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ABSTRACT

There are some things that can be standardized about internship programs in communication programs, and some things that cannot (for example, criteria for entering a program and credit hours permitted). However, the following 11 internship standards can and should be adopted by the Experiential Learning Commission of the Speech Communication Association: (1) the internship experience must provide the student with an opportunity to practice classroom learning or introduce the student to new material, thus developing skills; (2) no intern should be placed at an agency without the college supervisor visiting the agency and discussing the placement; (3) agencies should produce written documentation outlining interns' duties and responsibilities; (4) interns must interview with agency supervisors prior to placement approval; (5) departments should provide documentation of the students' internship and college registration; (6) departments should provide a contract agreed upon by the college, agency, and student; (7) departments should schedule a site visitation; (8) department faculty sponsors should make regular contacts with the intern and intern site supervisor; (9) student and site supervisor should prepare midterm evaluations of the student's progress; (10) student and site supervisor should prepare final evaluations of the student; and (11) departments should maintain a file with comments about the placement site for review by future interns. These guidelines are aimed at the establishment and maintenance of an internship program, are designed to benefit the student by ensuring that the intern experience is successful. (SR)

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"To Standardize or Not to Standardize,
That Is The Question"

a paper presented at the

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Annual Convention

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by

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The Internship Experience (2nd ed.) by Lynne Schafer Gross is an excellent starting point for a discussion of internship policy and standardization, especially for communication programs. Although the text is directed more toward the prospective student intern, it is clear that internship programs do indeed vary from college to college and Gross (1993) advises students that, "Success is primarily dependent upon the student making sure that he/she follows through with the various procedures and processes."

When I first embarked on this topic, I had planned to survey various universities and colleges regarding their internship programs. However, other organizations, such as the Broadcast Education Association, through their publications, have already conducted such research and found that programs vary from college to college. In many cases, colleges were so proud of their own programs that they thought their structure should be a model for everyone else.

Indeed, our internship program at Westfield State College has been recognized by area professionals and accrediting teams as one of the best in the New England region. When you have intern placements as far away as Paris, Dublin, London, Bermuda, Jamaica, Los Angeles,

Dallas, St. Louis, and Miami and at prestigious locations in the United States, including the major networks in New York, CNN in Atlanta, and the Federal Communications Commission in Washington, DC, you tend to be a little self congratulatory.

However, each year that I attend the various presentations at the Speech Communications Association Annual Convention, I learn something new.

After giving the topic of this paper, "To Standardize or Not to Standardize, That is the Question" a great deal of thought over the past eighteen years that I have been our department's intern coordinator, I have come to the conclusion that there are some things that you can standardize and some things you cannot.

This conclusion is by no means an earth shattering revelation, but through discussions with many intern coordinators and interns from other colleges and universities, I have learned that the level of supervision, expectations, and organization of internship programs varies as much as the number of colleges and universities.

After reviewing much of the literature and surveys conducted by the Broadcast Education Association and other organizations concerning internships, it is evident that the following topics cannot be standardized.

I. Criteria for Entering An Internship

Colleges and universities have criteria that range from a quota system with only the top ten students receiving approval, to a system of a quality point average determinate, to a requirement for all students enrolled in the major regardless of academic standing. Our department at Westfield State has a quality point system requiring a 3.0 in the major and a 2.5 average overall. There are some in my department who believe that this requirement is too strict while others maintain it's not rigorous enough.

Proponents of the no requirement position indicate that the internship experience is so valuable that we should not deny any student the "right" to an internship. They also contend that the internship is an opportunity for those students with limited academic ability to find success, raise the average, and develop self-esteem. They argue that

academic performance may not be a strong predictor of internship success.

Proponents of the strict requirement position argue that the internship experience should be seen as an honors course that rewards three and one-half years of good work. They also strongly argue that the student intern represents the faculty, department, and university. Weak interns hamper the placement of future interns and with the strong competition between colleges to place interns, this becomes a factor.

II. Part of Major Credit or Elective Credit

Whether or not a student receives credit within the major is usually determined by the number of credit hours allowed for an internship. Those programs with a one to three credit maximum internship can absorb the internship into the major program. Those programs with a fifteen credit maximum cannot include the credits since in some cases an additional fifteen credits would increase major requirements by fifty percent. Those programs seeking accreditation also run into the problem of excess credits beyond the approved minimum.

