

INTERNSHIPS:

A FORUM DISCUSSION

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David: Let's begin with how internships are defined. I know there is some debate about the word *internship*. The college of education, for example, has *student teaching* instead of internships. I've heard that perhaps *experiential learning* is a better term overall. What is the right word to use?

Guy: The word *internship* is a big word across the country, and it means lots of things. On this campus we keep it to a fairly narrow definition. First of all, we offer only *academic* internships. Most campuses offer both academic and nonacademic. An academic internship has more structure—it has a syllabus, you register for the class, you pay for the credit, it goes on a transcript, it is part of a program whether as an elective or a requirement. The syllabus requires additional kinds of assignments besides the day-to-day, 8-to-5 experience—academic homework if you will.

For many years internships were called *co-ops*, and in many cases the word is still used, but the country is starting to lean more toward the word *internship*. It has a little more of an academic feel to some organizations. There are a couple of programs on our campus that don't use the term, but I still account for them in the internship world. For example, Education has *student teaching*. I account for them; I pay for their liability insurance as I do on every student that does an internship, but we call it *student teaching*. Nursing is another one—they do *clinical*s. Paramedicine is the same way. The rest of the campus, for the most part, would fall under the definition I initially mentioned.

Steve: Let me add a term we haven't used so far—*practicum*. By the university definition, a *practicum* is different from an internship. Our accrediting association calls them *practicums*, and we will probably continue to call them *practicums* even though they are really internships.

Guy: It is more or less meant to try to simplify the definitions we use. The experience does have a different definition for different organizations. I'm comfortable as the university's internship

director to comply with what an organization wants to call it because we have an understanding that when it comes to how we account for it on campus, we use the word *internship*.

David: Are all of these work experiences off campus, or are there internships on campus?

Guy: The guidelines for on-campus internships are quite strict—students must be full-time, they can't be off track, they must be working in that internship in a paid situation on this campus 20 hours a week. And there are a dozen other guidelines that the President's Council has approved because as a general rule, although we have some wonderful opportunities on campus, unless an experience is every bit as good as one the student could find off campus, we really don't want to be in the business of doing campus internships. We do have a handful that fit that definition, but the guidelines are pretty strict.

Bill: We have just developed student managers in the Animal Science Department—beef cattle, embryo transfer herd, feeding cattle program—and those student managers will be with us for a year. We feel this experience is as valuable as going to a ranch in Florida or a ranch in Nebraska because they are managing a herd, they are accounting for everything, they are running student workers or labor.

LOGISTICS

David: How do hours worked equate into academic credit hours?

Guy: The minimum on this campus is 50 hours worked per credit earned. No department can drop below that, and the range on campus is 1-6 credits. No one can offer a 7-credit internship.

David: So an internship could be as little as 1 credit with 50 hours total or as many as 6 credits with 90 hours per credit, which would equal 540 total hours?

Guy: Most internships are typically full semester experiences. Even though they may only be earning three credits, they are going to spend four months doing it. Someone might ask, after fulfilling the minimum work hours, "Well, can I come home now?" We are saying, "You are out there to gain experience to put you in the marketplace. Don't worry about

the hours as long as you get what you need, and beyond that just make sure it is a good experience.”

Kenton: Probably 99 percent of my students work twice the requirement.

David: Tell me more about the logistics of each program.

Kenton: Well, we’ve had an internship program in Business for many years, but we increased it last summer when we sent out about 170 interns. We tried to send them outside of Idaho, but about 40 percent remained in the state. So 60 percent were outside Idaho working in businesses, finance, marketing, human resource management, and all different areas of business. As department internship director, I receive their reports. A certain number are due at midterm and the rest at the end of the semester. I try to contact the supervisor every semester. You can imagine that is quite a load. Then we have a final evaluation from their supervisors on letterhead, and we add our own letter of recommendation, which is a reward for their future job applications. Our program also requires job-seeking skills. They must visit a job fair, do an electronic job search, practice interviewing, keep a networking record. About 65 percent of our internships are found through networking, 15 percent are found through our office or Brother Hollingsworth’s department, and 15 percent are found through job fairs. These last two categories are increasing as we improve in our job fairs and as Brother Hollingsworth acquires a greater database.

