the institution prides itself on delivering education that is both locally relevant and internationally recognised.

Mission, Vision, and Strategy

NWU's direction and organisational culture are guided by its formal vision and mission statements, alongside a set of values and strategic goals. According to the official vision statement, NWU aspires *"to be a pre,eminent University in Africa, driven by the pursuit of knowledge and innovation"* (North-West University, 2013).

This vision encapsulates the University's long-term aspiration to achieve academic and research excellence on the African continent while fostering innovation. Complementing the vision is NWU's mission, which articulates the University's core purpose and approach: *"The NWU's mission is to become a balanced teaching, learning and research university and to implement its expertise in an innovative way."* (North-West

University, 2013). In essence, NWU strives for a balance between high,quality teaching and impactful research, and seeks to apply knowledge innovatively to benefit society. The mission statement further emphasises that the university will achieve this by living its values, ensuring sound management, and pursuing transformation, aiming to be locally engaged, nationally relevant, and internationally recognised (North-West University, 2013).

In strategic planning terms, NWU's vision and mission form the foundation of a VMOST analysis Vision, Mission, Objectives, Strategy, Tactics a framework that links the organisation's long,term intentions to its operational actions. Building on its vision and mission, NWU has defined clear strategic objectives and a coherent strategy to realise them. The University's "*dream*" or high,level goal is captured in its current strategy: "*Transform and position the NWU as a unitary institution of superior academic excellence, with a commitment to social justice.*" (North-West University, 2020). This strategy statement reflects NWU's intent to consolidate its multi,campus identity into one unified brand of excellence, and to do so in a way that advances social justice for example, through inclusivity, equity, and community engagement.

NWU's objectives the "O" in VMOST are outlined as five long,term strategic goals which align with the core areas of its mission. These goals are: **1** to promote excellent teaching and learning and reshape the university's programme offerings to meet market and societal needs, **2** to intensify research and innovation outputs, **3** to integrate community engagement with teaching and research, embedding principles of sustainability, **4** to develop a clearly differentiated student value proposition enhancing what NWU offers to students in terms of experience and support, and **5** to develop and retain excellent staff while fostering an equitable and diverse staff and student profile(North-West University, 2020). Together, these objectives aim to ensure that NWU remains a top,tier university that is academically strong, socially responsive, and inclusive.

To achieve these objectives, NWU's strategy is supported by specific tactics and enablers. Key strategic enablers identified by the University include: effective governance and management operating in a sustainable, transformed manner with a sound operating model, advanced information and communications technology ICT to support core business needs, strengthened communication and stakeholder engagement to build brand equity and community trust, and financial sustainability through prudent fiscal management and diversified income streams (North-West University, 2020). These can be viewed as the "Tactics" in the VMOST framework ,concrete areas of action that facilitate the realisation of NWU's strategy and objectives.

For example, the focus on ICT and innovation supports the objective of intensifying research by providing better research infrastructure and enhances teaching through e,learning platforms. The emphasis on governance and a unified operating model ties back to the strategy of functioning as a *unitary* institution, ensuring all campuses and departments work towards common goals with consistent standards (North-

West University, 2020). Communication and brand development efforts, which is the domain where my internship took place, are tactical measures to improve NWU's stakeholder relationships and reputation, thus helping to attract quality students and staff supporting goals 4 and 5.

NWU's values ,including ethics, accountability, and an ethic of care ,underpin all these layers and are integrated into strategy execution. The University explicitly states that it operates on a set of constitutionally based values and strives to foster an environment of engaged and caring staff and students (North-West University, 2020). This value,driven culture was evident during my internship; it manifested in daily interactions and in the emphasis on quality and integrity in our work. In summary, through VMOST analysis it is clear that NWU has a well,defined strategic framework: a bold vision of pre,eminence in Africa, a mission balancing teaching and research innovation, concrete objectives to drive excellence and transformation, a strategy to unite and excel, and specific tactics from technology upgrades to brand,building to carry out that strategy. This alignment of long,term vision with short,term actions is crucial for NWU to maintain its standing and achieve its growth ambitions.

External Environment

NWU operates within the higher education industry, which is influenced by a variety of external factors. A PEST analysis examining Political, Economic, Social, and Technological factors Cadle, Paul and Turner, 2014 provides insight into the macro,environment that impacts NWU's operations and strategic choices. Below is a summary of key PEST factors relevant to NWU, including the university's position and responses within this context:

Political Factors: The higher education sector in South Africa is shaped by government policies and regulations. One major political development in recent years has been the government's introduction of a fee-free higher education policy for low,income households, which has significantly affected universities' funding models. At NWU, the number of students qualifying for government bursaries through the National Student Financial Aid Scheme, NSFAS increased dramatically ,by over 370% from 2015 to 2020, after the announcement of fee,free education (North-West University, 2020). While this policy has improved access to university for many students a positive social outcome, it also introduced financial sustainability challenges for NWU and other universities. The influx of NSFAS,funded students means NWU must manage late or complex payments and increased administrative load in handling financial aid, and the university faces uncertainty if the NSFAS funding model becomes unsustainable (North-West University, 2020).

Additionally, the Department of Higher Education and Training DHET plays a role in regulating tuition fees. Since October 2015, the DHET has annually recommended caps on tuition fee increases across the sector for example, a 5.4% cap for 2020 and 4.7% for 2021, and NWU's Council takes these guidelines into account when setting its fees (North-West University, 2020). Such political interventions, while aimed at

affordability for students, can constrain NWU's revenue growth and require careful financial planning. NWU engages actively with policymakers e.g., through Universities South Africa and direct DHET consultations to voice its needs and adapt to policy changes. The University's strategic documents acknowledge that government regulations on fees and funding can pose risks to financial stability and institutional autonomy (North-West University, 2020)., and thus NWU's strategy includes lobbying for sustainable funding models and diversifying income streams to reduce reliance on tuition and state subsidies.

Economic Factors: The economic climate in South Africa directly influences NWU's operations. The country's low,growth economy in recent years has constrained both public funding and private investment in the education sector. NWU's state subsidy block grants and earmarked grants has seen only modest nominal increases e.g., 6.5% from 2019 to 2020 that fall short of higher education inflation, effectively amounting to a decline in real terms (North-West University, 2020).. This economic pressure means the University must do more with limited resources, implementing cost containment measures and seeking third,stream income such as research contracts, partnerships, and fundraising. An example from NWU's recent context is the decline in external research funding due to broader budget cuts in government and industry, especially during the COVID,19 pandemic, which reduced or halted some funding streams (North-West University, 2020). The broader economy also affects NWU's commercialisation initiatives ,a subdued economy has led to less private sector interest in licensing university intellectual property or technology (North-West University, 2020). To address these challenges, NWU's strategy enabler 4 explicitly focuses on financial sustainability (North-West University, 2020). This includes initiatives to optimise operational efficiency, increase income through continuing education programmes and philanthropic donations, and prudent budgeting to buffer against economic downturns. Economically, NWU is positioned as a value,for,money institution in South Africa, it competes for students in a context where affordability is crucial, especially given the price sensitivity of students and families. The University's ability to maintain quality while managing costs is a key economic strength that it leverages in its recruitment and planning.

Social Factors: Social dynamics and trends significantly shape NWU's environment. One major social aspect is the increasing demand for higher education and calls for wider access and transformation. In South Africa, there is a strong national emphasis on making universities more accessible to previously underrepresented groups and on transforming institutional cultures to be more inclusive.

NWU aligns with this priority, as *"widening access to as many qualifying students as possible is still a priority"* for the institution (North-West University, 2020). This is evidenced by NWU's expansion of distance learning offerings and support programmes to reach students from various regions and backgrounds. The University has also been working on transforming its staff and student profile to reflect South Africa's diversity, addressing racial and gender imbalances in senior academic staff for example (North-West University, 2020). Social movements and perceptions have an impact on campus life and policies: for instance, recent student,led movements around issues like gender,based violence, racial equality e.g., the

global Black Lives Matter resonance, and LGBTQ+ inclusion have prompted NWU to examine and strengthen its support systems and campus culture (North-West University, 2020). I observed that NWU takes these societal issues seriously, during my time, there were initiatives and dialogues on campus about creating a safer and more inclusive environment for all students. Another social factor is the shift in student expectations and engagement modes.

The current generation of students is very digitally savvy and expects online engagement and instant information. As noted in a 2020 NWU news report, the University had to pivot to digital recruitment and engagement when face-to-face events were curtailed (North-West University, 2020). NWU's quick adaptation to online platforms for open days and school outreach demonstrates its responsiveness to social and behavioural changes in this case, accelerated by the pandemic. Finally, NWU's presence in both urban and rural settings Potchefstroom is a smaller town, Vanderbijlpark near a big city, Mahikeng in a different province means it serves communities with different social contexts, which influences the programmes offered and community engagement projects undertaken. In summary, NWU's social environment is characterised by a push for greater access and equity, evolving student needs, and a need for the institution to remain socially relevant and responsive, all of which NWU addresses through its policies on transformation and its ethic of care.

Technological Factors: Rapid technological advancement is both an opportunity and a challenge for NWU. The onset of the **Fourth Industrial Revolution 4IR**, with increasing digitalisation, automation, and new modes of learning, is fundamentally reshaping how universities operate (North-West University, 2020). NWU recognises that technology has a transformative impact on teaching methods, research capabilities, and student services. This became especially evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced a sudden shift to remote learning and online collaboration. NWU had to scale up its e-learning platform and ensure that online offerings could reach students who had varying levels of internet access (North-West University, 2020). The digital divide inequities in student access to devices and connectivity emerged as a significant technological and social challenge and NWU had to innovate around providing remote support and learning materials to students in need.

On the other hand, NWU has leveraged technology for efficiency and innovation: the University invests in smart campus initiatives, has developed robust IT systems for administration, and encourages research in cutting-edge fields. The presence of specialised research entities and collaboration on international projects such as a notable NWU genetics research being included in a global study reflects NWU's engagement with advanced technologies and methodologies (North-West University, 2020). As part of its strategy, NWU lists "develop best-in-class information and communications technology to support the core business" as a key enabler (North-West University, 2020).

