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ABSTRACT

This document discusses the objectives, advantages, and disadvantages of internships provided by colleges and universities to their students. The advantages of internships are listed as: (1) enhancement of student goals of career development; (2) promotion of favorable public relations for colleges; (3) provision of valuable services to alumni and the community; and (4) research opportunities for the students. The disadvantages are listed as: (1) exposure to litigation; (2) increased workload; (3) dilution of educational program; and (4) a fueling of student worship of the practical and preprofessional. The report emphasizes that while the concept of applied learning is supported at most colleges, disagreement surrounds the semantics of internship programs and the tension between faculty vs. student-centered perspectives increases. The paper emphasizes the importance of viewing these programs as a means of facilitating student growth, accommodating student needs, and achieving a balance between perfectionism and creativity. The report concludes with a discussion of some examples of undergraduate service learning at Ursinus College, Pennsylvania; a list of specific community service projects at the college; and a summary of optimal student learning experiences in the field. An outline of a conference of Ursinus College faculty on the internship experience is attached. (CK)

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The Liberal Arts and Applied Learning:
Reflections About the Internship Experience

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1996

Why do most institutions of higher learning bother with internships in the first place? What are our objectives in offering students the opportunity to participate in internships? It can be useful to organize our thinking by considering both the PROS and CONS associated with internships.

PROS

- 1. student goals: enhance understanding, test careers, gain entrance
- 2. college public relations: parents & students want careers
- 3. alumni & community benefits: sites gain valuable service
- 4. faculty connections: research opportunities

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CONS

1. Exposure to litigation
2. Increased Workload
3. "Gut" course threatens standards; dilutes educational program
4. Fuels student worship of the practical & preprofessional

The concept of applied learning has fairly wide support at most colleges, and most educators seem to think offering internships is desirable, despite their downside. Disagreement surfaces as we move from the general to the specific. Before jumping into the details, it can be helpful to consider two general issues.

Semantic Confusion

The first involves semantics. There are a variety of words that are used to describe applied learning experiences. These include field experience, practica, internships, externships, service learning sites, and straight volunteerism. These words are often used with little precision, which obviously complicates communication. Each institution and academic department needs to work to clarify what it means by the word "internship"?

(For credit? Departmentally developed? Departmentally sanctioned?
Departmentally evaluated?)

Faculty Vs. Student-Centered Thinking

The second issue involves the perspective we adopt in attempting to improve service learning opportunities in higher education. We can discuss applied learning in either a somewhat "faculty-centered" or a more "student-centered" way.

By "faculty-centered", I am referring to a stance that is often tied to the scholarly disciplines we love, and that emphasizes our strong commitment to certain abstract academic standards. These values are central to the college, and contribute great things to our excellence. However, they are sometimes at odds with student values, and can prompt us to view student preferences disparagingly.

For example, when students focus on the real world relevance of their college experience, some "faculty centered" professors respond with disdain, or wistful criticism of preprofessionalism. This student preoccupation with getting jobs would probably seem less atrocious and foreign to professors if their own future income was totally uncertain.

"Faculty centered" thinking also tends to foster mistrust of students' willingness to work hard. Many assume that students require vigilant monitoring, lest they squander their educational opportunities. While there is no question that some students need

the stick, many more seem to respond better to the carrot. When given the freedom to function more autonomously, many of our assertive, ambitious, and charming students accomplish more than we ever dreamed they could.

There are advantages to adopting a balanced perspective in thinking about the issues related to internships. If our main purpose is to transform students, and to facilitate their achievement and growth, this ambition should define the lens through which we view the various questions about how to design, conduct, and evaluate internship experiences.

As we deliberate, we probably should keep asking ourselves: how will this choice affect the number of students equipped for post graduation success? For example, if we decide applied experience is generally beneficial, we need to find efficient ways of making it available to more students. I would argue that the best test of any internship policy is how it directly or indirectly affects student outcomes.