David: So many students have found internship opportunities and brought them back to the department?

Kenton: Yes. It’s a great experience for the students to realize what it takes to go out and get a job. We don’t want to spoon-feed them. I don’t think we could anyway; we have too many. But many universities do it that way. A big part of their BYU-Idaho internship is searching for and finding a job. That can be a little difficult in Rexburg, Idaho, away from the big business centers. One of our biggest challenges is getting students to move from Idaho to go with the bigger companies. A lot of times we have opportunities, and they just don’t want to leave and go back East. But we have had great success all over the United States. We actually went international this year with a couple of internships.

Bill: The internship program with the Animal Science department has also been in existence for years. We have quite an internship pool that has been established, and we try to put students in all sorts of animal industries—everything from ranching, to feed lot management, feed sales, to chemical sales, pharmaceuticals. We have a list—Guy has quite a list—but the student must have the idea, make the first contact, and then approach the department for approval. They do all the leg-work, establishing everything. Once they are established in their internship, they submit weekly reports. At the end of the internship, their experience provider or supervisor does a follow-up review with them and reports back as to skills the students have developed or used.

Carma: In the Culinary Arts Department, we've had an internship since the program was started. Ours is a three-credit required internship. The students go to a variety of places. We have some in Florida. We have some working in with the Urban Studies program in Chicago. So it's quite a variety of opportunities. In our "practicum" course, where all the majors meet together, we have students prepare a resume and a portfolio—with photographs and captions—of things they can do in the culinary field. We try to make it a professional working portfolio. And we've really worked hard on the supervisor evaluation, so it says exactly what they did—whether they were on time or other specific requirements.

When they come back, we have each student show slides and tell about their internship experience to the whole group. That helps prepare the next group. The younger students learn what an internship is all about; they learn what they have to do, and they see their peers go through the process. The returning students tell whether they enjoyed their experience, whether they would like to do something similar in the future, whether they worked harder than they expected, and what the job involved.

Kent: Our program is a little different. We really don't have a major in political science, but we strongly recommend this for those who are planning careers in government service or are interested in the political aspects of academics. For the most part, we don't have paid internships except for the U.S. Senate. Our slots usually come because of relationships with the faculty or personal relationships on the part of the interns.

Once in a while we get an attorney. We were fortunate a couple of years ago to give a little scholarship to a guy who was studying here and was a little down and out. I got a call last year from him and he said, “I’m the new public defender of Bonneville County and I’m sending up a check for the amount you gave me on scholarship. And by the way, I’d be really happy to take an intern each semester.” Personal relationships make a lot of difference.

We have one internship now that is ready to start with the city of Idaho Falls; hopefully one will start with Rexburg. And just because you have a student in one internship opportunity during one semester does not mean you will have a student there the next semester. Organizations change and people change in organizations. One year they are willing—one guy says, “I love your interns, I’ll be glad to take them”—and the next time somebody else doesn’t want to be bothered.

I find more beneficial than anything else the weekly reports I get from these interns. They have problems and are not quite sure how to handle them. And this is not a minor responsibility for a faculty member. Some people think you send the students off and that is it. But you never know what kind of problems you are going to run into—transportation problems, roommate problems. I had one girl in a congressman’s office and all they wanted her to do was input data. That’s not why we sent her back there. We want our interns to have a varied experience, so they can understand how the offices work and play a role in what’s going on.

Typically we have four or five interns working in a given semester. It used to be that we would just have them in the summer. That was it. But that’s not the case now. And that really provides a greater opportunity for us.

ADMINISTRATIVE CHALLENGES

- David: I imagine the track system also creates greater responsibilities for whoever is directing the internship program. It becomes a year-round program rather than just summers. Do most of the departments have someone designated as the internship director? And does the job carry some load release?
- Guy: Every department on the campus has an internship coordinator, a faculty member who has been assigned that responsibility,

and the campus policy is one-tenth of a credit load per intern. Some departments would say that doesn't suffice. Some would say that is hardly worth it, but there are a bunch of schools who don't do anything for their faculty. We really are the exception.

Kenton: That means I would have earned 17 credit hours last summer.