During my internship, I saw practical examples of this focus ,the Brand and Design team used a digital project request system and online collaboration tools to manage design jobs, and the marketing department was actively using social media analytics and digital marketing strategies to reach prospective students. Embracing new technology is clearly part of NWU's culture, however, the University must also continuously adapt curricula to produce graduates with skills relevant to a technology,driven economy. This need is addressed through initiatives to introduce more blended learning, incorporate 4IR topics in courses, and maintain modern ICT infrastructure. NWU's position in terms of technology is that of a forward,looking institution that has successfully navigated a massive digital transition especially post,2020 and is striving to remain at the forefront of educational technology in South Africa.

NWU operates in a dynamic environment shaped by government policies on higher education funding, economic pressures on budgets, societal demands for transformation and access, and the inexorable advance of technology changing educational delivery. The University's strategies informed by tools like PEST analysis and other business analysis techniques demonstrate awareness of these external factors. NWU's status as a public university means it must balance its academic mission with public accountability and the need to remain financially viable and socially responsive. Throughout my internship, I developed a deeper understanding of how these external factors influence daily operations in the Brand and Design department. For instance, the emphasis on digital campaigns was a direct response to both social trends and technological possibilities. Likewise, messaging in our marketing content often highlighted NWU's values of inclusivity and excellence, aligning with the broader socio,political narrative. This organisational background and environmental context set the stage for the specific projects and experiences I encountered during my internship, as detailed in subsequent sections.

Internship Duration and Timeline

The internship took place over a period of approximately ten months, from January 2025 to October 2025. While the formal accredited internship module commenced in June 2025, I was fortunate to begin contributing to the department informally as early as January. This allowed me a head,start in acclimatising to the workplace and taking on preliminary tasks before the official start. Below is a timeline of the internship with key milestones and activities highlighted:

January- March 2025 Orientation and Initial Involvement: *Orientation and Team Integration.* In January, I was introduced to the Brand and Design team and oriented to the department's processes. I familiarised myself with NWU's brand guidelines and the project request system. During these first few months, I shadowed the incumbent project coordinator or team members handling coordination to learn how design requests are handled. I also began assisting with small tasks such as proofreading marketing brochures and organising design files. By March, I took on the coordination of a few minor design requests e.g., updating posters for a campus event under supervision, which helped build my confidence and understanding of the workflow.

April- May 2025 Pre-Internship Project Contributions: *Early Project Involvement.* Although still before the module's official start, I became involved in planning sessions for an upcoming *NWU Brand Video* project. April was spent in brainstorming meetings where the team discussed concepts for a new university promotional video aimed at student recruitment. I contributed ideas and took meeting minutes to document the creative brief. In May, pre,production for the video was underway; I assisted my line manager in scheduling auditions for student participants and scouting campus locations for filming. Additionally, in May I coordinated a small photoshoot on the Potchefstroom campus for the alumni office ,this was my first experience taking the lead on a photoshoot logistics booking a photographer, obtaining permissions, arranging participants' schedules.

June 2025 Official Internship Start: *Module Commencement and Goal Setting.* With the official start of the internship module in June, I formalised my role and responsibilities. At the beginning of June, I met with my line manager to set out my internship objectives and KPIs as described in the Internship Objectives section. We agreed on a work plan and I signed the Work Agreement Appendix A which outlined my duties and learning outcomes. I was now fully responsible for the coordination of design requests coming through our department's system. A significant portion of June was dedicated to the production of the **NWU Brand Video**, one of the flagship projects of my internship. The video was filmed in mid,June: over a week of shooting across all three campuses. I played a coordinating role ,ensuring crew travel arrangements between campuses, communicating the filming schedule to local campus contacts, and even managing on,set logistics like securing quiet locations and setting up NWU,branded materials for shots. It was an intense period, but by the end of June, filming was completed successfully.

July 2025 Design Projects and Brand Video Post,Production: In July, I balanced two main streams of work. First, I oversaw **post,production of the brand video** ,liaising between the videographer/editor and various stakeholders for feedback. I coordinated review meetings where senior management previewed the first cut of the video and provided input. Gathering and consolidating this feedback for the editor was a delicate task that I managed carefully to ensure clarity and that changes were made by deadlines. T

he second stream was routine design projects: July is a busy time for marketing materials because NWU's student recruitment campaign for the 2026 intake ramps up. I coordinated the creation of digital banners, social media graphics, and an email newsletter template targeting prospective students. An important milestone was mid,July, when the **brand video was officially approved** after a few rounds of edits. This project's completion was a proud moment, as it was showcased internally and set to be launched in the next month's campaign.

August 2025 Major Campaign Launch and Photoshoots: *Recruitment Campaign & Photography.* August saw the launch of NWU's annual Student Recruitment Campaign for the forthcoming academic year. With COVID,19 restrictions eased by this time, the campaign was hybrid ,involving both

digital outreach and selective in-person events. The brand video I coordinated went live on NWU's official channels website and social media at the start of August as a centrepiece of the campaign. I monitored the initial engagement views, shares, and comments and communicated the positive reception to our team. Alongside the digital campaign, I coordinated two significant **photoshoots** in August. The first was a general branding photoshoot aimed at updating NWU's image library with fresh photos of campus life, student diversity, and facilities. This involved working with an external photographer over a two-day shoot on the Mahikeng and Vanderbijlpark campuses since much of our existing imagery was Potchefstroom-centric, we wanted to balance it. I organised student volunteers to act as models, arranged permissions to shoot in classrooms and labs, and ensured all participants signed consent forms. The second photoshoot was specific to the Faculty of Engineering's promotional materials, I arranged this in the engineering workshops and labs, highlighting student projects and technology aligning with the 4IR theme. By late August, both photoshoots were completed, yielding hundreds of high-quality images for use in brochures, the website, and presentations.

September 2025 Campaign Management and Design Workflow Improvements: In September, my focus was on sustaining the momentum of the recruitment campaign and improving internal processes. I handled a surge of design requests that came in as part of the campaign's second phase, for example, graphics for Open Day events, updates to the undergraduate prospectus PDF, and infographics highlighting NWU's rankings and programmes. To handle the volume efficiently, I introduced a simple *tracking spreadsheet* accessible to all team members, which listed all active requests, deadlines, and responsible designers. This was an initiative I took to increase transparency and workload management. It proved helpful in our weekly team huddles, where we could quickly update the status of each project. In mid-September we also held a retrospective meeting on the recruitment campaign's performance so far. I assisted in gathering metrics for this, including social media engagement stats and the number of applications started through our campaign's landing page.

One notable achievement was that our online campaign had reached tens of thousands of prospective students across platforms. It was satisfying to note that NWU's adaptation to digital recruitment an area I contributed to was praised, echoing the ease with which NWU embraced digital marketing as noted in (North-West University, 2020). Additionally, in September I mentored a new volunteer student assistant who joined our team for some experience. Guiding her through the basics of the design request process was rewarding and also freed me up to focus on more complex tasks.

October 2025 Conclusion and Handover: October marked the final month of my internship and was dedicated to wrapping up tasks and reflecting on the experience. Early in October, the recruitment campaign came to a close with the last round of follow-up emails and a virtual Q&A session for applicants.

I helped moderate that session, which was a new challenge handling live questions from prospective students and ensuring the right information was provided by our panel. We also finalised a campaign report where I contributed a section on lessons learned in project coordination and timing. In terms of design projects, October had fewer new requests, giving me time to ensure all ongoing projects were completed or smoothly handed over.

I compiled documentation for the next project coordinator or team, including updating the Brand and Design Services Standard Operating Procedures with a few improvements we implemented such as the request tracking sheet and guidelines for revision limits. I met with my line manager for a comprehensive final review of my internship performance, where we discussed how I met my objectives and my contributions to the department. The internship formally concluded in the last week of October with a debrief meeting with the university's WIL coordinator to reflect on my experiences. As I left the office on my last day, I handed over all project files and a summary of pending tasks to the team, confident that I was leaving the workflow in a good state. This concluded a highly enriching timeline of work and learning.

Throughout this timeline, each phase of the internship built upon the previous, from initial learning to taking ownership of projects and finally to contributing process improvements. The phased progression also mirrors the academic integration, with early exposure, a concentrated period of official duties, and a closing reflective stage. By documenting the timeline, I can clearly see the evolution of my responsibilities and how key milestones like the brand video and photoshoots were achieved. These milestones not only served NWU's immediate needs but also stand out as highlights of my professional growth during the internship.

Job Responsibilities

During my internship as Project Coordinator in the Brand and Design department, I was entrusted with a range of responsibilities central to the department's function of delivering branding and marketing design services within NWU. Below I detail my key job responsibilities and tasks:

Receiving and Managing Design Requests: One of my primary duties was to act as the first point of contact for internal clients requesting design or branding services. NWU's Marketing and Student Recruitment department which Brand and Design is part of offers these services free of charge to all university faculties and units, via an online request form (North-West University, 2025). I monitored incoming project request forms daily. For each request for example, a faculty needing an event poster, or the admissions office needing a brochure update, I reviewed the details, clarified any missing information with the requester, and logged the job in our project tracking system.

It was my responsibility to brief the design team members on each new project, ensuring they understood the client's needs and deadlines. According to our department policy, clients are encouraged to provide clear descriptions and are allowed up to three revision cycles for their design request services. (North-West

University, 2025). I played a key role in enforcing these guidelines: making sure initial briefs were as detailed as possible and that all relevant stakeholders requester, content writers, photographers, etc. were looped in from the start to minimise excessive revisions.

Liaising Between Clients and Designers: I functioned as the liaison or “go-between” in the creative process. This meant constant communication ,I relayed client feedback to the graphic designers and conveyed designers’ questions or constraints back to the clients. Often, I facilitated initial meetings or calls between a client and the assigned designer for complex projects, but thereafter, routine feedback came through me. For example, if a faculty client requested a flyer and later wanted to change the content, they would inform me and I would then coordinate with the designer to implement changes, keeping track of revision count. This intermediary role was crucial in maintaining a professional workflow and shielding creative staff from potential communication overload. It also ensured a unified voice to the client. I had to exercise diplomacy and clarity in these communications ,translating sometimes vague or non-technical client requests into actionable design tasks, and also occasionally explaining to clients why certain design decisions were made to manage expectations. Managing this two-way communication improved overall efficiency and client satisfaction with our services.

