Internships at OSU

Introduction and Overview

In the Spring of 2011 the Curriculum Council determined that internship policy at OSU is in need of revision. Guidelines and policy concerning internship are outdated; there are discrepancies in stated Curricular Procedures & Policies; the Baccore Revision recommends developments for Experiential Learning (EL); and there are improvements needed in creating equity to access to internships.

Outdated policy - Internship policies were last reviewed in 1985 when the OSU’s student population was more homogeneous and internship experiences prepared students for a different labor market. Since 1985 national trends around internship and experiential learning have changed with more emphasis on learning goals and skills needed for graduates.

Policy discrepancy - A discrepancy was recently discovered between the 1985 policy on Internship listed in Curricular Procedures & Policies, and newer curriculum guidelines for blanket numbered courses. Curricular Procedures & Policies states that to propose a new internship course, a Category II proposal is required. Newer policies regarding blanket numbered courses, which include 410, Internship courses, state that no CAT II is required to propose a new course. This calls for a review and resolution by Curriculum Council and Academic Programs.

Experiential Learning (EL) and Baccore Revision - While curricular changes are underway at OSU, this might be a good time for a revision of internship policies. During the last couple of years of Baccore Revision, the campus has waged a lively conversation around experiential learning and best practices for incorporating EL into the curriculum. Most departments already offer internships, an acknowledged form of experiential learning. As articulated in the Baccore Revision, for experiences to qualify as EL, they require learning outcomes, a process for supervision, feedback, and reflection and debrief guided by an instructor.

Lack of standards and accountability - Many internships on campus do not meet our articulated standards for EL. Perhaps if they were identified as Experiential Learning, there would be guidelines, expectations, and standards for internships. As it stands, internships fall under guidelines for blanket numbered courses, in which standards, curriculum, evaluation, and learning outcomes are at the discretion of faculty. With no curricular oversight for internships, there is no academic rigor, accountability or assessment. This is one area the 2011 NWCCU accreditation recommended needed improvement at OSU (see Appendix I, below).

In a recent webinar, Dr. Gardner, Director of Research for the Collegiate Employment Research Institute at Michigan State University, stressed that internships/co ops are “messy” across the country, and because they are increasing so rapidly, there will come a time when some standards will be required. Internships are one facet of education that has not been looked at and our students bear the brunt. Graduate schools and employers look for internship experiences as a
sign the student has familiarity with their field and has developed the skills to easily transition from school to work/grad school. Students who forego these experiences are at a great disadvantage in the competitive world of graduate schools and employment.

**The value of credit** - Academic internships are required by some departments and optional in others. When students sign up for up to 12 credits for internship they, presumably, enter a contract with the university to have some type of teaching delivered to them or access to campus resources. This does not apply to all internships. Contractually there are no obligations or accountability on the part of university. The students are usually on their own to find an internship and turn it into a successful experience. Only around 50% of OSU students complete internships and 70% of those find internships through family or faculty referral. For students without connections or from an underprivileged background internships can be out of reach.

**Internships as a Social Justice/Inequity Issue**

According to Dr. Gardner, a national conversation has arisen in response to growing concerns over the fairness and legality of all college internships. He showed that there is a great deal of inequity in access and benefit from internships. Much of the attention is being focused on issues of social class, ethnicity, gender differences, and other socio-economic factors affecting this activity. For law-makers, economists, journalists, academics, and others, a debate is raging in the absence of good data, and reliable information about these complicated issues.

The most common methods of finding internships is through faculty, and possibly subject to faculty favoritism, or parents. Many of our first generation students do not have parents with industry connections and often they don’t have the guidance needed to excel in the application process. As a university, we have few mechanisms in place to provide compensatory assistance, with meager resources allocated to career development or internship coordination.

**Internships as a Career Development Issue**

Internships are becoming essential for a successful transition out of college. They are a recruiting method for many employers and are seen as the best way to gauge interest and skill in an area. Unlike part-time jobs, internships are supposed to include training and mentoring, which give students a leg up.

Dr. Gardner emphasized the importance of frontloading experience so we don’t need to put as many resources at the end. Career Services’ career development model is very focused on this idea, but we could do much better as a campus to collaborate and coordinate our efforts.

**Call for action and what is needed (partial list):**

1. A survey of internship 410 classes at OSU (currently underway) to find out:
   a. Requirements
   b. Support mechanism – internship coordinator/faculty contribution
   c. Learning outcomes
   d. Teaching strategies – commitment to student success
e. What merits credit

2. Review of how 410 courses compare to other blanket numbered courses in terms of institutional investment?

3. An establishment of minimum standards and obligations for what is to be delivered for something to qualify as a 410 course at OSU.

4. Familiarity by departments of legal and ethical standards related to internships
   a. Equal access, EEOP
   b. Labor laws
   c. Laws on what internships can be unpaid and which cannot
   d. What qualifies as “internship” vs. volunteering or free labor
   e. Risk management (Insurance, workman’s comp, etc.)

5. Establishment of some type of oversight, campus or college wide. This could be a council, community, curriculum coordinator, or a director of experiential learning.

For this group, the questions are: Whose responsibilities are internship standards and guidelines and what is the Curriculum Council’s role?

Appendix I

The self-evaluation report for the 2011 NWCCU accreditation included the following analysis and recommendations that relate to the issue of experiential learning standards:

Core Theme 1, Objective 3 -Summary

Foster Student Learning and Engagement beyond the Formal Classroom Setting

Offerings of out of classroom learning experiences exceeded expectations. However, the results from the NSSE survey show a lack of participation in experiences as compared to other institutions.

Academic programs offer a range of programs, but there is little indication of level of participation, availability, and effectiveness or quality of these experiences. Better assessment is needed.

Student support units provide good experiences and assessment. Need to increase effectiveness of interactions between academic units and student support units.

See: http://oregonstate.edu/leadership/accreditation