Guy: You take someone like Steve in social work—that's going to take a lot more maintenance and oversight than some majors. I won't pick programs to compare, but there are variations.

David: It seems the programs represented in this room are those developed before the transition. We have the veterans here.

Kenton: I think that is a real interesting comment. We are the veterans because we've done this for several years. But I think some of these new teachers struggle with it. They weren't hired to be an internship director; they were hired to teach, and they put the internship assignment down low on their totem pole. Whereas we veterans recognize the great benefit of internships, and we are strong advocates. I don't think you find that throughout the whole faculty.

Guy: The challenge, in respect to these veterans and many others, is getting everyone on the same path and setting parameters. People have really had to adjust. I've tried to allow enough flexibility not to interrupt what they have been doing, but at the same time not have people going in different directions. That is not always a smooth process. For some folks the adjustment is a little tough, but for the most part, the campus has responded very nicely to the ways in which the internship office has tried to consolidate and still leave them room to run their own programs.

David: What are some of the other major challenges in running an internship program?

Bill: As we've sent people all over the country and the world, one of the big challenges is housing. We sent one young man to a farm in Nebraska. He walked into the ranch where they were going to house him and there were four young women from Utah State already living in the house. He called his father and said, "Dad, I'm in a situation. What do I do?" Dad called us; we made a phone call, and he was out of that situation. How do we oversee the housing and ensure university standards are kept?

Guy: Well, it's hard and there is a fine line. We sent out 1300 interns to 40 states this last academic year. So our office is not "just around the corner" for most of these interns. We are really not, nor does President Bednar want us to be, a housing facilitator. What we try to do is work with members of the Church and contacts and at least get some positive leads so that students can look for housing in areas that are safe. Safety is a big issue, from Elder Eyring all the way down the BYU-Idaho administration. When we send out individuals, the Church wants to know where our interns are, so at any given time we can pull them out of there in 24 hours. That's the guideline that I've been given. So safety is an issue, and housing is an issue. And it's expensive in some places. We have people in New York City. They are paying two or three times more than they will ever make on the internship. Economical and safe housing is a challenge.

Another big challenge for everybody in this room and other internship coordinators across campus is that when they assist students or a student approaches them about an internship, that opportunity must have credibility. Sometimes we have students approach us with something that may meet the requirement but is really not something they want to do—it's just an easier road out. Sometimes your students say, "Let me get my internship out of the way, then I'll go and do what I really want to do." So we have to make internships as credible as possible. Does every student find exactly what he wants? Or are students disappointed from time to time as they searches for an internship? Yes, that does happen. But we need to make sure that what gets plugged in for credit really is credible.

We have a process to help with this evaluation, an exceptions committee that consists of a couple of students, a coordinator on campus, a dean, and an administrator (myself). The committee looks at situations that need review. Sometimes we go back to the student and say, "This doesn't work very well." This process has proven to be helpful—sometimes hard, but always helpful.

Bill: I had a student approach me this week. She said, "Brother Torngren, I just got accepted with this internship in the East." And it was something she really looked forward to, but it was selling hot dogs—as an animal science internship. And I said, "Well, I don't think this is going to work." This

particular entity also had a large exotic animal element; so I said, “If you can make the contacts and work with their exotic animals in some way, then I can approve it. But to just go back and stock shelves, we can’t count it.” There is an important process—checks and balances and stops—to make sure they are approved.

Guy: I’m not the subject matter expert, and these folks are. I have to rely on them. Granted, I can look at something that doesn’t smell right and usually know it. But I have to rely on folks who have the training. I have to say, “Steve, I don’t know anything about what a social worker needs to do or how many hours.” I need these people to give me correct information and vice versa.

Carma: One thing that I do to address this problem is say to the student, “Don’t short change yourself. You are going to spend time with this, and you want a good experience.” And that really helps them. They start looking at it differently.

EMPOWERING STUDENTS

Dave: How do you avoid sending a student somewhere where either they are being exploited for the expertise they bring, or there is no true mentor who will be able to teach them anything?