Project Scheduling and Time Management: With multiple projects running concurrently, a major responsibility was to schedule and prioritise tasks. Each week, I updated and circulated a production schedule that detailed all active design jobs, deadlines, and the designer responsible. I had to coordinate with three graphic designers and one multimedia designer in our team, balancing their workloads. In practice, this involved daily check-ins to monitor progress and reallocate tasks if someone was overloaded or if a high-priority request came in unexpectedly. During peak periods, such as in the lead-up to the student recruitment campaign launch, I organised our workload by breaking down big projects into smaller tasks e.g., for the campaign we had sub-tasks like social media graphics, print ads, video subtitles, etc. and setting internal deadlines for each.

Effective time management on my part was essential; I maintained a calendar of all marketing events and due dates like Open Days, application deadlines to foresee what collateral would be needed when. This allowed me to proactively prompt departments for requests in advance, rather than receiving last-minute urgent jobs. It was also my duty to ensure we met every deadline or communicated early if there was any risk of delay.

Quality Control and Brand Compliance: Ensuring that all outputs met NWU’s branding standards was a critical part of my role. NWU has a formal Brand Policy and Corporate Identity Manual that all materials must adhere to (North-West University, 2025). After a designer completed a draft, I would review it for quality and compliance before sending it to the client. This review included checking that the NWU logo was used correctly, colours and fonts matched official brand guidelines, and that any photos or visuals were

aligned with the University's image for instance, using current student photos, proper campus imagery, etc.. I also proofread text in designs for errors or inconsistencies. Only once I was satisfied did I forward the draft to the client for feedback. By acting as a quality gatekeeper, I helped maintain a high standard of output and reduced the likelihood of back-and-forth over obvious fixes. When a design needed changes per client feedback, I again checked the revised version. Finally, before any design went into production or was published, it required formal approval from the head of our department the Director of Marketing or their delegate. I facilitated this approval process by presenting the final design along with a checklist of brand compliance, effectively vouching that all requirements were met (North-West University, 2025). This meticulous approach to quality control protected NWU's brand integrity and ensured our department's credibility.

Coordinating Production and External Suppliers: Some projects extended beyond digital design into physical production ,for example, printing banners, posters, or commissioning promotional items. In those cases, another responsibility I held was to coordinate with external service providers. Our department policy was to assist clients by sourcing production quotes, especially for jobs over a certain cost threshold, in line with NWU's procurement rules (North-West University, 2025). I prepared specifications and solicited quotes from approved printing vendors for jobs like 2,000 flyers or campus billboards. Once the client department approved the costs, I would liaise with Procurement if needed and then manage the handover of design files to the printer. I scheduled deliveries and, on a few occasions, performed press checks reviewing a proof at the print shop for color accuracy. An example was the production of new campus tour brochures; I obtained three quotes as required and coordinated the printing and delivery of 5,000 brochures. Additionally, for the brand video, I coordinated with an external video production company for tasks like drone footage by acting as NWU's representative to ensure they delivered footage that met our brief. Handling these supplier interactions taught me a lot about budgeting, formal communication, and ensuring service level agreements were met.

Content Gathering and Asset Management: The role also involved collecting and managing content assettext, images, video used in designs. Often, clients would need help refining their content ,for instance, if a department sent a draft text for a leaflet, I would review it and sometimes edit it for clarity or length before passing to designers. In collaboration with a copywriter in our team, I made sure the messaging was on point and bilingual where required since NWU often communicates in English and Afrikaans, and increasingly Setswana in some contexts. For images, I maintained the department's media library: after the August photoshoots, I catalogued the new photos, tagged them by campus, subject, etc., and uploaded them to our shared drive so designers and other NWU staff could access them easily. I also ensured that any usage rights or consent forms for photos were properly documented.

Similarly, when the brand video was completed, I coordinated distributing the final video file to various channels web, social media team, campus marketing teams and archived the raw footage and project files for future reference. This asset management responsibility was crucial for efficiency ,it meant that when a new request came in, I could quickly provide the design team with already available resources, like a suitable photograph or an icon from our library, speeding up the design process.

Support at Marketing Events: Beyond desk work, I occasionally provided on-site support for marketing events in my capacity as part of the Brand and Design team. This included helping set up branding materials like NWU banners, backdrops at events such as Open Days, career fairs, or the virtual studio for online webinars. For example, at an Open Day in September, I assisted the events coordinator by ensuring the visual elements posters, directional signage, info booklets were all in place and matched our brand style. I also took photos during some events to capture moments for social media. These duties gave me frontline exposure to how our designed materials were actually used and received by the public, closing the feedback loop for me as a project coordinator.

Administrative and Reporting Tasks: Lastly, I handled various administrative tasks integral to the role. I maintained records of each project ,including the request form, any email correspondence, final sign-off forms, and cost if any. These records were used for monthly reporting within the Marketing department. I contributed to a monthly report by listing all projects completed in that month, noting significant ones like the brand video and any metrics for example, “20 design requests fulfilled in August, average turnaround time X days”. I also logged my internship hours and tasks as required by the university’s internship programme. Near the end of the internship, I helped draft a section of our department’s annual report input, highlighting how the Brand and Design team supported major campaigns and the number of clients served, thereby quantifying our contribution to NWU’s strategic goal of enhancing its student value proposition.

These responsibilities illustrate the multifaceted nature of the Project Coordinator role. It combines elements of project management, client service, quality assurance, and even creative support. Fulfilling these duties required me to be organised, attentive to detail, and proactive in communication. Over time, I became a central hub in the department’s operations ,ensuring that all the cogs clients, designers, printers, content, and deadlines meshed together smoothly to produce effective branding and marketing outputs. The experience of juggling these responsibilities has been challenging at times, but it has provided me with robust practical skills and a strong sense of accomplishment in contributing to NWU’s marketing efforts.

Skills and Knowledge Acquired

Over the course of the internship, I acquired a range of skills and expanded my knowledge in both professional and personal development areas. These skills were gained through hands-on experience,

mentorship from colleagues, and reflection on my performance. Below, I outline the key skills and knowledge I have acquired and how each was developed:

Project Coordination and Time Management: I learned to effectively coordinate multiple projects simultaneously, an essential skill in any fast-paced work environment. At the start, juggling numerous design requests felt overwhelming, but I soon mastered the use of planning tools and prioritisation techniques. I developed a personal system of to-do lists daily and weekly and used the project tracking spreadsheet as a visual management tool. Through trial and error, I improved my ability to estimate how long tasks would take and to sequence them logically e.g., while waiting for feedback on one project, I would progress another. This internship taught me time management in a practical sense, meeting tight deadlines for campaign materials and ensuring nothing “fell through the cracks” required discipline and forward-planning. I now feel confident in my ability to handle complex workloads and set realistic timelines, which will be invaluable in my future career.

Communication Skills Written and Verbal: A significant portion of my role involved communication, and I honed these skills extensively. On the written communication side, I became adept at writing clear and concise emails to clients and colleagues. I learned to frame messages in a professional tone and to structure information in a way that made it easy for busy stakeholders to read and respond for instance, bulleting key points or questions, rather than burying them in a paragraph. I also gained skill in writing creative briefs and project summaries that captured all necessary details without ambiguity. On the verbal communication side, I improved through frequent interactions, from conducting kick-off meetings with clients to daily informal check-ins with designers. I developed better listening skills, ensuring I fully understood client requests or designer concerns before responding. Importantly, I learned to ask clarifying questions rather than assuming, which often prevented misunderstandings.

Additionally, presenting the final brand video to a group of senior staff and explaining our design approach boosted my public speaking confidence. Overall, I learned how to tailor my communication style to different audiences: being more technical and detailed with designers, more outcome-focused with clients, and more succinct and report-like when dealing with management.

Knowledge of Branding and Design Principles: Working in the Brand and Design environment deepened my understanding of branding principles and graphic design basics. Although I was not the one creating the designs, I had to understand what makes a design effective or on-brand. I became familiar with NWU's corporate identity elements, including the specific colour palette and the importance of consistency in colour reproduction, the approved fonts, logo usage rules such as minimum size and clear space, and tone of imagery e.g., using photos that showcase diversity and positivity on campus.

I gained insight into design principles like layout balance, hierarchy of information, and the need for designs to be audience-centric for example, making sure a poster for high school learners was visually engaging and not overly text-heavy. With guidance from the graphic designers, I learned terminology like “bleed” and “vector vs raster” and the requirements for print versus digital outputs. This knowledge allowed me to communicate more effectively about designs and to anticipate potential issues such as knowing that a small text might not be readable from a distance on a banner. By the end of the internship, I could review a design draft and confidently suggest minor adjustments like alignment or font size that improved the overall piece, something I wouldn't have been capable of at the start.

Client Service and Stakeholder Management: Through continuous interaction with various internal clients ranging from professors to administrative staff to student leaders, I learned how to manage stakeholder relationships professionally. This included setting expectations at the start of a project communicating clearly what our process is and realistic timelines, keeping clients updated regularly, and handling feedback gracefully. I experienced how to deal with constructive criticism and occasional difficult feedback, for instance, if a client was unhappy with an initial design draft, I learned to remain calm and solution-focused, reassuring them that we would address their concerns and outlining next steps. I also improved in negotiation skills; there were times I had to negotiate deadlines e.g., convince a client to accept a deliverable a few days later than they wanted by explaining the rationale or negotiate the scope politely declining requests that fell outside our department's mandate or suggesting alternative solutions. Importantly, I saw how building personal rapport with clients even small talk or remembering someone's preference went a long way in smoothing collaborations. These experiences have given me a client-oriented mindset and the ability to balance differing needs, which is critical in any role involving service delivery.

Problem-Solving and Adaptability: The dynamic nature of our projects meant I frequently encountered unforeseen challenges that required quick problem-solving. For example, during the brand video shoot, one planned location became unavailable last-minute; I had to swiftly arrange an alternate venue and adjust the schedule, notifying all involved. This taught me to think on my feet and come up with contingency plans. In another instance, a batch of printed brochures arrived with a colour error due to a printer calibration issue, I coordinated a reprint under a tight timeline, negotiating a discount from the supplier and arranging an urgent courier. Through such incidents, I learned to stay composed and methodically break down the problem identify cause, consider options, implement solution. I also became more adaptable, as priorities shifted often, like suddenly pausing routine work to prepare urgent communications during a campus incident. I discovered that flexibility and maintaining a positive attitude in the face of change are key skills. Now, instead of feeling stressed by unexpected changes, I approach them as opportunities to demonstrate reliability and ingenuity.

