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ABSTRACT

Working leaves for faculty in two-year diploma programs provide colleges with more experienced and current faculty, provide industry with new employees or consultants with fresh ideas, and present faculty with opportunities to use up-to-date technologies and methodologies and share those experiences with students. At the University College of the Cariboo, in British Columbia, a faculty member in the Computing Information Systems diploma program arranged a work leave in spring 1995, although no formal program existed at the college. First, the instructor contacted area firms employing large numbers of Information Systems workers, receiving offers from two firms, and received approval from the college for a 1-semester leave at 50% pay. The leave was then arranged with a large supplier of wood and paper products, with the firm covering the remaining 50% of the instructor's salary. The instructor spent the first 8 weeks of the leave researching and documenting the company's existing information system, while the remaining time was spent developing a new system for tracking work done by the company's Business Information Systems division. Finally, although the leave cost the college \$6,000, it provided significant benefits. The instructor gained new skills and familiarity with new processes and used this knowledge to develop a Natural Resource Science course for fall 1995. (TGI)

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Industry Work Experience Leave for Faculty

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Paper presented at "Workforce 2000," the Annual Conference on
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Industry Work Experience Leave for Faculty

Introduction

The purpose of a two year diploma program is to prepare graduates that have knowledge of the skills and tools that are the same as or similar to those used in industry. In order to do this, faculty must be aware of the latest trends and technology being used in the workplace. Keeping abreast with what is needed and used, can be accomplished in several ways. These include having advisory committees, reading journals, attending conferences, experimenting with new computer software, and other professional development and contacts. However each of these methods of keeping up-to-date involve very short periods of time, hours or days. A better and more intense method of experiencing what is happening in industry is through a *working leave*.

A *working leave* for faculty of two year diploma programs results in a win / win / win situation. The college wins in that they have a more current experienced faculty delivering their programs. Industry wins in that they gain an employee or consultant that brings fresh ideas and innovations to the workplace. The faculty members wins in that he or she are updated with current technologies and methodologies in their discipline and have new experiences to share with their students.

The following discusses how a *work experience leave* can be arranged, the cost of such a leave and its benefits.

The problem and a planned solution

By the winter of 1994, I had been working at the University College of the Cariboo (UCC) for almost nine years and during this period had only limited exposure to *real practical* computing through small consulting jobs. I felt the need to go back into industry to get hands on experience of what was happening in my discipline and to obtain new war stories to share in the classroom.

Although no formal work experience leave program existed, I discussed my concerns with my Dean and received strong support to proceed with the idea of arranging a working leave for myself. I then decide on the type of work experience that would be most relevant and proceeded with the arrangement for a leave.

Negotiating a work experience leave

The first problem that I was faced with was should I negotiate a leave with the college then find a place to work or should I find a place to work then arrange for a leave. Since I

was only interested in work experiences that would enhance my knowledge in specific areas of computing, I decided that I must find employment first.

At the start I tried arranging a work exchange secondment with a colleague that had done some prior teaching and now worked in the Information Systems department of a local firm, however, this failed. I then wrote letters to three of the largest employers of Information System workers in our city, outlining the type of work that I was interested in and a draft plan as to how and when a leave would occur. Two of the three firms expressed interest in the plan and made me offers subject to acceptance by the college.

Next I checked the collective agreement between the college and the Faculty Association and discovered that short term leaves of up to 4 months (1 semester) were available for professional development purposes. A request for leave was sent to the leave committee and was approved for a one semester term at 50% pay. The other 50% of my salary was to be paid by the company that I would go to work for.

Cost of the leave

Instructional replacement by a Sessional Instructor (4 months @ \$4,000 per month)	\$16,000
Less savings due to 50% leave (4 months @ \$2,500 per month)	-\$10,000
Net costs of leave	<u>\$6,000</u>

Type of work performed while on leave

The leave was for 4 months to work under contract at Weyerhaeuser Canada Ltd in Kamloops, BC in their head office Business Information Systems division. Weyerhaeuser is one of the world's largest suppliers of pulp, paper and wood products.

The first eight weeks of the work term were spent researching and documenting an existing system for Weyerhaeuser using a methodology known as *Systems Organization Charts* or *Hierarchy Charts*. This work was very beneficial to Weyerhaeuser since the systems documentation had not been updated in some time. It was also valuable to me in that I gained a better understanding of the lumber sales business.

The remaining work term was spent developing a new systems of tracking and costing work performed by the staff of the Business Information Systems division. This time tracking and work order system was to be developed utilizing a relational database (Oracle) on a minicomputer (HP 9000) with an interface on microcomputers (PC's) via



Client/Server architecture. The Client/Server software used was PowerBuilder. This design and development work with relational databases and Client/Server software was exactly the experience that I was looking for in that it could be utilized in two or three courses that I was teaching in our Computing Information Systems diploma program [CSOM - Computer Systems & Operations Management].

Problems and short comings

From my perspective, there were no serious problems with this working leave, half of my salary was paid by the college and half was paid under contract by Weyerhaeuser. Benefits regarding medical, dental, etc. were paid for by the college, and the only loss was a few unearned vacation days while on leave. The rigid work day of 8:00 till 4:00 took some getting used to after the more flexible hours of teaching in a college environment.

In the Computing Department of the college some juggling of course assignments had to be made but these were minimal.

Benefits realized

As mentioned earlier this work experience leave was a win / win / win situation. The college gained in terms of enhanced skills obtained by me as an instructor in the Computing Science department. A new computing course offering for students of the Bachelor of Natural Resource Sciences (BNRS) degree was to be developed and taught in the fall of 1995, just four months after my leave. My work at Weyerhaeuser gave me and the department better insight into development and teaching a relevant course for the BNRS program.

The work with designing a relational database for time tracking and work orders was very useful in the Database Systems course that I teach each fall. I was also able to share information and skills gained from working with the Client/Server software, PowerBuilder, in two of my courses. Being away from the college, working on tasks that were different from what I had done for the past 9 years was very refreshing.

Weyerhaeuser found the documentation that I developed valuable as an orientation for new employees and co-op students that were to work with their Order/ Invoice system for lumber sales. The development work on the time tracking and work order system although mostly research and development helped the Business Information department to gain and enhance local experience in working with the newer systems architecture of Client/Server which is a Weyerhaeuser corporate goal.

Summary

It is obvious that working leaves for faculty are valuable, however what is the acceptable cost for the value gained? Should all faculty be encouraged to take working leaves and how should the costs be shared by the college, the company in industry, and the faculty member? Should agreements be made similar to those of co-op programs for students?

From my personal experience, all three parties involved in the work experience leave were satisfied regarding benefits gained versus costs and problems involved.