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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses how the Career Services Office at Allegheny College has shifted its emphasis over the last five years to programming related to internships. Although the office has not stopped providing the career counseling, resume critiques and on-campus interview schedules that are traditionally provided by career services offices, all new programming since 1997 has been related to internships. In the process the department has created and tested several new programs tailored for Allegheny students. One initiative was the formation of the Allegheny College Center for Experiential Learning (ACCEL), a center that combines the Office of Career Services, the Office of Community Service, the International Office and student leadership programming into an umbrella unit housed in one suite and with an overall emphasis on experiential learning. The effect on campus of the creation of ACCEL and the increased emphasis on internships has been substantial. Students have a greater awareness of the importance of taking part in internships and other experiential learning options, and many take advantage of multiple opportunities. (GCP)

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by

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Stepping Out: New Directions in Internship Programming

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Introduction

A liberal arts education is a broad and rich preparation for life. Add one or more internships to it, and the doors to the professional workplace begin to swing open. In recognition of this, the Career Services Office at Allegheny College has shifted its emphasis over the last five years to programming related to internships. Although the office has not stopped providing the career counseling, resume critiques and on-campus interview schedules that are traditionally provided by career services offices, all new programming since 1997 has been related to internships. In the process the department has created and tested several new programs tailored for Allegheny students, who are primarily traditionally aged, highly motivated liberal arts students.

The shift was triggered in 1996 by the arrival on campus of a new president, Richard Cook. President Cook had become a strong believer in internships through his previous tenure as Provost at Kalamazoo College, where a shift toward a greater emphasis on internships had proven to be beneficial to the college and its students in a variety of ways. In the summer of 1997 Cook organized a Summer Working Group, a group consisting of representatives from faculty, administration, students, staff, alumni and trustees who convened for an intensive month to research, brainstorm, discuss and envision directions the College could take in order to ensure its long-term viability. One of the assigned topics tackled by a subcommittee was experiential learning.

The Summer Work Group concluded that experiential learning can have a tremendous impact in broadening the horizons of our students, who have often lived relatively sheltered lives. Rather than replacing the emphasis on traditional liberal arts disciplines, which remain the primary focus of the College, an increase in opportunities for experiential learning can augment and reinforce the learning that takes place in the classroom. In the process, it can make our students more attractive to both employers and graduate school programs.

The working group made several recommendations for initiatives that could initiate this shift in emphasis. One was the formation of an Allegheny College Center for Experiential Learning (ACCEL), a center that combines the Office of Career Services, the Office of Community Service, the International Office and student leadership programming into an umbrella unit housed in one suite and with an overall emphasis on experiential learning. The second was the establishment of an Experiential Learning Term that takes place for three weeks directly after commencement, beginning in mid-May.

ACCEL came into being a year later, after a great deal of planning, discussion, reshuffling and remodeling. The Experiential Learning Term (E. L. Term) was initiated the following spring, with the first pilot program occurring in May of 1999. The components of the E. L.

Term are a three-week internship program in Boston, New York City and Washington D.C.; Study Tours in which faculty take groups of students on trips to study conditions in South Africa, Mexico, China, the Ukraine and other sites; community service projects such as the Borderlinks Program on the US/Mexican border; and the awarding of grants for students to attend leadership conferences.

The E. L. Term Internship Program

To facilitate the E. L. Term Internships, the Career Services staff solicits the support of alumni working in the target cities of Boston, New York, and Washington, D.C. The staff asks alumni if they can arrange with their employers a three-week internship for students at the end of the school year. The internships are designed to give students a feel for a career field and the experience of working in a major city. They are ideal for students who are unable to find paid internships and/or need to work during summer break.

Although many of these short-term internships are unpaid, the college contracts with colleges or other sites in the target city to arrange housing for students. Students are responsible for their own transportation and meals. The experience fosters camaraderie among the students as they explore the culture and cuisine of the city.

