



Experience life after graduation before graduation

Often there must be a first-hand experience for a lesson to be learned. For career readiness, few classroom lectures can match the benefits of an internship or co-op work experience. While not every college is succeeding with experiential education, some are blazing trails with great success.

Higher education faces increasing consumer pressures from parents and students who want more for their rising tuition. Experiential education is perceived by many of them as a tangible benefit, an added value that differentiates one school from another.

“Any college or university that does not have an internship or co-op program is shooting itself in both feet — recruitment and retention,” asserts Michael True, director of the internship center at Messiah College. He contends that, “Higher education needs to focus on internships and co-ops that provide meaningful work related to a student’s major, an integrated and reflective academic component and appropriate supervision from both the college and employer sides.”

Work-based learning opportunities also help strengthen relations with hiring employers and can be a means of alumni engagement and relationship building.

Added value during school increases market value afterward

As a student intern applies classroom learning in this “hidden job market,” he or she is clarifying career goals. “Internships and cooperative education experiences should involve hands-on, task-oriented, pre-professional learning in structured ‘real-world’ settings in which students are supervised,

monitored and mentored,” explains Karen Roloff, director of internships at DePaul University’s College of Communication.

The work experience helps students build confidence and establish a network with professionals and mentors. Good internships develop a student’s communication and collaboration skills that are valued by all employers. All those “added values” increase a student’s market value at graduation.

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“It’s very powerful when a student has a field experience that reinforces what’s seen and heard in the classroom. When they return to their studies, they better understand why they’re taking any given class,” says Susan Powers-Lee, executive vice provost at Northeastern University. “It also challenges the faculty to integrate more real world examples into the classroom,” she asserts.

Internships & co-ops; what’s the difference?

Internships and co-ops differ in length, full- or part-time status and payment arrangements. They also differ by whether the student is simultaneously attending classes and working.

Cooperative education usually integrates subject matter. The co-op work assignment and the classroom learning are closely related. The classroom and co-op experiences are usually sequential in alternating

semesters of classroom study and employment. Co-op employment is always paid. Co-ops are common in engineering and technical specialties. Co-op campuses often collaborate more with employers and more closely monitor student work progress on the job and afterward.

Internships may be part-time or full-time. They often occur during the summer or in non-classroom hours during academic periods.

Interns may be paid or unpaid for their work. Depending on the employer, the work ranges from basic administrative activities to duties with more responsibility. Because some internships are less structured than most co-

ops, interns are more vulnerable to lower quality experiences. However, as employers are facing increased skills shortages, they are taking more care to provide worthwhile internship experiences.

The employer perspective

Administratively, many employers prefer internships to co-ops. Among those employers who are committed to co-ops, they appreciate the longer, more entrenched work period.

Among 276 employers surveyed in 2007 by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), 242 (88%) have internships in place,

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depot where other popular tool sets are interconnected.

When a faculty member establishes a Facebook group or a Second Life meeting, you have provided a great tool for students — and a recruiting tool as well! You've also added faculty touch points, which enhance the learning experience.

The success factors are all interrelated. Manage their use to create synergy that will grow enrollments, increase student success and satisfaction, embrace alumni and build your brand. ■

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and 124 (45%, mostly manufacturers) offer co-ops.

IBM has maintained a long tradition of support for both co-ops and internships. Big Blue consistently hires 1,500 to 2,000 college students annually and converts more than half of them to full-time employment, which IBM views as a key indicator of program success.

"Students hired into IBM, whether by a formal co-op or an academic or elective internship, are all treated the

same in how they're managed and the quality of the experience they receive," explains IBM's program manager, Marilyn Mayo.

Co-ops at IBM are usually administered by IBM's systems and technology groups. Mayo reports that the advantage of a longer work term is that it enables managers to give students more challenging and productive projects. She adds, "We treat them as though they are full time employees, and encourage managers to hire those that prove themselves worthy."

Getting started on campus

Is learning that involves experience in a work environment an important aspect of a sound education? A successful experiential learning operation requires campus-wide consensus on that point. A cultural shift may be involved.