Accommodating Student Needs

If we are working in higher education in order to meet the needs of students, listening to their ideas about what will help them to achieve their long term educational objectives becomes a priority. If we structure our internship program flexibly, we can be open to individualized ways of meeting the idiosyncratic needs of particular students. Sanctioning student-initiated internships

permits students to get what they want, while expanding future options for other students. They locate appropriate sites, corral supervisors, and break through the red tape, while the college gains a new resource to offer prospective students.

This way of accommodating student needs and interests may presage the way colleges will increasingly function in the information age. Faculty will be mentors and facilitators of more individualized learning. Computers can convey the common canon, but human contact is needed to help the information come alive, and to help students become comfortable and confident in sorting, synthesizing, and applying knowledge.

Balancing Perfectionism and Creativity

As academics, we need to balance our usual cautious, perfectionistic style with an innovative, flexible approach. We want to be conscientious, methodical, consistent and protective without punishing creativity and initiative and thereby stymieing program development.

Most schools already have various standards governing the conduct of internships on their books. Often many of these guidelines are currently being applied haphazardly. We need to decide as a community if we endorse the current standards. We should base our conclusions in part on the experiences we have already had in trying to develop successful internship experiences for our students.

Once we affirm or revise the standards to be applied, they should be communicated more broadly, so all of those involved with service learning and internship experiences can conform to the basic framework, while tailoring the internship concept to best fit the specific needs of their students.

If we conclude that we're still in a period of expansion and innovation, that we need to offer a larger array of applied learning experiences to our students, then it may be premature for institutions to box themselves in with highly restrictive standards. Instead, a flexible framework that can accommodate departmental experimentation may be best in many settings.

We need to look at a wide variety of opportunities for our students to experience the real world relevance of what we've been teaching them to do in our courses: to think critically, sensitively, and systematically about all that they do. The life of the mind we try to nourish facilitates better problem solving and communication skills. Students in all majors are eager to put their abilities to practice in a way that extends beyond the campus. When applied learning is viewed in this broad way, the potential for internship settings becomes quite vast.

We need to unleash our own and our students' creative energies, experiment, share our experiences, and revise our programs accordingly. Our goal is to promote student involvement and growth. We need to trust our students and trust each other. High expectations will help us get our students to do increasingly ambitious, fantastic things with the tools we have given them!

Examples of Undergraduate Service Learning:
The Ursinus College Psychology Department

In addition to intense participation in research activities, the Ursinus College Psychology Department has long encouraged student involvement in service learning. The department works to create a warm, cooperative climate within the department, that is hopefully conducive to student exploration and ambition. Its members strive to communicate expectations clearly ("your education just starts in the classroom; research, internships/service/program development, and career planning are integral parts of what you'll be doing as a psychology major"), and regularly solicit information about student progress. The department's students are highly involved, and tend to find their niche and make their mark within the department, often through involvement in service activities.

Ursinus psychology majors have demonstrated their ability to make a difference in the community in myriad ways. Their commitment, diligence, and creativity have enabled them to accomplish far more than many of them had imagined they could when they originally matriculated. By building on our record of success in facilitating student achievement in the community, we hope to expand the number of sites and students involved in such initiatives.

Service learning has long been an integral part of most students' experience in the Psychology major. Experience in community settings is a prerequisite to most careers in applied

psychology; providing a wide variety of field experiences has contributed to the department's success in placing a high number of students in graduate programs and jobs.

In order to make efficient use of faculty resources, the psychology department has encouraged the development of student-led projects which permit the integration of student service and scholarship. Early course work exposure to information about community needs and helping strategies (Psych 100, 260, 360) equips students with the skills needed to volunteer as project assistants during their freshman and sophomore years. During these early years, they are encouraged to sample widely from various field opportunities. By their junior year, there is the expectation that most will have selected one particular project to make a priority. During their senior year, teams of two or three students assume responsibility for developing, organizing, and conducting project activities, with the ongoing assistance of a faculty advisor. Student leader teams help with recruiting, training, and supervising incoming volunteer assistants.

This process allows the development of long-term, ongoing projects, that benefit from a steady infusion of new student energy and ideas. It also permits graduating seniors to enjoy the lasting contribution they have made to a continuing community service. The department has had 185 students enrolled in the psychology internship course since 1984, and has involved 130 students in various departmental community programs.