To ensure that students derive the most benefits from the internships, the staff visits and evaluates each of the work sites prior to the establishment of the internship. The staff also hosts a dinner for the interns and their sponsors in each city, at which the sponsors are encouraged to share ideas about where to go, what to do and how to get around in the city.

The staff piloted the internship program in 1999 and offered eight internships in New York and Washington, D.C. Because the experience proved to be a positive one for participating students and alumni, the staff has arranged from 30 to 40 internships in each of the ensuing years. Since there is generally a small number of sites that go unfilled and some attrition due to alumni job changes or students who back out, the number of participating interns ranges from 20 to 30. When they are first approached, alumni are sometimes doubtful that a three-week internship will be of significant benefit to students or employers. After trying the program, however, alumni are generally pleasantly surprised by students' accomplishments, and most continue to sponsor students from year to year.

Examples of E. L. Term internship sites include the Boston Alzheimer's Center, the New York Times, the Center for International Policy, the U.S. President's Office of Management and Budget, and the National Coalition for the Homeless.

ACCEL Database

In the early stages of the creation of ACCEL, the staff realized the need for a site where students could have access to as many experiential learning opportunities as possible through "one stop shopping." They contracted with a professional with experience in creating internship databases. The database she created permits students to search approximately 2,000 opportunities by type of experience, interest field, geographical location and other criteria. The program also sends registered users an e-mail notification whenever a new opportunity that meets their criteria is added to the system. Currently 1186 of the 1822 students enrolled at Allegheny College, or

65%, are registered users of the database, and it is the core communication tool for internship programming.

Allegheny-Specific Internship Program

Allegheny alumni tend to be pleased with their education and to have fond memories of the college. Consequently, they are usually happy to be asked to help students with their careers. Over the years the Career Services Office has engaged them as career resources for students in a variety of ways ranging from providing sites for shadowing to attending career connections dinners and serving as speakers on career panels. As the staff developed the new internship programming it was natural to look to alumni as partners in this effort.

After the success in the E. L. Term Internship Program, which engaged alumni as hosts for short-term internships, the staff conceived the idea of developing summer-long internships with alumni or others with ties to the college. The plan was to create internships that were specific to Allegheny students, thereby eliminating the need to compete with students from schools throughout the country. In cases where the employer had an existing internship program, the staff tried to persuade them to hold one spot for an Allegheny student.

In most cases the staff asks the employer to create paid experiences. They approach employers through personal visits to the worksites emphasizing the accomplishments of previous interns and the value students could bring to the organizations. The visits are followed up by regular phone or e-mail contact. Over the last four years a sustained marketing effort has generated 93 summer-long Allegheny-specific internships in states ranging from Florida to California. Examples include internships with the United Nations, the National Hockey League, the Pennsylvania Fish Commission, a Navaho Tribal College, Grey Advertising, and the Segan Company, a Hollywood film producer.

These internships are not always filled, depending on whether or not they match up with students' career and geographic interests. As the program developed, it became clear that students were often unable to take advantage of a desirable opportunity because they had no place to stay and could not afford the housing costs in a city. This hurdle led to the creation of the Allegheny in D.C. Program.

Allegheny in D.C.

Political Science and International Studies are popular majors at Allegheny, and about 20 students per year take part in semester-long off-campus study programs in Washington, D.C. Students who are interested in careers in government, international affairs or national organizations have learned that the best way to get a start in these areas is to spend a summer in the Capital, gaining relevant experiences and making the connections that lead to future opportunities. There are many tremendous internship opportunities in D.C. but they are often unpaid and do not provide housing, thereby placing them out of reach for the majority of Allegheny students.

The department felt that if housing were provided, students could find the remaining means to make a D.C. internship possible. They also felt that a structured program housing a number of Allegheny students together would make the experience less intimidating and therefore

appealing to a larger number of students.