Technical Skills and Tools: On a technical level, I became proficient with several software tools and platforms used in the department. I improved my skills in Microsoft Excel/Sheets through maintaining the project tracker, using functions to highlight overdue tasks, etc. I also used project management software the department experimented with Trello boards for a while which gave me exposure to digital Kanban-style task management. Additionally, I got hands-on experience with NWU's content management systems: I learned to do minor updates on the NWU website via the CMS when needed for example, uploading the brand video and embedding it on the site. I also gained familiarity with design software indirectly; while I did not design myself, I occasionally opened Adobe InDesign or Photoshop to make a tiny text correction or export a file when the designers were unavailable, under their guidance. Moreover, I learned to operate basic audiovisual equipment ,helping set up a camera or sound for a small video shoot gave me rudimentary technical know-how in that area. Lastly, I used analytics tools like Facebook Insights and Twitter Analytics to collect social media data for our campaign report, which taught me how to interpret engagement metrics. These technical and tool-based skills complement the soft skills and round out my competency profile.

Understanding of Higher Education Marketing: Beyond the immediate tasks, I acquired a broader understanding of how marketing and branding function in a higher education context. I learned about the strategies universities use to attract and retain students, such as the importance of highlighting unique value propositions in NWU's case, things like its multi-campus advantage, range of programmes, and student success rates. I gained insight into the annual cycle of university marketing ,for example, how recruitment marketing peaks in certain months, how content needs change academic highlights vs. student life stories throughout the year, and how various channels school visits, social media, alumni networks intersect.

Working closely with the Marketing and Student Recruitment director, I learned about segmenting audiences addressing Grade 11 vs Grade 12 learners differently, or tailoring messages to parents. This industry-specific knowledge is something I could only fully appreciate by being embedded in the environment. It has prepared me with context and awareness that I can carry into any future role in marketing or communications within education or other sectors.

The skills and knowledge I have gained are comprehensive ,spanning organisational skills project and time management, communication and interpersonal skills, domain knowledge in branding/marketing, and practical problem-solving abilities. Each skill was acquired through real tasks and challenges, making the learning deeply impactful. Importantly, I also learned a lot about myself ,such as my ability to handle pressure, how I collaborate in a team, and what areas I need to further develop for example, I noticed I can improve further on delegating tasks when appropriate, as I sometimes tried to do too much myself. The internship has truly been a learning-by-doing journey, and these acquired skills are evidence of my growth from a student to a budding professional

Challenges Faced

No significant learning experience comes without its challenges, and my internship was no exception. Throughout the internship, I encountered several obstacles and difficulties that tested my abilities and required me to adapt and grow. Reflecting on these challenges is important, as they taught me resilience and provided some of the richest learning opportunities. Below, I discuss the main challenges I faced and how I addressed or overcame them:

Managing Multiple Deadlines and High Workload: One of the earliest and persistent challenges was handling the sheer volume of work during peak periods. In the heart of the recruitment campaign around July and August, I was coordinating dozens of design jobs concurrently, all with tight deadlines. Initially, I found myself staying late and feeling stressed trying to keep track of everything. The risk of something slipping through like forgetting to follow up on a smaller request was high. This challenge forced me to significantly improve my time management and organisational tactics. I overcame it by implementing better task management tools, using the project tracker spreadsheet diligently and setting reminders for myself. I learned to prioritise tasks by urgency and importance each morning, and I communicated with my line manager when I felt the workload was becoming unrealistic. In a few cases, I negotiated adjusted deadlines with clients for non-critical items, which taught me it's acceptable to ask for extensions rather than silently struggle. Over time, as I became more adept at multitasking, this challenge eased. The experience taught me how to work smarter under pressure, and towards the end of the internship, I was able to manage similar loads with much more calm and control than I had at the start.

Communication Gaps and Misunderstandings: Despite my efforts to be clear, there were instances of miscommunication that led to challenges. For example, early on I had a case where a faculty client expected a drastically different design style than what was delivered, because I had not fully understood their brief nor clarified their vision. The result was a disappointed client and extra rounds of revisions, costing time. In another instance, a designer misunderstood a client's request that I relayed, which resulted in work having to be redone. These moments were humbling and highlighted the challenge of effective communication. To address this, I made a point to double-check understanding. I started summarising client requests back to them in writing "Just to confirm, you are looking for X, Y, Z..." and encouraged designers to ask me questions if any instruction was unclear. I also arranged joint meetings virtual or in-person with clients and designers for complex projects so everyone heard the same message from the start, reducing the telephone effect. When misunderstandings did occur, I took responsibility and apologised to the client, then worked to fix the issue promptly. Through this, I learned that transparent and frequent communication is key, it's better to ask an extra question than to assume. These incidents ultimately improved my communication skill, as noted earlier, and taught me to foresee possible ambiguities and eliminate them proactively.

Dealing with Critical Feedback and High Expectations: Working in a creative domain means work is subject to subjective opinions and high expectations. I faced some challenging feedback ,for instance, a senior professor once criticised a brochure design that I coordinated as “not capturing the essence” of their programme and was quite blunt in her critique. Even though the design could be adjusted, hearing such strong negative feedback initially felt personal and discouraging. Similarly, during the brand video development, multiple stakeholders had differing opinions; incorporating all their feedback while maintaining a coherent output was challenging, and some were quite critical about parts of the video. I had to learn not to take criticism personally and to stay professional and constructive.

By focusing on the content of the feedback rather than its tone, I could extract useful points to act on. I also engaged my line manager for guidance on how to diplomatically handle situations where I felt the feedback was perhaps beyond scope or not feasible. For the professor’s brochure, I set up a meeting with her and our designer to delve deeper into her vision, which helped us produce a second version that she appreciated. That taught me that sometimes critical feedback simply comes from a place of the client feeling their needs weren’t understood ,and investing time to listen can turn it around. In essence, this challenge improved my emotional resilience and client handling skills, showing me how to remain courteous, seek clarification, and deliver revisions that meet high expectations.

Navigating Organisational Processes and Bureaucracy: NWU, like any large institution, has formal processes for approvals, procurement, and inter-departmental collaboration. As an intern new to the system, I initially found it challenging to navigate the bureaucracy. For example, getting a simple video uploaded to the official YouTube channel involved multiple permissions; ordering printed materials meant understanding the procurement thresholds and paperwork. At times, these processes slowed down my projects unexpectedly. I recall an instance where a delay in internal approval for a social media post meant we missed an optimal timing window ,a frustrating challenge as I had not looped in the approver early enough. I overcame these hurdles by learning the organisational structure and building relationships. I made it a point to identify key contacts in related departments like the IT web team, procurement office, etc. and introduced myself.

By having a friendly rapport and understanding their requirements e.g., knowing that the legal office needed 3 days to vet content if it involved certain terminology, I could plan better. I also learned to prepare documents in advance and double-check forms to avoid them being sent back for corrections. Essentially, I learned the “inside workings” of NWU’s administrative machine. While it was challenging at first to accept that not everything can be as agile as one might wish, I adapted by aligning my workflow with these

processes. The lesson learned is that in a large organisation, success often requires patience, thoroughness, and internal networking to get things done efficiently.

Balancing Creativity with Constraints: Another interesting challenge was balancing the creative aspects of marketing with institutional constraints like brand guidelines or limited budgets. Sometimes internal clients would request very creative or unusual ideas e.g., a flashy 3D animated invitation, or expensive bespoke merchandise that clashed with NWU's brand standards or budget realities. As the coordinator, I had to diplomatically steer expectations back in line ,a delicate challenge because I did not want to be seen as stifling creativity, yet I had to enforce rules. In one case, a department wanted to use an off-brand colour scheme for a campaign to "stand out"; I had to explain why that wasn't allowed, and instead found a compromise by using secondary palette colours from the brand manual that still gave a fresh look. In another case, a client wanted a rush job in less time than our production or printer could realistically deliver. Balancing the "yes we can" service attitude with honest feasibility was tough.

I addressed this by improving how I communicated constraints as part of the solution. Rather than simply saying "No, we can't do that," I learned to explain the reasons branding consistency, cost, time and immediately offer an alternative approach that would achieve a similar outcome. By reframing the conversation to "Here's what we *can* do within our guidelines and timeline," I managed to satisfy clients in most cases. This challenge taught me about the importance of creative problem-solving ,that even within constraints, there's room to innovate. It also underscored how critical it is to deeply understand the rules like the brand policy so that I could advocate for them convincingly.

Adapting to a New Role and Building Confidence: On a more personal level, an initial challenge was the transition from being a student to taking on a professional role within a team. At the beginning, I sometimes felt unsure of myself ,hesitant to voice my ideas in meetings or to assert myself when coordinating older or more experienced colleagues. There was a bit of "impostor syndrome," wondering if I was doing things correctly. This was a mental and emotional challenge that could have hindered my performance if left unchecked. I overcame this gradually as I gained experience and received positive feedback. Small achievements, like successfully running a meeting or getting a "thank you, this is great" from a client, boosted my confidence.

My line manager also played a part by entrusting me with significant responsibilities like the brand video coordination ,succeeding in those showed me I was capable. I also pushed myself intentionally: for example, volunteering to present our team's update in a division meeting gave me a chance to step out of my comfort zone. Through these actions, my professional confidence grew. By the latter half of the internship, I noticed I was much more at ease taking initiative and making decisions. This personal growth was in fact born out of confronting the initial discomfort and challenge of adapting to a workplace identity.

The take-away is that building confidence is a process, and each challenge overcome feeds into greater self-assurance.

Each of these challenges, while difficult in the moment, proved to be transformative experiences. In resolving them, I often had to seek advice, think creatively, or stretch my skills, all of which contributed to my development.

The support system in the workplace colleagues and my mentor was instrumental in overcoming many of these obstacles, as was maintaining a reflective mindset: I regularly asked myself after each hurdle, “What could I have done differently? What will I do next time?” By doing so, I turned challenges into lessons. Facing these challenges has made me more resilient and better prepared for future professional endeavors, as I now have a repertoire of strategies to handle similar difficulties. Moreover, successfully navigating these obstacles has given me confidence that I can thrive even when things don’t go perfectly smoothly at work, an invaluable mindset going forward.

