

## **Internships and Other Practical Experiences**

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### **Description**

The Internship Working Group (IWG) relied on several sources of information to assess the status of internships and other practical experiences among UNH undergraduates:

- Chair survey and survey to faculty at UNH-M
- Interview with internship coordinator at UNH-M (Trece Mettauer)
- Interview with staff member in internship office in Career Services (Deidre Foyle-Lyder)
- Student focus group
- Report of the Task Force on Integrating Advising and Career Resources at UNH (July 2001)

Twenty-five chairs responded to the survey . In addition, because of its size, we decided to send the survey to all of the tenure-track faculty at UNH-M; nine responded. The numbers below refer to programs rather than individual respondents. Data are presented on twenty-seven programs.

Of these:

23 have a course for internship experience; only 4 do not have such a course; there is a separate internship course that is available for any UNH-M student (UMST 500), and students in any program can sign up for a credit-bearing internship under this course number, provided they have a faculty sponsor.

Only nine programs actually require the course as part of the major; it is optional for most of the others, and in at least one case, the internship course cannot be used for the major

All of the programs offer some sort of practical experience, but the range of these is great, and some of the experiences are not integrated at all with the rest of the program's curriculum. Chairs mentioned many variations of practical experience, including:

- internships
- research
- practica
- work experience
- service learning
- teaching and TA work
- summer employment
- exhibitions
- courses
- field experience
- workshops
- shows

independent study  
work in clinical settings  
tutoring in Learning Center (UNH-M)  
tutoring and lessons (music; foreign language) in local public schools

The School of Health and Human Services programs are at one end of the continuum: these programs have the most integrated practical experiences, and these are integrated fully with the rest of the curriculum. At the other end of the continuum are a number of programs that offer some sort of practical experience, but these are not integrated at all with the rest of the curriculum; they are very much an aside.

Few of the programs use the internship office of the University Advising and Career Center (Career Services); only 3 report using Career Services to identify internship opportunities. Another four programs use the internship office, but not consistently and systematically for internship identification. Sixteen programs do not rely on this office in any capacity. Students often do, independent of their program's connection with the office, as reported by Deirdre Foyle-Lyder (the one full-time staff person responsible for the Internship Office). In the case of one unit (WSBE), there is a separate internship coordinator who serves the programs and students of that college as an independent entity.

In sum, we identified a variety of mechanisms for practical experience, most commonly internships, but other vehicles exist. There is little systematic in common among these experiences. Some are offered via courses, some are not. Some carry academic credit; some do not. The range of academic credit is great – 0 to 16. In most cases, students can receive pay for an internship (although this is uncommon), but in other cases, pay is not an option when academic credit is connected with the internship. And a minority of the responding programs fully integrates the internship/practical experiences with the rest of the program's curriculum.

## **Appraisal**

Expectations: There appears to be a gap between student expectations and opportunities for practical experience, as represented by internships. We know from the CIRP fall 2001 survey that students expect practical experience/training in their college experience. For instance, 68% of the students reported that “to be able to get a better job” was a very important reason for coming to college. 68% reported coming to college “to get training for a specific career.” We infer from these reports that students expect practical experiences as part of their college careers. In some important areas, this expectation is fully realized. The programs in HHS, for instance, have well-developed practical and/or clinical experiences as a core aspect of their curricula. In other cases, practical experiences are very much of a hit-or-miss proposition.

Integration: Similarly, in some programs the practical experiences that are offered are fully integrated with the curriculum. But in other cases, if there are practical experiences and internships, these are distinct from the traditional course-linked curriculum. In some cases, internships are available to the students, but these do not count as part of the major, which raises

questions about how faculty view internships and the application of knowledge in practical settings. Faculty supervision is the norm for internships that are offered in academic programs, but the way in which such supervision counts towards a faculty member's load is neither systematic nor well thought out. In the majority of cases, the supervision simply does not count as part of the faculty work load.

Another important dimension of integration is the relationship between the academic programs and the Internship Office of the University Advising and Career Center. In the majority of cases, the relationship is weak at best. In some cases, there may be legitimate academic reasons for the gap between academic internship offerings and the Internship Office, and established internship programs that work well without connections to the Internship Office should not be disturbed. For instance, WSBE has a number of internship options for students, and the internship sites are identified through faculty connections with the business community. WSBE has its own internship coordinator to facilitate these arrangements. But in other cases, the gap is a function of a lack of communication and information. The Internship Office policy is to refer students to their advisor if they want to get academic credit for an internship experience. This is as it should be. However, programs that offer internships do not consistently rely on the resources of the Internship Office for help in identifying appropriate internship sites and experiences. The office maintains a database of internship opportunities (the WORK web-based program), but departments do not consistently rely on this for the development of internships for students. There is a gap between the Internship Office and academic programs that interferes with students' ability to realize their expectations for practical experiences.