Steve: I contact the supervisors directly and tell them what we expect. If they are not willing to deliver, then we won’t even deal with it. I also encourage students that if they get into any kind of bad situation or type of harassment (because we have mostly women in the program) they can leave right then without any questions asked and inform me of what’s going on. We’ve never really had a problem with that, however. I try to encourage them to go into the interview with the idea “I will be paid for this, and I’m not here to empty your garbage or answer your telephone. I’m here to learn.” And they are pretty forceful about how they present their expectations, and the supervisors usually respond well. They think, “These kids know what they want when they come in, so we’re here to give them what they want.”

T.L.: I agree. We don’t hold their hands. We say, “Part of this experience is that you find the internship, you get the job, use your networking, find out who you know who has a connection, that’s how things work in the world. But don’t

do it for free.” There is a misunderstanding that Interior Designers are independently wealthy and give consultation for free. We charge, so we expect our interns to be paid. We tell them, “Don’t take anything that’s not paid unless it’s an absolutely fantastic opportunity and the learning and the resume material are more valuable.”

Guy: Of the 1300 interns we sent out last year, about 70 percent were paid interns, and about 55 percent of those interns were offered some kind of a return spot, full-time employment, or some additional experience with that organization. That’s about 10 points higher than the national average. Our 70 percent paid is about 20 points higher than the national average. So we’ve done well on this campus in terms of finding paid slots.

Steve: Unfortunately, if an internship is with the State, which is always under a budget crunch, it is difficult to ask an office to take a paid intern when most state employees haven’t had a raise for three years. Some government agencies, however, do receive grants that allow them to pay interns with some type of a stipend. I think the thing we want to watch most is whether the students are being taught. Students might have a very good work experience, but are they spending time doing training and extra things that will give them the opportunity to really learn what the jobs are all about?

Kent: When I have a student in Washinton, D.C., write, “I attended this hearing for the Senator on this date and compiled a brief for him,” he is thrilled to death because he is right in the middle of it and learning like crazy. So I agree with Steve, the learning experience is what’s critical here.

Steve: Most professionals want to share, to talk about their work. If we have a student working in Juvenile Corrections, we want that student in the courtroom; we want him to learn courtroom manner, and most Judges will know he is there, and want to teach him. Professionals enjoy talking about and teaching what they do. And it goes both ways. We had a great experience with one student who was working in Connecticut last summer in a prosecutor’s office. She was in a meeting on sexual harassment and she took over the meeting because she had training from some of our classes. She said, “I was shocked at these people. They had no clue what they were talking about.” They all came up to her afterwards and

congratulated her on what she had done, to teach the people in this office, when she was the intern.

T.L.: This is one of the most important aspects of education. I am thankful for my own education, but in some ways it was inadequate. Once I graduated, I didn't know what was going to happen in the world. I was ill prepared for reality, and I think that is the objective of the internship. Our program's objective is for the students to be prepared for real life. We have a class on resume writing and the business aspects of interior design. Once they walk out of here and have that internship experience, they feel confident. They aren't saying, "I don't know what I am going to be when I grow up." They know at that point. I think that's the essence of education.

Kent: A young man I sent down to the public defender's office recently called me on the phone and said, "You know I just interviewed this murder defendant in this trial and in this week I taped two depositions. You can't believe the experience I'm getting down here. I'm not getting paid a cent." But he's going to law school. The quality of the experience, as far as I'm concerned, is worth everything we put into it.

FINAL ADVICE

David: One final question. For programs just starting internships, what advice would you give?

Steve: I think one of the suggestions I would have is networking. Rely on your own students. Rely on your former students. We use a lot of our former students.

T.L.: I like the reporting system too. If students come back and all the other students get fired up about it, then they are talking about it all the time, and they are ready to go start hunting a year in advance. Ours don't do it until after their junior year, and so that gets them fired up to start looking two years in advance.

Kent: Nothing is more powerful than the student. You can tell them all day long. But when a student comes back and says this was great, that has the most impact.

Kenton: I think you must have faculty and administrative leadership too. It can't be just one of the faculty members in the department. And then to train and meet with other people, like we are

doing here, adds to the motivation, and the insight, and the overall vision.

Guy: My advice would be to make internships a requirement and empower the students to find their own internships. They will do it. But if you say, “It is an elective,” you will not get a lot of activity because some will take an easier road. And if you say, “Rely on me; I will find you something,” that doesn’t work. Empower them and require it. ☺