Student Internships

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Abstract

Student internships represent a unique, innovative, nontraditional educational approach based on experiential learning. Internships take students out into the community and the real world to internship sites for experiences in the field. Internships that are challenging and high-quality have proven to be an effective and efficacious approach that has many advantages and few disadvantages. Research has shown that there is a direct correlation between the internships in which students have served and the ultimate career paths which they select.

Overview

Internships, which originated in the U.S. in the early 1900s, are work-based educational experiences that relate to specific jobs, positions, occupations or professions. They are career-oriented curricular endeavors of practical application. Students are placed as interns with a wide variety of sponsoring organizations based on their individual fields of interest. They can serve internships in the arts, education, health, communications, business and industry, technology and many other areas. Students are released from school for part of the school day or school year; work a variable number of required hours on a part-time basis for a designated period. Student interns receive on-the-job, one-on-one training in a work setting from skilled professionals, who provide the knowledge and expertise of their field. Students learn by doing in actual situations through direct, hands-on experiences. They are evaluated and assessed by both their school internship coordinator and their onsite professional supervisor or mentor using an authentic, competency- and performance-based model, portfolios and exhibitions. Among the many positive educational outcomes of internships are practical experience, new skills and improved attitudes and behaviors.

This article primarily focuses on pre-college internships—programs especially for the high-school student population. The high-school students who intern are pursuing and participating in internships as interns or internees are typically 11th- and 12th-graders—juniors and seniors. Although some schools

Keywords

Apprenticeship

Authentic Assessment

Coop

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Experiential Learning

Externship

Individualized Learning

Intern

Internship

Job Shadowing

Performance Assessment

Performance Exhibition

Placement

Portfolio Assessment

School-to-Work Programs

Service-Learning

are creating internships for middle-grade students, these are somewhat more controversial. High-school student internships are precursors to later college internships.

Guided, effective, high-quality internships are increasingly being recognized as integral elements and vital components of students' educational or academic programs. Internships play a valuable role in students' learning experiences as they do work that is both important and challenging. Community-based internships requiring on-the-job training provide a pathway for promoting meaningful youth-developmental educational experiences, and represent a distinctly innovative approach to high school (Bazzoni, 2000; Hendrie, 2004; Hirsch, 1974; Littke, 2004).

Littke (2004) defines internships as "real work integrated into the everyday world of the school" (p. 124). Internships constitute interdisciplinary learning that is 'truly integrated' into the community, and serve as a unique type of learning approach; a form of learner-centered education. The concept of an internship is to put learning into practice—to extend learning into applied experiences in which students actively participate. Internships combine classroom and real-world experiential learning— independent study and work by students. They are work-based educational experiences that relate to specific jobs, positions, occupations or professions. Students serve and complete

temporary project assignments at the work site (Bazzoni, 2000; Stasz & Brewer, 1998).

In addition to general and program-specific internships, there are a variety of other widely used types of work-based, work-study, experiential education learning programs which transition students from school to work or college:

- An apprenticeship is built similarly to an internship and is considered synonymous by some.
- A coop, short for cooperative education, is another type which is a paid internship taken for credit.
- A practicum (pl., practica or practicums), which involves practical experience and individual study outside the classroom that is less project-specific than an internship.
- An externship, which involves a non-resident association of an individual with an institution.
- Mentoring and job-shadowing,
- Service-learning, which is somewhat different in having a social-action component, but can be similarly considered (Cavanaugh, 2004).

History

The history of student internships (or cooperative education) originated in the U.S. in the early 1900s (Driscoll, 2006). The history of internships is intimately intertwined with that of experiential learning and experiential education, school-to-work programs and initiatives, career academies and career-exploration programs and service-learning programs (Michigan Center for Career & Technical Education, 1995).

Voluntary apprenticeships for youth originated in Europe in the early nineteenth century and remain a central component of many European training systems (Olson, 1993; Snell, 1996). In the U.S., apprenticeships have declined over the past 30 years and few high school students are involved in apprenticeship programs. There are questions whether the apprenticeship model can be reinvented to meet the needs of the contemporary workplace (Unwin, 1996).