The Department of Psychology currently offers myriad

internship and volunteer and paid service options. The faculty strongly urge involvement through their advising of majors; the majority of the department's students now participate in one or more activities. A department survey showed that 80% of psychology majors served as volunteers (e.g., at Norristown State Hospital (NSH), Parents, Inc., Graterford Prison, Perkiomen High School, Perkiomen Middle School, Montgomery County Geriatric Center, Methacton High School, Brooke Elementary, Renfrew Center, Laurel House, Medical College of PA, etc.); others obtain paid service positions (e.g., through the Ursinus Autism Clearinghouse, 15 students have served as behavioral therapists for area autistic children).

The department's individually tailored internships are flexible and varied. One student expanded her understanding by working alongside a neuropsychologist, another worked with a family therapist, still another did an internship with the Philadelphia Eagles. The department encourages students to be creative and to take initiative in gaining experience in the field. The faculty see it as their job to facilitate and nurture these connections with the community.

Current Psychology Community Service Projects
and Ursinus College Students to Contact for Information

1996-97

Norristown State Hospital Group Involvement Training

Greg Urban & Mary Zanotti

GRURBAN@acad.ursinus.edu

Graterford Prison Literacy Training & HIV Project

Orie Kristel, Mike Antonio, Patrice Shovlin

ORKRISTEL@acad.ursinus.edu

Autism Treatment Clearinghouse & Gluten-Free Diet Research

Melissa Gemmel

MEGEMMEL@acad.ursinus.edu

Perkiomen High School Peer Helper Training Project

Orie Kristel & Jennifer Young

ORKRISTEL@acad.ursinus.edu

Parents, Inc. & Read-to-me Program Evaluation Project

Lori Lennon & Joanna Miller

LOLENNON@acad.ursinus.edu

Montgomery County Rehabilitation & Geriatric Center

Angie Lauberstein

ANLAUBERSTEIN@acad.ursinus.edu

Allegheny (formerly the Medical College of Pennsylvania) Hospital

Mike Antonio

MIANTONIO@acad.ursinus.edu

Enhancing quality & access without creating a bureaucracy

1. Let' take care to refrain from needless rigidity.
2. Let's take care not to create more work for ourselves.
3. Let's not block one another's efforts.
4. Let's support experimentation.
5. Streamline the burden on faculty members.

We should make it incumbent on students to be responsible for as much as is possible. Our job is to communicate opportunities (as efficiently as we can), to inspire innovative activities, and to enforce basic standards.

Standardization will reduce flexibility: Proceed with Caution. We want a system that inspires both students and faculty to expand internship opportunities thoughtfully but expediently. Bureaucracy will make it drudgery; we need to keep it fun for faculty. Forms put a damper on student enthusiasm: keep them to a minimum.

There is a danger in educational institutions' being too formalized. In the event that something goes wrong, the more the school implicitly "owns" the student's activities, the greater the perception of institutional liability. It is sometimes better if the field site assumes some responsibility. It seems fair: they are getting the benefit of an eager, enthusiastic student worker! Too many forms may suggest that the university assumes legal responsibility for the actions of students on site, which can invite costly litigation. Since our capacity as educators to

supervise all the applied experiences of our students is limited, we don't want this liability.

How do we define scholarly products?

In thinking about options for evaluating students' learning experiences in the field, it is desirable to try to accommodate real-world relevance wherever possible. A student's substituting a well researched training manual or grant proposal replete with scholarly citations, for a stock term paper should probably be encouraged. Students that participate in agencies' program development projects and outcomes assessment programs are getting valuable experience in applying the writing, quantitative, and problem-solving skills we have equipped them to use.

Other issues that institutions must consider include the advantages of departmentally-based versus centralized internship options, and the merits of offering for credit vs. noncredit service learning experiences. While visibility on the transcript is desirable for all forms of service learning, it may be unwise to structure all service learning in terms of course requirements. A last issue involves the wisdom of making service learning a mandatory aspect of post-secondary education. Will mandatory experiences of this type be seen as a burdensome requirement, a demand as opposed to a gift? Will this dilute or compromise the benefits of service learning opportunities on campuses?