Achievements and Contributions

Throughout the internship, I had the opportunity to contribute meaningfully to NWU’s Brand and Design initiatives and also achieve several accomplishments that I am proud of. These achievements not only benefited the host department and the University’s campaigns but also marked milestones in my personal development. In this section, I highlight the most notable achievements and contributions from my internship:

Successful Coordination and Launch of the NWU Brand Video: One of the headline achievements of my internship was coordinating the production of a new NWU brand video from inception to launch. This was a major project for the Marketing and Student Recruitment department, aimed at showcasing NWU’s ethos, campus life, and academic offerings to prospective students and the broader public. My contribution spanned organising planning sessions, managing logistics for the multi-campus film shoots, facilitating feedback from stakeholders, and ensuring the final video met all brand standards. The outcome was highly successful, the video was delivered on time in July and officially launched in August as part of the recruitment campaign. It was very well received: within the first week of release, the video garnered thousands of views across NWU’s social media platforms and website. Colleagues reported positive feedback from viewers who found it inspiring and reflective of NWU’s spirit. For me, this accomplishment demonstrated my ability to handle a complex project and was a tangible output I could point to. It also directly contributed to NWU’s marketing arsenal, giving the university a fresh, engaging piece of content to attract students. Seeing an idea transform into a polished video and knowing I played a key coordinating role in it is deeply gratifying.

High-Impact Recruitment Marketing Campaign Contributions: I played a significant part in the 2025 student recruitment marketing campaign, which can be considered a broader achievement comprising

several contributions. My role in this campaign included ensuring that a suite of promotional materials digital ads, printed brochures, social media graphics, email newsletters, etc. were produced and delivered effectively. A concrete achievement here was the timely delivery of all campaign collateral, which I coordinated, nothing was missing or late for the campaign launch and subsequent phases.

I also contributed creative ideas during brainstorming, such as suggesting the use of student testimonial quotes on social media cards, which were implemented and performed well many shares and likes. According to the metrics gathered by the end of the campaign, NWU saw an increase in engagement compared to the previous year's campaign ,for instance, the online campaign's reach was notably extensive, with the NWU News noting that the University "adapted with ease to this new digital recruitment approach" (North-West University, 2020). While I cannot claim sole credit for the campaign's success it was a team effort, I know that my efficient project management and communication helped the team execute the strategy smoothly. The campaign's success is indirectly reflected in the steady number of applications NWU received for 2026 and the maintained position of NWU among top-choice universities in the region. Being part of such a successful, high-profile initiative and knowing my efforts contributed to its outcomes is a highlight of my internship.

Improved Design Workflow and Introduction of Process Innovations: Over the course of the internship, I identified and implemented a few process improvements that have had a lasting positive impact on the department's workflow ,an achievement in operational contribution.

One key improvement was the introduction of the design request tracking system the shared spreadsheet I created to track all active projects. Prior to this, much of the workflow was managed through email threads and individual notes, which sometimes led to confusion. My tracking system brought more visibility and accountability; team members could see the status of projects at a glance, and it became easier in team meetings to allocate resources. This innovation was appreciated by my colleagues ,it reduced instances of overlooked requests and helped new incoming requests to be triaged more quickly.

Another contribution was documenting a Standard Operating Procedure SOP for handling design requests. I drafted a concise SOP that covered steps from receiving a request to final approval, incorporating lessons I learned like including clients in initial brief meetings and limiting revision rounds as per policy. This document was included in the departmental handbook and will serve to train future interns or new coordinators. These contributions show that I didn't just perform tasks, but also actively tried to make sustainable improvements. It was satisfying to see that by the end of my internship, the team had adopted these practices, which will outlast my tenure.

Quality and Brand Consistency Assurance: Another achievement lies in maintaining a 100% record of brand compliance in all projects I managed. Throughout the internship, none of the designs I handled had

to be retracted or redone due to brand guideline violations or quality issues. This is an accomplishment considering the volume of content produced. It means I effectively internalised NWU's brand standards and applied them rigorously. My diligence in proofreading and checking designs ensured error-free and polished outputs. For example, I caught a few typographical errors and a misplacement of a logo on a poster before they went out, preventing potential embarrassment.

Additionally, by guiding clients to stay within brand rules as discussed in challenges, some needed convincing, I helped preserve the university's visual identity integrity across many departments. This consistent quality assurance contributed to NWU's professional image in its communications. It's an often unseen contribution, but the communications department recognised my attention to detail during my evaluation. I consider this a personal achievement in developing an "eye" for detail and upholding standards.

Photoshoots Execution and New Visual Assets for NWU: Coordinating the two major photoshoots as described in the timeline was a substantial undertaking and their successful execution stands as an achievement. Through these shoots, I facilitated the creation of a new library of over 200 high-quality photographs covering various aspects of NWU ,campuses, student life, laboratories, sports, etc.

These images are a valuable asset to the University, as fresh visuals keep marketing materials current and relatable. My contribution was not only logistical arranging schedules, permissions, etc. but also creative in art-directing to an extent on site suggesting certain group shots or locations that I knew were in demand by our designers. The end result was a diverse set of images that are already being used in NWU's promotional materials and on the website. For example, the 2026 Undergraduate Prospectus features a cover photo from one of the shoots I organised, and several faculty websites updated their banners with images from our collection. This tangible outcome ,enriching the media resources of NWU ,was a direct result of the internship project I led. It feels like leaving a legacy; some of these images might represent NWU's brand for years to come. The efficient manner in which the shoots were run staying on schedule and on budget was noted by my line manager as a notable accomplishment, since such shoots can often run into difficulties or additional costs.

Positive Feedback and Strengthened Relationships: While less quantifiable, an important achievement for me was the positive feedback I received from clients and colleagues, and the strong professional relationships I built. Several internal clients sent appreciative notes after project completion, thanking me for the efficient service and quality outcome. For instance, the Faculty of Engineering's dean wrote an email praising the new brochure and mentioned my "prompt and professional coordination" specifically. Internally, the graphic designers expressed that my clear briefs and organised approach helped them work more

effectively ,this peer feedback means a lot, as it indicates I added value to my team. My line manager's evaluation highlighted my reliability and growth, which I consider an achievement in fulfilling and exceeding the expectations of the role. Additionally, by working well with others including external suppliers, I strengthened the network between our department and others like faculties, or the printing vendor, which contributes to smoother collaborations in the future. Essentially, I helped enhance the service reputation of the Brand and Design unit. This goodwill and trust built is an intangible but crucial contribution; a well-served client is more likely to engage positively with our department next time, making the marketing operation more effective overall.

Academic Integration and Application of Theory: On a more personal achievement note, I was able to successfully integrate academic theory into practice, something that is often a goal of internships. For example, having studied project management and marketing communication theories in class, I effectively applied concepts like stakeholder analysis, target audience profiling, and the AIDA Attention-Interest-Desire-Action marketing model when crafting campaign materials. Notably, I used insights from coursework on communication such as the importance of consistent messaging and multi-channel engagement in helping to plan the recruitment campaign. The fact that these applications resulted in real-world success like higher engagement metrics on our posts is an achievement that validates my academic learning. I documented these academic-to-practice applications in my reflective assignments observational pieces. I consider the seamless blending of theory and practice, culminating in academic credit and praise, as one of the outcomes I achieved through diligence and reflection during this internship.

Each of these achievements was made possible by the supportive environment at NWU and the collaborative effort of the teams I worked with. I recognise that my contributions were part of a larger collective effort; still, I am proud of the distinct role I played and the initiative I showed. The internship allowed me to leave a positive mark ,whether it's through a piece of content, a process improvement, or simply the goodwill of satisfied stakeholders. These accomplishments also serve as evidence of my readiness to take on future professional roles with confidence and competence. They have been reported here not to boast, but to reflect on how the goals set out at the beginning of the internship translated into concrete results and to acknowledge the growth that occurred along the way.

Learning Outcomes

My internship experience has yielded rich learning outcomes that have significantly contributed to my academic development and career preparedness. These outcomes encompass new skills, insights, and confirmations of my career interests. In this section, I reflect on how the internship contributed to my academic and career goals and what specific learning I gained, especially in terms of applying theoretical knowledge from my studies to practical scenarios.

Practical Application of Academic Theory: A primary learning outcome was the ability to apply theoretical concepts from my coursework to real workplace situations, thereby solidifying my understanding of those concepts. For instance, in my academic programme we learned about project management methodologies like setting SMART goals, using Gantt charts, risk management, etc.. During the internship, I applied these by setting clear objectives for each project often informally SMART in nature and by identifying risks like “what could delay this design?” upfront and mitigating them. We also studied marketing principles such as branding strategies and the marketing mix.

I witnessed and practiced these principles in action, understanding how NWU's branding strategy positioning itself as an excellent and values-driven institution is implemented across its communications, and how the “promotion” aspect of the marketing mix is carefully crafted in a university context. Seeing theory come alive in this way deepened my comprehension. For example, academically I knew stakeholder engagement is important; practically, I learned *how* to engage stakeholders through timely updates, involving them in key decisions and saw the improved outcomes it led to. This internship essentially served as a capstone learning experience where my classroom knowledge was tested and proven in real scenarios.

Enhanced Professional Competencies: As detailed earlier, I gained and improved many professional skills, project coordination, communication, teamwork, problem-solving, etc. The learning outcome here is not just skill acquisition but also self-awareness of my competencies. Through reflection and feedback, I learned that I excel in roles that require organisation and communication, which aligns well with project management career paths. I also identified areas for further development for example, I learned I could improve my technical graphic design skills if I were to take on more creative roles in the future, or that I should keep working on delegating tasks when appropriate. This clarity on my skill profile and the experience of having exercised these skills in an authentic environment have prepared me for transitioning into the workforce after graduation. I can now confidently articulate in future job interviews what my skills are with concrete examples from this internship to back them up.