The UNH-M campus provides an exception to this lack of integration between academics and internships. In Fall 2002 an Internship Coordinator position was established. The coordinator has a number of responsibilities: to oversee the internship experience in Communication Arts; to serve as a resource to other programs that have internship experiences as part of their curricula; to further develop internship programs to promote the urban mission of the campus; and to be the contact when someone from an agency or business is seeking a student for an internship. The coordinator is responsible for publicizing internship opportunities through the use of a database (under construction), and through an internship board. This position will also provide a centralized location for data to be collected on where and how many students are placed every year, providing the college with an ongoing resource to track student engagement with these opportunities.

It should be pointed out that the Internship Office in Durham plays an important role in offering students opportunities that are not tied to their academic programs of study. Students occasionally want to try something new, to explore a different option, or to test their skills in the world of work. In these cases, the students do not want to tie the internship to their studies, and the Internship Office works with these students to identify internship possibilities. There is no academic credit, and thus no need to work with academic departments.

Assessment: Programs need to know if their students expect practical experiences, and while some data on this is part of the CIRP survey administered every other fall, it is not clear that programs know about the data or access it in any systematic way. In addition, assessment would be enhanced if we collected information on how students evaluate their internship experiences.

It is probably the case that those programs in which there is little integration also lack an assessment of internships. The standard student evaluations of teaching do not include items that are specifically useful for assessing internships. While the Internship Office assesses internships from the perspective of the employer, there is no mechanism in place at that office to assess the experience from the student's point of view. There is only one full-time person in that office; so there is little opportunity now to add such assessment activities.

## **Projections**

Internship experiences are an important expectation among students, and they are essential for some programs. In order to enhance these opportunities, we recommend several steps over the next five years:

All programs need to carefully examine the possibility of and expectation for practical experiences for their students. Practical experiences are obvious for some programs, but not for others, and in these less obvious cases, faculty should consult with programs that do offer model internship opportunities both within UNH and in their discipline at other institutions. Faculty may end up deciding not to create additional such opportunities in their programs, but at least the possibility should be studied and discussed. A campus-wide workshop to share ideas and practices would be a good vehicle for both communication and faculty development.

Those programs that have well-developed internships need to make sure these are integrated with the rest of the curriculum. Again, models are available for how to do this, and these could also be presented at a campus-wide forum.

The Task Force on Integrating Advising and Career Services (July 2001) recommended that programs identify a liaison to work with the Internship Office to facilitate communication and knowledge about internships. To date, this has not been carried out in a systematic way. Consistent, sustained communication is a key for successful integration. In general, the integration of Advising and Career Services has been proceeding slowly. More support for this and greater progress with the integration is necessary.

The Internship Office and individual programs should develop specific mechanisms for evaluating the internship experiences students have. This is an area where the Internship Office and the program liaisons could work together for mutual benefit. It is also an area where programs could learn from each other rather than each creating a unique evaluation instrument.

There is a troubling faculty workload issue here. In the majority of cases, internship supervision is not counted as part of the faculty load; it is unrecognized and thus marginalized. There are some notable exceptions, and models need to be shared about how to do this. There is no reason an internship should not be counted if it is "generating credits." What are the formulas and strategies that are working in this regard? Programs should study this, in conjunction with their Deans and the Provost's office. If the reward structure does not recognize and reward work with internships, it is doubtful that we can make substantial progress.

Resources for internships are all over campus, and more centralization would facilitate student access to internships. We do not advocate less programmatic autonomy for handling internships, but we do advocate greater sharing of information about options and opportunities. We also advocate more centralization of data on internships; nationwide 77% of students graduate with at least two internships. What is the figure at UNH? We do not know since the data are not collected in any systematic way. This is an activity that the Internship Office could develop and thus make a significant contribution to the assessment of internships.

There is currently only one full-time staff person responsible for the Internship Office. If that office is to take on a more central organizing and communication role, additional resources will be necessary to add another staff person. The kind of communication and assessment activities we are recommending are labor intensive; but they are also essential for greater integration of internships with the curriculum and with other aspects of the undergraduate experience.

In the spirit of communication and collaboration we are advancing, it makes sense to study the possibility of coordinating the efforts underway at UNH and at the Manchester campus. At minimum, those who work with internships across the campuses should be a functioning network to share resources and ideas.