Postscript

Campuses have been developing internship options for some time. We need to share our various experiences more widely, so we

can learn from one another's successes and failures...and hopefully avoid needing to make the same mistakes on every campus.

URSINUS FACULTY CONFERENCE

August 26, 1996

THE LIBERAL ARTS AND APPLIED LEARNING: THE INTERNSHIP EXPERIENCE

Moderated by: Cathy Chambliss, Jay Miller, Carla Rinde

1. The Value of Internships

a. In the curriculum

- provides an active learning experience
- respects diverse talents and alternative ways of learning
- communicates the high expectations found in the workplace
- encourages contact between student and faculty

b. To the College

- admissions - an internship program is a selling point
- retention - something positive to look forward to
- "job readiness" of graduates - provides real world skills and a "foot in the door"

c. To the student

- career development - gain hands on experience/"reality-testing"
- intellectual development - enhance skills and test theory
- personal growth - increase networking opportunities and employability

2. Student Prerequisites for Internships

a. Should there be a minimum grade point for participation?

b. Can students intern early in their academic career or should they wait for junior/senior standing?

c. How or should academic disciplines and specific courses relate to the internship?

- should specific courses be completed prior to the internship?
- what is adequate preparation within the discipline (presently need nine credit hours in area of internship).
- can students from outside department qualify to do internship in your department?

3. Criteria for Qualifying Internship Sponsors

a. Does the work relate to students interests and broader vocational goals?

b. Does the experience qualify as a "new learning experience" (or is it last summer's job?)

c. Is the intern receiving compensation, travel allowance, stipend, etc.?

d. Should on-campus internships be permitted? (Berman Art Museum, Wood Food Service, College Communications Office, Physical Plant)

4. Criteria for Arranging Credit

a. What are maximum credits offered for internships within department? (Can student get credit for 2 internships?)

b. How will credit earned in the internship apply toward major/minor requirements?

c. What about zero credit internships?

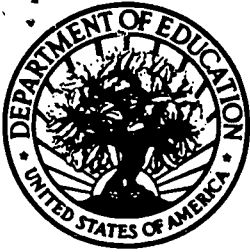
5. **Marketing the Internship Program**
 - a. How do academic departments secure internship sponsors and develop an internship network?
 - b. What is the role of Career Services? (A clearinghouse of internship listings and information?)
 - c. How do we market internships to students? (Flyers, e-mail)

6. **Monitoring and Supervising the Internship**
 - a. How do we monitor student progress?
 - telephone conferences
 - progress reports
 - b. Should an annual site visit by the Faculty Internship Advisor be required?
 - c. Should a mid-semester evaluation be required?
 - d. Should contact with on-site supervisor be standardized for all departments?

7. **Evaluating the Internship**
 - a. What Type of Grade: A-F or Pass-Fail or student's option?
 - b. Should there be a standardized form for the on-site supervisor evaluation and student self-evaluation?
 - c. How is internship evaluated? Number of hours, special project, journal, final paper or report, conference attendance, job performance (initiative, dependabilities, attitude, judgement, etc.)

8. **Role & Responsibilities of Faculty Internship Advisor**
 - a. Is the Faculty Internship Advisor responsible for
 - developing network of internship sponsors?
 - marketing of program?
 - supervising and advising interns?
 - visiting and maintaining contact with on-site supervisor?
 - evaluating intern?
 - b. Should advising interns be expected of all faculty members?
 - c. How should advising interns be recognized by academic departments and the institution? (teaching load reductions, salary, promotion, tenure, professional development, etc.)

9. **Standardization of Requirements and Process**
 - a. Should we have a standard campus learning contract or registration form?
 - b. Should there be centralized office for coordination of internship sites, learning contracts, etc.? (e.g. Career Services)
 - c. Should there be regular assessment of each internship site via an intern survey and occasional site supervisor survey?
 - d. Should there be a standardized time commitment (# of hours at internship site) required for credit?
 - e. How do we keep tabs on who did what where and make best use of information for:
 1. advising
 2. developing new internship sponsors
 3. retention
 - f. Registering for summer and January term internships. Do we require summer school tuition?



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