Some high schools are combining internships with career-themed academies. Marczely (1982) described an internship program in a Connecticut high school in which students selected four different career interest areas and spent four weeks at each job site working under the supervision of a resource person. Seven high schools in Minneapolis, Minnesota have work-site curricular components that include internships and job shadowing (Minneapolis 8th graders, 2002). These latter high schools set up more personal learning environments that include small learning communities oriented around career themes. Internships have also been key elements of the educational programs set up in the small public high schools pioneered by the "Big Picture" founders Dennis Littky and Elliott Washor (Hendrie, 2004). The growth of internship programs in U.S. high schools can best be explained by the positive effects they have on the quality of instruction and education in general.

Applications

Curriculum: Design Planning & Development

Internships are the training and experience component of a curriculum. They are career-oriented endeavors of practical application. High schools focus the curriculum around internships so as to make learning real (Littke, 2004). Student internships have a sound educational foundation and philosophical basis which are further outlined in Table 1. Internships in different disciplinary areas involve projects and activities that are meaningful to students and that advance their academic programs.

their own education. They also demand that the sponsoring organization determine the internship curriculum to be followed as well as the related activities. For these reasons, learning agreements or learning contracts for interns are often developed prior to students taking on the internships. The agreements (or contracts) establish the guidelines, outline the requirements and define students' duties and responsibilities.

Students make use of their prior classroom learning to build a bridge to the world outside the classroom. They relate their skills and knowledge to the practice of applied experiences in

Table 1. The Educational Foundation & Philosophical Basis for Student Internships

Pedagogical Domain	Description
Curriculum	activity-oriented, career-oriented, direct experiences, innovative, integrated, practical-application, project-based, work-based, youth-developmental, service/social action
Placement	appropriate, assigned, fields of interest, personalized, realistic
Environments	community, non-classroom, nontraditional, off-campus, out-of-school, professional, structured
Instruction	advising, coaching, counseling, expertise-oriented, guidance, mentoring, on-the-job training, professional, supervision
Learning	active, applied, community-based, cooperative, engaging, experiential, hands-on, independent, individualized, interdisciplinary, real-world, service
Evaluation & Assessment	authentic, competency-based, exhibitions, performance-based, portfolios
Outcomes	**experience**—applied, hands-on, in-depth, practical, work-based; skills—basic, communications, computer-literacy, interpersonal-relations, job-readiness, leadership, organizational, problem-solving, professional, researching, report-writing, teamworking, technology, workplace; **attitudes and behaviors**— autonomy, collegiality, cooperation, dependability, independence, initiative, positive, professional, self-confidence, self-motivation, work ethic, work values

Students, in concert with their advisors, faculty sponsors or counselors locate internships of interest and complete an internship application. Occasionally students find internships on their own, but these typically involve fewer and lower-quality learning opportunities (Haimson & Bellotti, 2001). Students normally conduct research on the industry in which they are interested and generate an internship proposal. The proposal should be structured with careful thought, be well-planned and well-organized. It should include an essay describing the intended internship program and individualized learning plan. It should identify the essential question and the clearly defined learning goals and objectives of the student.
Internships demand a strong commitment from students and require a significant amount of student participation in planning

actual work situations, and then integrate their internship field experiences back into academic school programs, curriculum and classroom learning. Work-based internship programs that are able to establish connections between work and school and that are closely tied with the school curriculum are preferable. Internships can connect students' after-school, post-school and adult lives (Haimson & Bellotti, 2001; Stasz & Brewer, 1998).

A student must typically be enrolled in high school on at least a half-time basis to take an internship, as student internships are usually part-time experiences. Students may be released from school for part of the school day or part of the school year. Depending on the internship, students may work a variable number of hours within a range. The time spent interning is

minimally weeks or months in length. Internships of a short-term basis can be one month, six weeks, a quarter or a semester in duration. For longer-term projects, students may receive full-time "sabbaticals" from all their regular high-school studies (Hirsch, 1974). Some schools extend the school year and require students to participate in an internship. Some internships are taken over a summer, while others are set up to provide culminating or capstone experiences for students and are taken during the final academic quarter, semester or year. Some high schools require internships each year (Stasz & Brewer, 1998). Regardless of the length of the internship(s), students explore their potential career choices to the greatest degree possible in the time allotted (Marczely, 1982).