Therefore, the staff created a program called Allegheny in D.C. through which they provide housing for students who have secured an internship in the D.C. area. Funding is distributed on a sliding scale basis. For instance, the cost is fully funded for students whose internships are unpaid, while students who make \$4,000 or more for the summer pay 60% of the cost. For the first year, the eight participating students were housed in a residence hall at a regional university. In the second year of the program, the staff has rented a house on Capital Hill through an agency that specializes in intern housing. Seven men and seven women have signed on to live in the house. One student was hired as a Resident liaison who will stay in communication with the department and arrange an event to connect students with D.C. alumni.

This year the staff also inaugurated Allegheny in Boston, which follows the same guidelines and houses students at an area university. Two students have signed on for this pilot program.

Funding

These programs clearly cost money and raise the question of where the funding comes from. The College administration funds much of the ACCEL program as a new initiative that benefits the College in a variety of ways. When the ACCEL concept became a reality and began to yield student outcomes, the Development Office also began promoting it to potential donors. The College has now received gifts that provide the money for the Allegheny in D. C. and Boston programs.

The administration also funded the creation of an E. L. Fund, to which students and faculty members can apply for grants for student experiential learning opportunities. This fund has been augmented by two additional funds provided by alumni or other friends of the College and distributed to student applicants. For instance, students have received funding to take part in internships at the New England Aquarium, the U. S State Department and the John Hopkins Department of Psychiatry and Neuro-imaging. Students have taken part in an archeological dig in Ireland, a three-week conducting seminar in Austria and an internship with Senator Hillary Clinton. To receive funding, a student must demonstrate that the experience will further his or her educational objectives.

Unsuccessful or Unproven Initiatives

In the process of creating a new program tailored to our students, the staff tried a couple of initiatives that either did not succeed or are as yet unproven. One such initiative—and one that is offered by some other schools—was an on-campus internship fair with alumni representing their employers. The staff had trouble attracting enough employers to participate. And, unfortunately for those who did take part, there was little interest among candidates in the internships they offered. Many students wanted internships in particular fields and locations, and the options did not match their interests.

Another initiative that has not yet caught on fully is a venture into International Internships. Interest in the international arena has grown on campus, and each year the staff is visited by a few students who are interested in international internships, but they tend to start the process too late or to be daunted by the amount of time and research needed to find and apply to an

appropriate opportunity.

Therefore, the staff undertook a project in which they surveyed students to determine their interest in international internships and their preferred locations. When students seemed enthusiastic about the idea, they proceeded to research sites and programs offering international internships and to identify a few that seemed to best match the needs of our students. They visited these sites to learn more about them and to ascertain the fit and then promoted them to students through a Power Point presentation.

The student response was *underwhelming*, and so far no students have applied to the programs. The timing may have been a problem. The promotion began in the Fall of 2001, shortly after the events of September 11, and the new climate following that event may have made the idea of an international internship less appealing. The staff continues to feel that the program could take off in a future, more confident season.

Outcomes and Summary

The effect on campus of the creation of ACCEL and the increased emphasis on internships has been substantial. Students have a greater awareness of the importance of taking part in internships and other experiential learning options, and many take advantage of multiple opportunities, fitting a study tour, an internship and a leadership conference into a summer, or taking part in three or more internships while at the College. The number of students coming to the Career Services Office for help with internships has grown considerably. In the 1998-1999 school year, for instance, 112 students came for such help; by 2002-2001 the number nearly doubled to 222. The number of students applying for grants from the ACCEL fund has also increased dramatically.

As a follow-up to the E. L. Term Internships, the staff asks students to complete a self-assessment in which they report the ways in which they have grown and learned from the experience. The students from 2001, from whom there is the most data, responded positively on a wide range of measures. The growth areas to which they responded most strongly and uniformly were gaining a better sense of their strengths and weaknesses, improving verbal communication skills, further developing a capacity for independent learning, and learning to understand and respect professional and business standards. They also strongly agreed that they would apply what they had learned to other settings.

Reports from the Admissions Office indicate that the ACCEL programs are also having a positive impact in college recruiting. The staff is confident that the new programs are successful in terms of marketing, fundraising and most importantly, educational excellence. Liberal arts and internships are proving to be a winning combination.



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