Insight into Organisational Dynamics: Another learning outcome is a nuanced understanding of how large organisations function, especially universities. NWU provided a learning environment on organisational structure, governance, and culture. I learned about hierarchical decision-making processes like how approvals move from department level to director level, etc., and how cross-department collaboration is managed. Academically, one learns about organisational behaviour and culture; practically, I observed NWU's culture which values inclusiveness and academic freedom, and I saw how that culture reflects in everyday interactions for example, the fairly open-door policy of managers, the encouragement to voice opinions, etc.. I also became aware of the external pressures on a university as outlined in the

PEST analysis, and how internal strategies are devised in response. Understanding the bigger picture of NWU's vision and strategy gave meaning to my daily tasks, I realised that even designing a simple flyer is part of a greater mission to communicate NWU's brand and values. This broadened perspective is a key learning: in any job I do moving forward, I will seek to understand how my role fits into the organisational objectives and environment, as it enhances both motivation and effectiveness.

Career Direction and Interests Clarified: One of my personal goals was to use the internship to clarify my career interests. The experience did exactly that. I found that I greatly enjoy the field of marketing communications and project coordination.

The internship confirmed for me that a career in marketing/project management is fulfilling; I found joy in planning, executing, and seeing the tangible results of campaigns and projects. I also discovered that I have an interest in brand management, ensuring consistency and seeing how a brand is built intrigued me. On the other hand, I also learned what I might not want to pursue deeply; for example, while I managed some content writing and editing, I realised I prefer coordination over pure content creation, and I prefer a role with variety rather than a singular focus like graphic design or copywriting alone.

This clarity is an invaluable learning outcome because it will inform my job search and perhaps further studies for instance, I might consider a certification in project management or a postgraduate focus on marketing management given this interest. Essentially, the internship acted as a testing ground for my career path, and I come out of it with a stronger sense of direction.

Academic Credit and Performance: On a formal note, the work I did and the reflection reports including this comprehensive report tie back to my academic programme's requirements. Through diligent work and thorough reporting, I expect to achieve high marks for the internship module. The assignments I submitted during the internship, such as weekly journals or observational essays, drew directly from my experiences and were enriched by the citations of best practices and NWU context that I gathered like using Cadle's frameworks and NWU's strategy documents to analyse situations. My ability to contextualise academic content in the internship setting was itself a learning outcome; it trained me in analytical thinking and writing, which is beneficial for any academic or research work. Furthermore, having concrete examples to reference like "in my internship I applied concept X in doing Y" may prove useful in the remainder of my academic journey, as I can contribute relevant real-world perspectives in class discussions or future research projects.

Networking and Professional Relationships: A less tangible but very important outcome is the network I have built. I learned how to cultivate professional relationships, which is a key part of career development often not taught in class. Through interacting positively with a wide range of people at NWU, I now have contacts who can serve as references or mentors. I also learnt networking etiquette, for example, I connected on LinkedIn with colleagues and learned to maintain professional connections. One direct

learning was understanding the importance of maintaining relationships: I plan to keep in touch with certain colleagues like the designers and my line manager beyond the internship, and I've seen how these connections can lead to future opportunities. Thus, the internship taught me that networking is not just about making contacts, but about demonstrating your value and building trust so that those connections are willing to support you in the future.

Reflection and Lifelong Learning Practice: The internship was structured in a way with reflective components that taught me how to learn from experience continuously. By facing challenges and then reflecting as I am doing in this report, I became more adept at self-evaluation and identifying lessons learned after each project or event. This meta-skill of reflection is something I will carry forward. It aligns with the concept of lifelong learning, being able to extract insights from every experience to improve oneself. For example, after finishing the brand video project, I took some time to jot down what went well and what I would do differently in another similar project. This practice meant that when I tackled the next project the photoshoots, I applied those insights like better stakeholder briefing at start, anticipating logistic needs, etc..

The improvement in performance from one project to the next was noticeable, illustrating the power of reflective learning. Academically, this reinforces the value of experiential learning models we studied like Kolb's cycle of experience-reflection-conceptualisation-experimentation. I have essentially internalised that approach.

The learning outcomes from this internship are multi-faceted. Not only have I strengthened specific job skills and applied academic theory, but I have also grown in understanding the professional world and myself. The experience has been transformative; I feel more prepared for my career, more connected to my field of interest, and more confident in my capabilities. Additionally, the internship reaffirmed the value of NWU's educational framework, it showed that what we learn in classrooms does have direct relevance, and conversely, that practical experience can greatly enhance academic understanding. This synergy between academic learning and workplace experience is perhaps the most valuable outcome of all, as it has truly made me a more well-rounded early-career professional.

Observations

During my internship, I made numerous observations about workplace practices, organisational culture, and my personal working style. These observations often came from consciously stepping back to analyse situations, as well as from assignments that required observational notes. In this section, I share some of the key reflective and observational insights I gathered:

Observation of Organisational Culture and Work Environment: NWU's Brand and Design department fostered a collaborative and supportive environment. I observed that team members frequently helped each other, whether it was a designer asking for a second opinion on a design or a colleague offering to proofread

someone else's work. There was a culture of open communication ,for example, my line manager would have weekly informal catch-ups with each team member to check on workload and morale. This practice created a sense of being valued and heard. I also noticed the blend of formal and informal interactions: meetings had agendas and clear outcomes formal structure, but there was also room for humor and personal connection informal warmth. This balance contributed to high team morale and is something I noted as a marker of a healthy workplace. Coming from a student background, I had expected perhaps a more rigid environment, but NWU's culture was relatively relaxed yet productive. I also observed the manifestation of NWU's values like the "ethic of care" in subtle ways ,for instance, when one colleague fell ill, the team and management were very accommodating and others stepped in to cover her tasks without any negative judgment.

Such an environment, I observed, leads to loyalty and extra effort from employees; it certainly did in my case, as I felt motivated to give my best.

Differences Between Academic Life and Workplace: One clear observation was how different the rhythm of work is compared to academic life. In university classes, you often have clear start and end times for tasks assignments, exams, etc., whereas in work, tasks can be more continuous and overlapping. I observed that the ability to *prioritise on the fly* is more important at work ,a plan for the day can change if something urgent comes up, whereas in academic life deadlines are usually fixed far in advance. I also noted the feedback loop: in school, feedback is periodic like grades or comments after submission, but at work, I was getting near-constant feedback every time I delivered something, there was input. This continuous feedback helped me learn faster, but it also required me to be receptive and adaptive constantly. Another difference I observed was accountability: academically, one is largely accountable to oneself and to some extent group projects, etc., but in the workplace, every action can impact colleagues or the organisation's output, which instills a strong sense of responsibility. This made me more conscientious. These differences cemented my understanding that transitioning from academia to work requires shifts in mindset: being more agile, communicative, and team-oriented.

Observation of Client Behavior and Expectations: Working with a variety of internal clients faculty staff, administrators, etc., I observed patterns in client behaviour. Many clients, I noticed, are not fully aware of the creative process or the lead times required for quality output. This led to last-minute requests or unrealistic initial expectations. Observing this helped me preemptively manage expectations by educating clients gently for example, explaining why a professional printing takes a week, or why designing a brochure is not just "pushing a button". I also observed that clients greatly appreciate clarity and honesty. When I told a client "We cannot meet this deadline but we can deliver by X date, and here's why," most were understanding ,sometimes even apologetic for asking too much ,which dispelled my earlier fear that clients would be uniformly demanding or harsh. Another observation was that clients love to feel involved; those who I kept more in the loop e.g., sending a quick progress update or a preliminary draft for a peek were

usually happier with the end result. This reinforced for me the notion that involvement can lead to a sense of ownership and satisfaction. Conversely, I saw that when clients were left in the dark until the final output, they were more likely to be surprised or request big changes, as they hadn't been part of the journey. Thus, I learned an observational lesson in stakeholder engagement: keep people appropriately involved to smooth the road to project success.

Personal Work Style and Preference Observations: Through the internship, I paid attention to when I was most productive or what conditions helped me work best. I observed that I do well when I start the day by planning and organising, on days I skipped my morning plan, I felt more scattered.

I also noticed I work best in a somewhat quiet environment for tasks like writing or scheduling, but I enjoyed some background buzz when doing routine tasks, finding a balance was key and luckily our office had a mix of open space and small meeting rooms I could use for focus time.

I realised that I have a tendency to try to handle things myself before asking for help, one observation was that sometimes I spent 30 minutes puzzling over a problem that a colleague could have answered in 5 minutes. Recognising this, I gradually became more comfortable asking quick questions, and I noticed the efficiency that brought. So an observation about my style is that I should leverage team knowledge sooner. Another personal observation: I found that I derive a lot of satisfaction from checklist completion, crossing off tasks gave me a mental boost. Knowing this, I sometimes broke tasks into smaller subtasks so I could tick them off and maintain momentum. These self-observations might seem small, but they are helping shape more productive work habits for me.

Mentorship and Leadership Observation: Working closely with my line manager provided a live example of effective leadership and mentorship. I observed that his approach was to guide rather than micromanage. He set clear expectations, but then gave me autonomy to carry out tasks, stepping in mainly when I sought advice or when a critical decision was needed. This trust in turn made me strive to meet or exceed expectations. I also noticed that he provided constructive feedback in a balanced way, always acknowledging what was done well before pointing out what could be improved, which is very motivating. Additionally, I observed how he handled his own workload and stress: he was calm under pressure and often used humor to keep the team relaxed even when deadlines loomed. This was a valuable observation in leadership style that I aspire to emulate. Mentorship-wise, I observed the benefits of having regular one-on-one check-ins which he did. These sessions weren't just task reviews; he would ask how I was feeling about the work, what I was finding challenging, etc., signalling genuine interest in my development. It reinforced to me the power of mentorship in professional growth. Observing this, I made a mental note that as I progress in my career, I too would like to support newcomers in a similar way, because I saw first-hand how it builds confidence and competence.

Adaptive Changes Over Time: Another observation was noting how I and the team adapted over the internship period. For example, early on, our team had a tendency to communicate mostly via email, even for quick questions. Over time, I observed a shift partly initiated by me and some colleagues to more real-time communication like a group chat or just walking over to someone's desk. This sped things up and reduced email clutter. It was interesting to observe a micro change in team communication style and how everyone appreciated it. I also observed my own adaptation: at the start I wrote very lengthy emails believing more detail was better; I learned by observing responses or lack thereof that being succinct and to the point was more effective in busy environments. I adjusted my writing style accordingly and noticed better response rates. This taught me that paying attention to how others respond to your methods is key, if something isn't working ideally, tweak your approach. Over the months, I could see a noticeable improvement in the team's workflow and my own efficiency, which validated these small adaptive changes.