Student Placement

Internship placement typically occurs during a students' junior or senior year. Students should be realistically assigned and appropriately placed in internships. They often choose their own internship sites with input from advisers. It is important to find placements where students can fulfill their personal goals. Students' individual qualities can be used as a basis to select them for internships (Hirsch, 1974).

An important factor that affects student placement is whether internships are paid, partially paid or unpaid. Most are unpaid, but internships in which students receive partial pay are stipend-based. College-bound students predominantly take unpaid internships whereas noncollege-bound students typically take paid internships (Haimson & Bellotti, 2001; Marczely, 1982; Stasz & Brewer, 1998).

Learning Environments

Internships are a type of educational program that can be used to wean students away from traditional classrooms (D'Andrea, 2005), and connect students with learning environments off school-campus grounds, away from classrooms and textbooks. They provide different structured environments—locations, sites or settings—of the student's own choosing. Community-based internships are one type of community-service opportunity. These make use of community resources and community engagement, by making the community a partner in the students' education in which the community is a teaching and learning resource. Internships strive to better the community in which students live.

Internships may also develop partnerships between schools and corporations—companies, businesses and industries. Internships create positive attitudes from the business community and get businesses involved in students' education. Local employers offer internships in business disciplines and technical fields. Schools forge beneficial alliances with sponsoring organizations of internships. Students can serve internships in the arts, education, health, communication, technology and other fields. Students can be assigned to local- community or –neighborhood organizations relevant to their interests, or with nonprofit organizations, social-service agencies, hospitals, universities, government and public agencies at all levels —city, county, state and federal (Hirsch, 1974; Wynn, 2003).

Instruction: Activities, Opportunities & Experiences

Intern projects incude a range of practical, sound and authentic educational experiences that emphasize real work and independent activities (Hendrie, 2004; Littke, 2004). Internships often develop ties between schools' internship coordinators and onsite professionals—those who develop, implement and administer student internships.

Internships can be used as a pedagogical tool. Student interns are employed and receive on-the-job, one-on-one, practical training in hands-on learning experiences. They work with and learn from skilled professionals in a work setting, which gives them opportunities to associate with the people and the resources that can make work real (Littke, 2004). The job-site professionals give interns assignments and responsibilities to serve as assistants. Students are exposed to workplace environments, norms of the workplace, work expectations and obligations (Wynn, 2003). Students participate in meetings and get a feel for what work days are like in their field of interest.

Typical activities designed by career coordinators for high-school student interns include conducting site interviews, keeping an observation diary and writing personal evaluations. Students may have a requirement to work or observe a minimum number of hours (e.g., eight, nine or more) per week at the job site in any combination of flexibly scheduled individual arrangements (Haimson & Bellotti, 2001; Marczely, 1982).

Student Learning

The type of learning that is fostered by internships is experiential. It is active learning that is based on doing, on "what works" and in which experience is central (Webb, Metha, & Jordan, 1992). It is learning in the community, in the real world and in actual work situations. It is interacting and engaging with the environment, where problem-solving is emphasized. It is learning that is individualized to meet one's own needs and interests, and combines learning how to learn on one's own (i.e., independent learning) and learning with the help, support and guidance of others (i.e., cooperative learning). This type of learning can be tied to service and social action.

Evaluation & Assessment

Internships are part of a model that has a unique vision of educational success in which standardized tests, subject-based courses and textbook learning are eschewed and replaced with authentic, competency- and performance-based elements and measures of their education (Hendrie, 2004; Toch, 2003). During the internship, students are paired with a mentoring adult or onsite supervisor in the organization or business where they are interning. The mentor or supervisor collaborates with student

interns on their internships, carefully monitors their work, coaches, counsels, guides and evaluates them on an ongoing basis. Mentors and supervisors are part of a support system in place to assist and nurture student interns. Students should be successful in their internship experiences and their mentors or supervisors work diligently to ensure their success.