Staff will be needed for student and employer outreach. Career readiness services will have to be aligned with (or absorbed by) academic affairs. Curriculum accommodations are necessary.

There is information available from schools with successful experiential learning efforts.

Northeastern University's Center for Experiential Education and Academic Advising (CEA) is

one source particularly adept at curricular issues. (northeastern.edu/experiential/) An annual summer institute on experiential education for visiting deans, directors, faculty, administrators and their teams is conducted on Martha's Vineyard.

The NSEE (nsee.org) operates the Experiential Education Academy, launched in 2004. The academy offers professional development workshops, which are delivered by experiential education practitioners. DePaul's Roloff is also the president of the National Society of Experiential Education. She explains that, "Several colleges and universities are using NSEE to deliver the EEA professional development workshops to their faculty and staff."

My organization, The Internship Institute, assists employers with materials and services, and we're always here to help nourish interest in experiential education.

And if you're well-connected, perhaps you can seek out helpful colleagues at one or more of the best known co-op schools like Drexel, Northeastern or the University of Cincinnati. Or California State University, Fullerton; West Virginia State University; Brigham Young University, Idaho; Rhodes College; High Point University; Hendrix

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College; Kettering University and Keuka College, all of which require experiential learning for graduation. Messiah's True adds, "The emphasis should be on a centralized program which balances the experiential learning needs of students with the simplicity of service for all constituents, including employers." ■

Athletics

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and Teddy Dupay. Three of those players made good on their oral pledges. Gary Clark enrolled instead at Wake Forest.

Easily the most successful coach in Gators hoops history, Donovan is candid about his willingness to target younger prospects. "When you watch [prospects] play you are going to have a feel of projecting. I think it's just like when you're watching a player as a [high school] junior or a senior, you want to project where they're going to be several years down the road in college," Donovan says.

Who's not?

Not every coach agrees with this approach, of course. At University of Georgia, Dennis Felton takes exception with the "earlier is better" approach espoused by some of his

rivals. "What's happening now is making me a little queasy, to be honest. Guys are in such a rush, and it doesn't make a lot of sense. I just hope it doesn't go where football has gone, where people commit and de-commit based on numbers. It used to be 95 percent of the time if someone committed to a school, others would stop recruiting them," Felton said.

"Now you're seeing more kids de-committing after the coach stopped recruiting the position. Then when a player de-commits, instead of getting the top 10 at that position, you're down to the top 20 or top 30 at that position," Felton added.

South Carolina's coach Dave Odom doesn't see how such premature commitments can mean much in the final analysis. "Now it's become, if a high school kid doesn't commit early, there must be something wrong with him," observed Odom, who added that "I don't pay much attention to eighth-, ninth- or 10th-grade commitments. There's so much more basketball to be played. I don't want my coaches involved in that type of recruiting. It makes no sense to me."

Predictably, many juvenile commitments don't stick. Point guard Cashmere Wright is an example. The gifted shooter backed out of his Clemson commitment, claiming that

he committed too early and wanted to look further at other schools.

Texas sharpshooter Chris Babb committed to New Mexico earlier in the summer. A month later, he decided New Mexico wasn't the place for him. Brandon Jennings decided to play at Southern California, but later reneged and opted for Arizona. Texas A&M could boast of a pledge from Anthony Jones for a full day before Jones had a change of heart. Other examples of such second thoughts abound, far too many to list here.

"The competition and marketplace for kids is really no different from the stock market," claims Phil Martelli, who coaches at Philadelphia's St. Joseph's University. "If Michigan does it, then Michigan State has to do it. In Philadelphia, if Temple does it, then St. Joe's has to do it. There's certainly a herd mentality."

So coaches feel they must beat the bushes for emergent talent, because if they don't, someone else will beat them to the best prospects. Some critics believe that the NCAA should restrict commitments to juniors and seniors only, but that possibility seems remote. It's contrary to the recruiting realities of 2007. All expectations are that today's burgeoning trend will entrench itself in the coming years. ■

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