Inaugural Postgraduate Industry Linkage Program a Resounding Success

Overview
The Postgraduate Industry Linkage Program (PILP) is a two part program designed and run by the Chemical Engineering Postgraduate Association (CEPA) to help chemical engineering postgraduates improve their networking skills and connect them with industry. It received a $2,000 grant from the Office of the Vice-Provost (Learning and Teaching) as part of the Better Teaching, Better Learning Student Bursaries Scheme. It has also received a $200 grant from the Monash Postgraduate Association (MPA), as well as funding from the Department of Chemical Engineering.

The Program
In March 2015, two interactive networking seminars were delivered by Naanki Pasricha, a Communications Coach and trained speech pathologist. Her seminar covered:

- What is networking?
- Identifying who is in your current network (activity)
- How do we build our professional network?
- The power of effective conversation skills – the role of the listener and the speaker, body language, eye contact, being aware of your listener’s needs, asking relevant questions etc.
- Constructing your 1-minute “elevator-pitch” (individual and small group activity)
- Online networking- LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter

Subsequently, the production facilities of Yakult and Nufarm were visited. Students had the opportunity to learn about their operations and network with engineers. It was also a great chance to network and develop key industry contacts giving students a competitive advantage when applying for graduate employment.

Results
With about 40 participants attending each part of the program, the interest in PILP exceeded expectations. CEPA's feedback survey revealed that 92% of the participants were 'extremely satisfied' or 'satisfied' with the site visit and networking seminar experience. Two thirds of the participants found the output of the networking seminar helpful in interacting with company representatives or peer students during subsequent site visits.
Future Direction
The feedback from chemical engineering postgraduates highlights the strong latent demand for soft skill development and industry engagement. Based on the positive endorsement from the student body, CEPA intends to integrate PILP in its annual event calendar. This project has the potential to serve as a flagship program for other departments to follow.

Above: Monash University chemical engineering postgraduates tour Nufarm's production plant in Laverton North.