Student-internship administrators, faculty promoters, sponsoring teachers, career-education coordinators, student counselors and/or advisors have the responsibility to conduct site visitations at the internship site where a student is placed. Students must also report back to school one day of the week to discuss job-site projects and provide ongoing progress reports of their work (Marczely, 1982). Students maintain a log in which they record internship activities. A mid-internship evaluation is often made to assess students' progress.

At the end of the internship, when the defined objectives are completed, an exit interview is conducted. The student returns to school and prepares a final project report to summarize the internship experience. The sponsoring teacher, in concert with the site supervisor or mentor, prepares a final evaluation of the student intern.

A post-internship authentic assessment and evaluation of the high-school student's performance sometimes has a requirement for a portfolio of work that may also include a postgraduate plan, and a public performance exhibition (Darling-Hammond & Ancess, 1994; Hendrie, 2004). Portfolios and exhibitions, which directly demonstrate knowledge and skills, provide two common examples of what is sometimes referred to as performance assessment. The evaluation of a portfolio of work is also widely termed portfolio assessment. Both performance assessment and portfolio assessment are widely used to evaluate and assess internships.

Students can generally take internships for credit or not for credit. Some schools have campus-wide internship requirements and students must participate in an internship to earn a diploma. Thus, an internship is an element of some degree or certificate programs. If high-school students are taking the internship for credit, and after they complete assigned course projects and requirements and fulfill the internship, they receive a grade and a certain number of academic credits are granted or awarded (Marczely, 1982).

Educational Outcomes

During their internship programs, students develop new, practical, usable skills of the workplace. Ideally, they learn,

- A work ethic and work values,
- Skills to help them compete effectively on the job and in life,
- To improve their interpersonal relations and communications skills,
- To improve their organizational skills,
- To improve computer literacy and technology skills,
- To work independently,
- Researching skills,
- Report writing,
- Team-working skills from working cooperatively on group projects,
- To complete work on time,
- To be positive, professional and articulate,
- To be dependable, to show initiative and to be self-motivated.

Students can make real and tangible contributions during their internship programs while accenting both their personal growth and their career development. Students garner self-confidence as interns and develop their leadership skills through leadership training.

Viewpoints

Advantages

Internships provide invaluable experience and can change students' lives. Interning can increase students' maturity levels and can improve their self-confidence and self-concepts. They not only benefit students but also the organizations providing them. Internships can focus on areas in which students can perform service and social-action assignments. They also strengthen students' academic resumes on their college applications, give them a head start on internships they may participate in during summers while in college and assist them in deciding on their college major. This assists students in planning for their futures and helps in transitioning them to post high-school life at college and the future workforce (D'Andrea, 2005; Greifner, 2007; Littke, 2004).

There are internship programs to excite and motivate virtually every student. Internships get students more engaged so they can take a leading role in their own education. Internships provide a way to raise academic achievement for some students. They are an effective means to get students interested in school and to make learning matter. Internships play a positive role in keeping students in school, preventing them from dropping out (Cavanaugh, 2004; Littke, 2004; Toch, 2003).

Internships help students to explore various career alternatives, areas of career interest or possible career opportunities. Internships assist students in developing relationships with experts in fields of strong interest to them. Students can use internships to try out specific jobs or types of positions, orientate and test certain occupational areas of interest and potential future careers. Internships aid students in identifying, clarifying, developing career goals and professional aspirations and confirming career-path options. Student internships help female students particularly to explore nontraditional career fields. Internships can improve students' job-readiness skills, future

job prospects and starting salaries. Internships provide students with valuable, first-hand, work-based experiences and relevant workplace skills (Haimson & Bellotti, 2001).

Internships can be part of an alternative high-school program and help students who do not do well in traditional programs (Vladero, 2006). Some internship programs are set up and developed to provide internships for economically disadvantaged students. Student internships for inner-city job seekers are valuable for modeling adult-employment success and exposing youth to long-term, advancement-oriented employment (Committee for Economic Development, 1997; Petkewich, 2005).