III. Number of Credit Hours Permitted

Many traditional liberal arts colleges have a low maximum number of credits for an internship, for example six, (Kamalipour, 1993) while those colleges who combine a liberal arts approach with professional concentrations may permit up to fifteen credits. Programs with international, national, and regional internships usually permit a maximum of fifteen credits so students can maintain their standing as a full time student. An overseas internship that grants only three credits might hamper the financial aid packages of some students who must retain full time status to qualify.

IV. Credit Equivalency and Transcript Credit

Some colleges and universities perceive little academic value of internships and advocate only transcript credit for the experience. Those programs who grant academic credit also differ on the hour to credit ratio. Our program equates 40 hours of internship work to one credit. A fifteen credit internship requires forty hours per week for fifteen weeks. However other programs have an eighty hours to one credit ratio (Kamalipour).

V. Grade or Pass/Fail

This area is widely debated. Some colleges have a maximum number of credits to be elected on a Pass/Fail basis. Our college limits Pass/Fail credits to upper level courses outside the major and not to exceed eight credits. Proponents of Pass/Fail indicate that site supervisors do not have the grading expertise to accurately evaluate students. Others contend the faculty supervisors do not have the day to day contact with the student, therefore a faculty evaluation is somewhat tainted.

Proponents of the grade policy argue that the grade is a motivating factor for students who might otherwise slack off with limited supervision and an almost assured Pass grade. Additionally, proponents of a grading policy contend that future employers look at the internship grade carefully since it has been primarily determined by professionals in the field.

VI. Centralized Office or Departmental Control

Some internship programs run out of the Career Services Office while the vast majority are departmentally run. Colleges with standardize

internship programs are the most likely to have a central office handling internship placements.

VII. Final Grading Responsibility

In most cases, the university supervisor has the final say in the grading process. What differs is the percentage. Some supervisors maintain 100% grading privileges while others grant as much as 90% to the site supervisor

It is clear that there are too many variables to consider in the above seven categories which prohibit any national standardization in these areas. As Thomas "Tip" O'Neill, the former Speaker of the House of Representatives once stated, "All politics is local." It appears that adage also applies to internship programs.

However, there are some internship standards that can and should be adopted by the Experiential Learning Commission of the Speech Communication Association.

The following standards in no way compromise an individual college or university program. These standards are aimed at the establishment and maintenance of an internship program.

Standard One: The internship experience must provide the student with an opportunity to put into practice what has been learned in the classroom or introduce the student to new material and thus develop skills previously or not previously acquired.

Standard Two: No intern should be placed at an agency without the college/university department intern supervisor visiting the agency and discussing the placement with the agency representative.

Standard Three: Agencies should produce written documentation outlining the duties and responsibilities of the intern and the specific skills that are expected.

Standard Four: Student interns must interview with agency supervisors prior to placement approval.

Standard Five: The department should provide documentation indicating that the student intern has been approved for an internship and is registered at the college or university for such an experience.

Standard Six: The department should provide a contract that is agreed upon by the college, the agency, and the student. This contract should outline duties and responsibilities of the college, the agency, and the intern. Items in the contract might include daily logs, number of visitations, written evaluations, research papers, etc.

Standard Seven: The department should schedule at least one visitation (if feasible) to the intern site during the intern experience.

Standard Eight: The department faculty sponsor should make regular contacts with the student intern and the intern site supervisor.

Standard Nine: Both the student and the site supervisor should prepare a midterm evaluation of the student's progress. These evaluations should be discussed with the student intern.

Standard Ten: Both the student and the site supervisor should prepare a final evaluation of the student's progress. These evaluations should be discussed with the student intern.

Standard Eleven: The department should maintain a file containing relevant comments about the internship placement site for review by future interns.

The above eleven standards should not in any way cause problems for college or university regulations regarding criteria, grading, credit, or organizational structure.

The eleven standards are designed to benefit the student to insure the internship experience is successful.

Selected References

Gross, L.S. (1993). The internship experience 2nd ed.). Prospect Heights, Illinois: Waveland Press, Inc.

Kamalipour, Y.R. (1993). Internship procedure, performance and assessment. Feedback, 34 (3), 25-27.

(Feedback is a publication of the Broadcast Education Association.)