Observing the Impact of Good Design and Branding: Since I was at the heart of brand and design projects, I got to observe how quality design and consistent branding actually impact stakeholder perceptions. For instance, after we refreshed some faculty brochures and rolled them out, I observed through comments and attendance at an Open Day that prospective students and parents took the materials more seriously, often commenting on how professional and appealing they looked. This anecdotal observation aligns with marketing theory that good design can increase engagement and perceived value. It gave me a real appreciation for the craft of design and the importance of brand consistency that we were upholding. Conversely, I also saw older, off-brand or cluttered materials in use in some departments produced long before, and it was evident that they were less effective some were ignored on display racks. These observations reaffirmed the value of the work our team was doing, it wasn't just aesthetics; it had practical impact on communication effectiveness. For me personally, it was satisfying to observe that our efforts translated into something tangible in the audience's response.

In compiling these observations, I realised how much I was able to learn simply by being mindful and reflective during everyday activities. These insights have been documented in my personal journals and have fed into this report and my overall growth. They represent a layer of learning that goes beyond tasks and projects, understanding *how* and *why* things are done in certain ways in the workplace, and noticing the subtle cues that can improve one's effectiveness and adaptability. Observational learning has taught me to remain curious and attentive; it's a habit I intend to maintain as I continue into the professional world, because it often provides the deeper lessons that formal instructions might not cover.

Mentorship and Relationship with my line manager

One of the most rewarding aspects of my internship was the excellent mentorship I received and the strong working relationship I developed with my line manager. In this section, I reflect on the nature of this relationship, how it facilitated my growth, and what made it effective.

From day one, my line manager the Senior Manager of Digital Communication and Brand made it clear that he viewed the internship as a learning opportunity for me, not just an extra pair of hands for the department. This set a positive tone and established trust. Our relationship was characterised by open communication, mutual respect, and a shared commitment to the internship objectives. I always felt comfortable approaching him with questions or uncertainties, for instance, if I was unsure how to handle a sensitive client request, I could knock on his door and ask for guidance without any hesitation. He fostered an environment where no question was “stupid” and encouraged me to discuss problems early before they grew.

The mentorship aspect was evident in how he took time to teach and provide insights. For example, when I struggled with prioritising tasks, he introduced me to a simple prioritisation matrix and walked me through applying it to my task list. When I completed the first draft of our campaign plan, he reviewed it with me line by line, not only suggesting improvements but explaining *why* those improvements were necessary often tying it back to principles of marketing strategy. These teaching moments were very enlightening, it was like having a personal tutor in the workplace, blending theory and practice.

Our weekly one-on-one meetings were a cornerstone of this mentorship. In these meetings, beyond just status updates, we talked about my progress towards my internship goals, any challenges I faced, and my general well-being. He often asked reflective questions, such as “What did you learn from that project?” or “Is there something you’d handle differently next time?” These prompted me to think deeper and articulate my learning, which reinforced it. He also actively listened to my perspectives; if I suggested a new idea or expressed a concern, he gave it genuine consideration. For instance, I once brought up that the process of getting approvals was causing delays, and he collaborated with me on a solution by delegating some approval authority to me for minor items, this empowerment boosted my confidence and showed his trust in me.

An important part of our relationship was the feedback loop. He provided constructive feedback regularly, but always in a supportive manner. After I led a meeting for the first time, we debriefed and he pointed out things I did well like preparing an agenda and things to improve like inviting input from quieter members. Because he balanced praise with critique, I never felt discouraged, instead, I felt motivated to refine my skills. Similarly, I could give him feedback in small ways: if I needed more clarity or if I felt I was underutilised at any point, I voiced it. For example, early on I mentioned I’d love to be more involved in creative brainstorming sessions, and he subsequently made sure I was invited to those meetings, which enriched my experience. This two-way feedback created a healthy, evolving mentorship dynamic.

Working with him also demonstrated what a good leader looks like. He was organised, yet flexible; decisive, yet considerate of team input. On a mentorship front, he often shared his own career experiences and mistakes made when he was starting out, which was reassuring, it made me realise that learning and growth

is a journey even for those in senior positions. There were even moments of career advice: during a lunch conversation, he talked with me about different paths in marketing and project management, giving me advice on possible further studies or certifications I might pursue based on my strengths. I felt he genuinely cared about my future, not just the work I was doing in the present for the department.

The trust between us grew as I proved myself. By the latter half of the internship, he was comfortable handing me more autonomy ,for instance, he let me handle a client meeting on my own, telling me “I know you’ve got this, but I’m here if you need me.” This trust empowered me; it made me strive to maintain the high standard he expected and validated that I had earned professional respect. We always maintained professional decorum, but our rapport also became friendly ,we could share a laugh about something or discuss a news item casually, which made working together pleasant and less stressful.

Another noteworthy aspect was how he supported me during challenges. When things went wrong or got tough like when a client was difficult or a deadline was crazy, he remained calm and helped me devise solutions rather than apportioning blame. I recall when a printing delay happened technically the vendor’s fault and I was panicking about us not having brochures for an event, he stepped in, spoke to the vendor firmly to expedite things, and simultaneously worked with me on a contingency like having digital versions on tablets at the event. He later used that scenario as a learning point for me on crisis management. Knowing I had someone solid to back me up made me more confident in tackling issues head-on.

The relationship was highly functional because it was grounded in clarity of expectations and responsibilities, open dialogue, and the shared goal of making this internship beneficial. By observing him, I also learned soft skills ,for instance, how he diplomatically handled interdepartmental politics or gave credit to our team members in larger meetings he always acknowledged my contributions in front of others, which not only felt good but modelled how to be a gracious leader.

The mentorship and line manager relationship was a standout feature of my internship. It was excellent in quality and played a crucial role in my development. I believe this kind of positive relationship can hugely accelerate an intern’s learning curve, as it did mine. My manager’s approach validated many principles I had read about in leadership textbooks ,such as empowering your team, communicating openly, and leading by example ,and I got to see them applied in real life. I have tremendous gratitude for his mentorship, and I intend to maintain contact beyond the internship. I also carry forward the lessons learned from this relationship: in the future, if I mentor someone or even in peer relationships, I will strive to emulate the patience, openness, and supportive guidance that he showed me. This experience has set a high bar for what a good supervisor-mentee relationship can be and has underscored the value of good leadership in any professional setting

Recommendations

Having completed my internship and reflected on my experiences, I can offer several recommendations. These suggestions are aimed at two audiences: firstly, for future interns in the Brand and Design department or similar roles in other organisations to help them navigate and maximise their internship; and secondly, for the NWU internship programme and the host department to consider for improving the internship experience and the programme's effectiveness.

Recommendations for Future Interns:

Be Proactive and Take Initiative: Don't wait to be told what to do all the time. Once you understand the basics of the department's operations, look for ways you can add value. For example, if you notice a process could be improved as I did with tracking design requests, don't be afraid to propose a solution. Supervisors appreciate interns who show initiative and enthusiasm. Proactivity also means seeking out learning opportunities, ask to attend meetings or get involved in projects that interest you. I found that by showing eagerness, I was entrusted with more responsibilities.

Develop a Strong Grasp of Brand Guidelines Early: In a Brand and Design role, understanding the brand's identity is crucial. I recommend that interns spend time early on studying NWU's brand manuals, past design work, and any guidelines available. If possible, have a "brand induction" session with a designer or brand manager. This foundation will help you make decisions independently and ensure your work is consistently on-brand. It will also earn you credibility with the team when they see you respect and uphold the brand standards.

Communicate Clearly and Frequently: Make communication one of your top priorities. Keep your line manager and team updated on your progress and any issues, it's better they hear about a problem early when something can be done, than at the last minute. Similarly, communicate with clients proactively; let them know you've received their request and give them timelines. I recommend setting reminders to send update emails if a project is lengthy. In meetings or emails, practice clarity, summarise action points to avoid misunderstandings. I learned that good communication prevents many potential problems and builds trust.

Learn from Everyone and Seek Feedback: Treat every colleague as a source of learning. The graphic designers can teach you about design principles, the content writers about effective messaging, and even the print shop technicians about production nuances. Ask questions and be curious, most people enjoy sharing their expertise. Also, regularly seek feedback on your performance. Don't wait only for formal reviews; after completing a project or task, ask your supervisor or even the client how you did. I often asked designers if my briefs were clear or asked my manager if I handled a meeting effectively. This not only helps you improve but shows others that you are committed to growth.

Time Management and Organisation is Key: With many moving parts in this role, it's vital to stay organised. Future interns should consider using tools like planners, digital task boards, or simple to-do lists. I recommend starting the day by reviewing priorities and ending the day by planning the next. Also, organise your files and emails ,for instance, keep a dedicated folder for each project and use clear naming conventions. This will save you time and stress when you need to retrieve information quickly.

Additionally, don't be afraid to say no or negotiate deadlines when you truly have too much on your plate; it's better than compromising quality. Your ability to manage your time will directly impact your success and stress levels.

Recommendations for the Internship Programme and Host Department:

Structured Onboarding and Training: While I was fortunate to have an informal onboarding, a more structured orientation program for interns could be beneficial. I recommend that NWU's internship programme incorporate a brief but comprehensive induction at the start maybe a day or two of training. This could cover an introduction to the university's organisational structure VMOST overview, which I ended up learning on my own, a walkthrough of key systems and tools used in the department, and training on departmental processes. Even a short session on expectations and intern rights/responsibilities would set a professional tone. The learning curve is steep in the first weeks; structured onboarding would accelerate intern productivity and confidence.

Set Clear Goals and KPIs with Regular Checkpoints: The internship module required setting goals, which was good. However, I suggest formalising this by having the intern, line manager, and academic supervisor meet even virtually at the beginning to agree on the internship objectives and any Key Performance Indicators KPIs. Equally important, schedule mid-point and end-point evaluation meetings. At the midpoint, all parties can review progress, give feedback, and adjust objectives if needed. This ensures the internship stays on track and the intern gets the most out of it. It also keeps the academic side in the loop, which might enrich the academic-internship integration. I benefited from an attentive mentor; making this a formal part of the program ensures all interns get that guidance.