Disadvantages

Work-based internship programs have associated costs for their design, delivery and sometimes for student participation. The number of hours students are involved in internships may have negative effects on some aspects of their school performance and may interfere with students' homework time (Stasz & Brewer, 1998). Some high-school internships are geared for boys and girls, yet female students are more likely to participate in work-based internships than male students. Additional work-based internships involving activities and settings that appeal to male students need to be developed (Haimson & Bellotti, 2001).

Many students have interned with more than one organization, since students typically need multiple internships to fill out their resumes for college or postsecondary employment. Unless internships provide challenging and high-quality experiences for students, then participating in them can become a "zero-sum game" in which students take internships for the sake of developing a list to impress college-admissions directors and/or future employers.

Some large national corporations have auctioned off internships for high-school students (Garnerman, 2006). Local school systems have used the internship auctions to raise money. The internship auctions ultimately affect equality in the workplace in that they give unfair advantages to affluent students (Garnerman, 2006).

Research

Research has shown that experiential-education programs, including internships in government and business, have a positive impact on student participants. The two factors which are the best predictors of personal growth are opportunities to act autonomously and to develop collegial relationships with adults (Conrad & Hedin, 1981). Experiential learning, such as internships, affect the social, psychological and intellectual development of secondary-school students (Conrad & Hedin, 1981).

Empirical evidence shows that school-to-work programs, which include internships, are especially advantageous for men who would be less likely to go to college, as they boost employment and decrease periods of idleness for men after leaving high school (Neumark & Rothstein, 2005). Coop programs and mentoring increase postsecondary education for men. Internships and apprenticeships also lead to positive earnings effects for women (Neumark & Rothstein, 2005). High-school students perceive that internships, job shadowing and mentoring are the most helpful school-to-work programs (Larson & Vandergrift, 2000).

Research has also shown that there is a high correlation between the career paths students select and the internships in which they have served (Kensinger & Muller, 2006). Challenging, high-quality internships continue to demonstrate their efficacy as experiential, school-to-work educational programs that impact the lives of those who have chosen to participate in them.

Terms & Concepts

Apprenticeship: A period of technical training and instruction in a particular occupation, trade, art, business or field in which the student being trained is required by legal agreement to work for an employer for a specific period of time.

Authentic Assessment: A type of assessment requiring students to demonstrate skills and competencies that realistically represent tasks, problems, applications and situations they are likely to encounter in daily life and the real world.

Coop: Short for cooperative education; a relative, long-duration, full-time, paid work experience in which students earn academic credit.

Experiential Education: An approach to applied learning in which students become actively engaged in the learning process through direct experiences.

Experiential Learning: Active and applied learning that directly engages and involves students in their own education.

Externship: A short-duration, less extensive version of an internship in which a student becomes actively engaged and participates in applied, practical, experiential-based learning in an area or field of interest.

Individualized Learning: Knowledge gained from instruction, training or other educational activities implemented on a one-to-one basis with students.

Intern: Also internee; a student who is being supervised during practical training.

Internship: A supervised learning experience in which students apply their prior knowledge to develop new skills in a professional setting.

Job Shadowing: Work-based learning experience in which a student follows a mentor for a typical day or period of time to observe and ask questions about a particular job, position, profession or career.

Performance Assessment: Evaluation of a student's educational progress that requires the direct demonstration of knowledge and skills.

Performance Exhibition: A public showing of works or products, for example, portfolios, to evaluate and assess achievement and successful completion of an educational program of study.

Portfolio Assessment: Type of evaluation used to measure progress toward the attainment of individualized goals or outcomes in which the learner provides a collection of information, material or exhibits to document learning based on prior experiences and work so as to receive academic credit.

School-to-Work Programs: Any of a series of organized efforts to assist students or other individuals to transition from education or training to actual work situations; examples include internships, coops, job shadowing and mentoring.

Service-Learning: A hands-on educational approach that combines service to the community with the classroom curriculum.

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Essay by R.D. Merrit, Ph.D.

Roy D. Merritt holds a Doctorate in Education / Curriculum & Instruction (1994) with a specialization in Science Education from New Mexico State University, Las Cruces. He has multiple degrees in both Education and Science and he has worked professionally in both fields. In addition to serving as an Educational Consultant, he is also a freelance and contract writer and is the author of numerous publications including refereed journal articles and resource books.