DEVELOPING INTERNSHIP LEARNING GOALS

SO, YOU'RE DOING AN INTERNSHIP FOR CREDIT. WHY?

Different students have different reasons. One student may be looking for a resume builder, another wants specific job and skill experience and yet another is trying to break into a particular occupation. Perhaps an internship is required for your major. Perhaps you already have a related job, why not get credit for it? These are all understandable reasons for doing an internship!

When getting academic credit for an internship, you need to consider, what am I getting credit for?

An internship experience can offer you the important benefit of career exploration and be an excellent resume builder, but it is important to remember that academic credit is awarded for the learning achieved, not for the work experience alone. The primary purpose of doing an academic internship is to better understand the theories, ideas, and practices of your discipline or major by actively engaging in a "hands-on," work-based, learning experience. In addition, an internship can be a very exciting way to learn. Your internship can provide you with an opportunity to question and examine the relationship between theory and practice. In other words, how does what you read and talk about in your classes compare to what you observe and experience outside the classroom? An internship is also a time of inquiry. Inquiry is seeking to learn by asking and observing. Students can discover new knowledge and understanding for themselves by being curious explorers and investigators during an internship.

An internship can be a very exciting way to learn.

However, a word of caution, you cannot expect the internship setting, the work supervisor or even your faculty supervisor to make an internship a meaningful learning experience for you. The quality of the experience is dramatically affected by your attitude and efforts. Most organizations are looking for student interns who are enthusiastic, quick learners, personable, reliable, and capable of working on their own. They will provide job related tasks and responsibilities and offer you an opportunity and environment in which to learn; but it is up to you to learn from the experience.
PLANNING FOR YOUR LEARNING

Planning for your learning can be done effectively through the construction of your internship learning objectives. But before you can write specific objectives, you need to think about the internship learning goals, meaning the type of learning that is intended for internship experiences. The three categories for common learning goals are:

1. Cognitive Development Goals
   - To apply knowledge and skills related to the concepts, principles, and methodologies of one's major or discipline (i.e., connecting theory to practice).
   - To acquire new knowledge in a new setting to enhance classroom education.
   - To integrate or synthesize knowledge from diverse disciplines, courses and areas of experience.
   - To apply higher order thinking skills (critical thinking, analysis, synthesis, evaluation, complex problem solving) to "real world" situations.

2. General Skill Development Goals
   - To develop skill competencies specific to an occupation or profession.
   - To expand oral and written communication skills.
   - To increase skills for understanding and working with people of diverse backgrounds and cultures and to work effectively within diverse environments.
   - To acquire additional interpersonal communication and interaction skills.
   - To develop skills to work effectively within formal and informal networks and work cultures.
   - To further develop observation, recording and interpretation skills.
   - To develop skills needed for effective citizenship.
   - To acquire skills in leadership.

3. Personal Development Goals
   - To develop self-awareness.
   - To clarify one's own values.
   - To develop self-reliance and self-confidence.
   - To develop and use an ethical perspective.
   - To develop career awareness, direction and exploration of vocation.
WRITING LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Your learning objectives are your learning targets or what you want to learn or be able to do by the end of the internship. After deciding upon the general areas you want to focus on, write your specific learning objectives as clearly and succinctly as you can. Use action verbs to develop your objectives. Some action verbs are: apply, solve, design, develop, present, describe, compile, identify, determine, become familiar with, evaluate, understand, know, produce, implement, explain, analyze, critique, compare.

Following are some general examples of learning objectives in each of the three categories for learning during an internship.

Examples:

Cognitive Development  *(By the end of the internship, I want .......)*
- To be able to explain various treatment methods for autism spectrum disorders in preschool children.
- To develop a working knowledge of the methods of cost accounting used by this firm.
- To understand the role of the public relations department at the art museum.
- To analyze how public policy at the state level is influenced by interest groups.

General Skill Development  *(By the end of the internship, I want .......)*
- To enhance my counseling and group facilitation skills when leading support groups for teenagers.
- To apply effective writing skills to grant writing.
- To develop and improve my speaking and presentation skills in front of professional groups.
- To apply research skills to the environmental impact study project.
- To understand and incorporate "coaching" sales techniques.

Personal Growth and Development  *(By the end of the internship, I want .......)*
- To identify and compare three entry-level positions I would be qualified for in the field of ______.
- To evaluate my vocation and career goals and plans.
- To set priorities and manage my time efficiently.
- To build my self-confidence in professional settings.

Your learning objectives may change and can be amended during your internship if new opportunities present themselves or you find that your original objectives need to be changed. During your internship, you will probably discover many more opportunities for learning than you ever initially planned. We hope, that by being a self-directed learner throughout the internship experience, you will develop learning skills that can equip you for life-long learning and keep you asking, "What more can I learn?"