Rotate Exposure if Possible: Given that marketing departments often have multiple facets brand, communications, events, social media etc., it might add value to allow interns short shadowing stints in related sections. For NWU, maybe an intern could spend a day with the Social Media team or the Events coordinator. This doesn't mean changing their role, but a bit of cross-exposure can broaden understanding. I found by necessity I interacted with events and comms, but a structured rotation even if just observational

would have been cool. It helps interns see the bigger picture of how all marketing functions tie together and could inspire them to develop skills in those adjacent areas. It also fosters inter-team relationships early on.

Feedback Mechanism for Interns: While I was able to express my thoughts informally, having a formal feedback mechanism where interns can share their experience with the programme coordinators would be useful. Perhaps a short survey or a debrief session at the end of the internship where interns can provide anonymous feedback about what worked and what didn't in the internship programme. This can help NWU continuously improve the internship structure. For example, if interns consistently say they needed more software training, the program can incorporate that. It closes the loop and shows that the university values the interns' perspectives.

Resources and Support for Intern Well-being: Internship can be a high-pressure period for students adapting to the workforce. I recommend that the host department and the university ensure interns are aware of and have access to support resources. This could include appointing a "buddy" someone other than the manager, maybe a fellow team member, who can be a go-to for daily questions and social integration. NWU could also remind interns of any student support services like counseling or career services that are available if they feel overwhelmed or need advice. On the department side, small gestures like including the intern in team social activities or casual coffee catch-ups help the intern feel part of the community, which can greatly enhance their well-being and performance. I was lucky to be included and supported, but formalising this ensures no intern falls through the cracks socially or emotionally.

Continued Engagement and Opportunities Post-Internship: Finally, I recommend NWU consider ways to keep successful interns engaged, as they are already trained and familiar with the university. This could be in the form of offering part-time roles, involving them in future freelance projects, or at least keeping them in an alumni talent pool for future vacancies. For the intern, it provides potential employment or experience opportunities; for NWU, it's tapping into someone who can hit the ground running. Also, inviting former interns to speak to new interns or at career events could be beneficial, it shows a pathway and maintains a relationship. I personally would be happy to remain involved if opportunities arise, so I imagine others might as well.

Implementing these recommendations could enhance the internship experience and its outcomes for all parties involved. They stem from reflecting on what could have made my own experience even better and what practices were particularly beneficial. The goal is to ensure the internship is not only a productive time for the department but, more importantly, a formative and positive journey for the student. Given how impactful my internship has been, I'm enthusiastic about the idea that it could be even further enriched for those who come after me.

Conclusion

My internship as a Project Coordinator in the Brand and Design department at North-West University was an immensely rewarding experience that served as a bridge between academic theory and professional practice. Over the course of the internship January to October 2025, I engaged in a diverse array of projects and responsibilities ,from coordinating a flagship brand video and multiple design campaigns to ensuring day-to-day design requests were fulfilled efficiently and on-brand. This report has detailed each aspect of that journey, reflecting on how the internship's objectives were met and what I learned along the way.

Summarising the key points, I began the internship with the goal of honing project management and communication skills in a real-world environment, and I can confidently say those goals have been achieved. Through handling numerous projects simultaneously, I improved my time management and organisational strategies. By liaising between clients and designers, I refined my communication skills and learned to negotiate and manage expectations. The challenges I encountered ,whether tight deadlines, communication hiccups, or navigating institutional processes ,were tackled and turned into learning opportunities. With the support of excellent mentorship, I overcame these obstacles and grew in professional confidence and competence.

The organisational background provided a valuable context for my tasks. Understanding NWU's mission to be a balanced teaching-learning and research institution (North-West University, 2013) and its strategic goals to promote excellence and innovation (North-West University, 2020) , gave purpose to my everyday work. I realised that even a simple poster we designed played a part in communicating NWU's brand promise and values. My contributions, such as the successful brand video and refreshed visual content, supported NWU's efforts to remain a pre-eminent university in Africa driven by knowledge and innovation (North-West University, 2013).

A significant part of this experience was the personal growth I underwent. I didn't just learn how to coordinate projects, I learned how to be a young professional ,how to work in a team, how to handle criticism, and how to adapt to an organisation's culture. The mentorship and relationship with my line manager were exemplary and became a cornerstone of my development. His guidance and the trust he placed in me allowed me to flourish in the role and even implement improvements that will outlast my tenure.

Reflecting on the overall internship experience, I feel a strong sense of accomplishment. I contributed tangible outcomes to the University like the marketing materials and process enhancements and in return gained practical experience and insights that no textbook could fully provide. The internship validated my career interest in marketing and project coordination and gave me clarity on my strengths and areas for further growth.

In terms of the internship programme's place in my degree, it served its intended purpose ,it was a capstone that enabled me to integrate and apply the knowledge acquired throughout my studies. Furthermore, it taught me new things that I will carry back into my academic perspective, creating a synergistic effect between theory and practice.To conclude, this internship was not an end, but a beginning. It was the start of my professional journey, equipping me with skills, confidence, and a network that I will build upon in the years to come. I am grateful to NWU and the Brand and Design team for the trust and opportunities they gave me. The experience underscored the importance of workplace learning ,it has turned academic concepts into lived experience and has prepared me to step into the working world as a more capable and prepared graduate.

As I close this chapter, I am proud of what I accomplished and excited about the path ahead, knowing that the foundation laid by this internship will support my future endeavours. The lessons learned and the memories made will remain with me, guiding my professional ethos and reminding me of how much can be achieved with dedication, support, and a willingness to learn.

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Appendices

Appendix A- Internship Work Agreement and KPI's

Reflection

My internship at NWU as Project Coordinator has been a deeply formative experience, both professionally and personally. It helped me translate theory into practice, build meaningful relationships, and develop core competencies in project coordination, client service, and brand stewardship. The opportunity to manage large-scale projects like the brand video and campaign photoshoots tested my organisational skills and revealed my capacity to lead and adapt under pressure. I have learned that clear communication and early expectation-setting are crucial to successful collaboration. I now better understand how to negotiate timelines, maintain brand integrity, and advocate for realistic creative processes in a demanding environment. One area I would improve in future roles is my tendency to take on too much independently, I've learned that seeking help early and trusting my team strengthens both outcomes and relationships. My next development goal is to expand my strategic thinking, moving from day-to-day delivery to contributing to broader campaign planning and analytics. This experience has built my confidence and given me clarity about my career direction. It has reinforced the importance of professional relationships and accountability, showing me that growth often comes from reflection and resilience.

	Key Performance Areas that you will be focussing on	Weighting	Core competency requirement	Weighting
1	Effective project coordination of design and branding tasks	25	Communication and Collaboration	20
2	Ensuring brand consistency and quality control	20	Attention to detail and brand knowledge	20
3	Content and asset management for campaigns	20	Digital literacy and media management	20
4	Stakeholder engagement	15	Client service and relationship-building	20

5	Support of major campaign activities (video, photoshoots)	20	Time management and adaptability	20
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Strategic objective	Key Performance indicator (what will indicate that you have met your strategic objective)	Unit of Measurement (how will you measure success for the strategic objective)	Portfolio of evidence (what evidence can you provide that you met the KPI)	Rating s (one halfway and one at the end)		Feedback about performance
Deliver design and branding projects on time and within NWU brand standards	100% adherence to branding guidelines and deadlines met	Project completion rate and compliance audits	Completed outputs and brand review approvals	2	4	Delivered high-quality designs on time and consistently met brand standards.
Improve internal communication and reduce feedback cycles	Decrease in average feedback rounds to two or less	Design tracker logs, client email feedback	Design tracker logs, client email feedback	3	5	Streamlined communication reduced revision needs and improved efficiency.
Coordinate and execute successful multimedia campaign projects	Completion and launch of brand video and photo assets	Video publication, image library, campaign reports	Video publication, image library, campaign reports	4	5	High-impact contributions to recruitment campaign noted and praised

An assessment of the performance of the Employee will be based on the following rating scale for KPA's and CCRs:

Category	Rating	Description
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KPI's Not Met/ Unacceptable performance	1	Performance does not meet the standard expected for the job. The review/assessment indicates that the employee has achieved below fully effective results against almost all of the performance criteria and indicators as specified in the PA and Performance Plan. The employee has failed to demonstrate the commitment or ability to bring performance up to the level expected in the job despite management efforts to encourage improvement
KPI's Almost Met / Individual Not fully effective	2	Performance is below the standard required for the job in key areas. Performance meets some of the standards expected for the job. The review/assessment indicates that the employee has achieved below fully effective results against more than half the key performance criteria and indicators as specified in the PA and Performance Plan.
KPI's Met / Fully effective	3	Performance fully meets the standards expected in all areas of the job. The appraisal indicates that the Employee has fully achieved effective results against all significant performance criteria and indicators as specified in the PA and Performance Plan.
KPI's Well Met / ' Performance significantly above expectations	4	Performance is significantly higher than the standard expected in the job. The appraisal indicates that the Employee has achieved above fully effective results against more than half of the performance criteria and indicators and fully achieved all others throughout the year.
KPI's Extremely Well Met / Outstanding Performance	5	Performance far exceeds the standard expected of an employee at this level. The appraisal indicates that the Employee has achieved above fully effective results against all performance criteria and indicators as specified in the PA and Performance plan and maintained this in all areas of responsibility throughout the year.

Appendix C- NWU Brand Guidelines and Services

Please follow this link to view the NWU Brand Resources, Services, and Guidelines

<https://services.nwu.ac.za/brand/brand-resources>

Appendix D- Feedback Testimonials

Hi Ethan

I really want to take this opportunity to thank you for the extremely professional service you are delivering from Marketing and Student Recruitment's side. I know that it is hectic with all the requests streaming in from across the NWU, and especially from Corporate Communication, but your willingness to always assist is really making a difference and is much appreciated.

Your ability to immediately grasp what is expected, even though not always explicitly expressed, is admired.

Continue with the good job.

Regards

Dear Ruan, Lizelle, Joscine & Ethan

I just wanted to share the gratitude from Louis below, similar to multiple other emails and other compliments received for the reception at the Aardklop Hospitality tent.

These initiatives are not possible without individuals that put up their hands to represent the brand and create these experiences. The objective of bringing the community, Aardklop and NWU closer together was definitely achieved because of your hard work and willingness to work long hours.

Thanks for representing us so well, and for the attitude with which you approached this.

Like one Deputy Dean mentioned: Dit was LEKKER! (because of your effort).