

AN INNOVATIVE INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH TO PROVIDING INTERNSHIPS FOR COLLEGE SENIORS

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ABSTRACT

The undergraduate Business and Human Development (HD) Departments at California State University San Marcos (CSUSM), are collaborating in an innovative interdisciplinary approach to supporting internships with local businesses in order to provide college seniors with experiences in the area of career development known as the “Senior Experience.” Three local companies associated with serving the community in the area of healthcare or counseling, will hire a team of 5 college seniors (3 Business majors and 2 HD majors) to create a project for the company. The selected project will be agreed upon and supervised by both the company and university representatives from both departments. This paper will reflect on the literature base pertaining to creating a successful collaborative interdisciplinary internship for college seniors exploring possible career options.

KEYWORDS

Collaborative Internships, Career Development

1. INTRODUCTION

As study after study emphasizes the importance of supporting learning outside the confines of a classroom, one viable method is establishing internships. Internships in local companies provide students opportunities with actual experience within an organization, making students more employable.

The undergraduate Business Administration and Human Development (HD) departments at California State University, San Marcos (CSUSM) are collaborating in an innovative interdisciplinary approach to creating internships known as the “Senior Experience.” Three local companies will each pay \$1500 to CSUSM to hire a team of 5 college seniors to create a project for the company. These projects will be agreed upon by the company and the university. These rigorous and real world projects provide the opportunity for college seniors to act as consultants by actually applying the culmination of classroom. In addition, the collaborating businesses will gain with focused college seniors who provide a fresh perspective on the selected project. The three different projects will be in the area of “health” or “counseling”. At the end of the semester, all teams participating in the Senior Experience will present their projects via a power point presentation. In addition, students will participate in a university hosted “Trade Show” to share their experiences and accomplishments with their assigned businesses. This reflection paper will focus on the development of this project.

2. BODY OF PAPER

Internships

There has been an increase in the number of students participating in internships from 3% of all college students in 1980 to 75% in 2012 (Hurst, et al. 2012). An internship is defined by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE, 2015) to include the following: 1.) To be an extension of the classroom learning; 2.) To provide skills or knowledge to be applied to other employment settings; 3.) A specific beginning and end, with a job description and desired qualifications; 4.) The student has identified specific learning goals and objectives; 5.) Supervision by an individual trained and experienced in the field of endeavor is provided to the intern; 6.) Routine feedback is provided by the supervisor directly to the intern; 7.) Resources, equipment and facilities provided by the employer support the learning goals and objectives of the intern. In addition, academic internships involve the student, employer and the university (Daugherty, 2000). The work completed with the company must be related to the student’s major and meet the provided

criteria for hours worked, duties performed and the relation of these activities to studies, in order to receive any academic credit. These valuable internships provide opportunities for experiences in both the academic and the professional setting for college students. Providing services in a selected career area provides a direct understanding of what this particular career would be like on a day to day basis. For college seniors, this could be a life changing experience!

Partnerships

In order to support students participating in an internship, multiple partnerships are required between the university, the placement sites and the students. Frequent and effective communication between all partners involved is essential to support student interns in successfully completing the assigned project.

Another important aspect of this partnership lies within the area of mentoring. According to Johnson (2002), mentors influence the professional development of interns through teaching, advising and/or supervising both learning and performance outcomes. For the CSUSM Senior Experience, two faculty members and the site supervisor will all help mentor the students.

Feedback

Feedback will be provided to the interns by both the local business representative and the team's university supervisor. When considering the important criteria that need to be established and included in the feedback to interns, NACE (2015) found that business supervisors for interns wanted more clarity with the university expectations and more effective guidance on evaluating interns; more specific focus on creating an effective match between interns and their internship; and for the university to offer more career training experiences to support the development of professional behaviors in interns. These suggestions will be considered for guiding feedback from the business supervisors to the interns involved with the CSUSM project.

Promoting Intern Success and Beyond

A study conducted on job significance for interns indicated that the significance of specific task completion required by the intern, as well as the feedback provided on how well the task was completed, was indicated as being most significant for interns (D'Abate, Youndt & Wenzel, 2009). The CSUSM project will support students in approved goal and objective completion which will be mentored by both faculty.

Other aspects of the work environment that were found to be significant in the experiences of interns consisted of learning opportunities, supervisor support and organization satisfaction (D'Abate, Youndt & Wenzel, 2009). In addition to these considerations of student needs, collaborating with a selected team of students also provides an effective route for the company to identify prospective employees.

3. CONCLUSION

According to NACE (2015), college graduates with internship experience are much more likely to receive a job offer (approximately 57% in 2013), as well as a higher starting salary than students without internship experience. To turn an internship into a job, Adams (2015) recommends that a student select an internship that requires substantial work; act professionally; network; ask questions; set goals; volunteer; and follow up with the business after the internship is completed. Using previously conducted empirical studies as a basis, it is the goal of the CSUSM Collaborative Senior Project to prepare, support and assist university seniors in successfully attaining the career of their dreams.

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