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Internship as High-Impact Practice: How to Make a Better Internship in Half the Time

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Internship as High-Impact Practice

• High-impact educational practices defined by Kuh and the AACU

• Increased rates of student retention, engagement, and learning

• High-impact practices:
  – First-year seminars and experiences
  – Common intellectual experiences
  – Learning communities
  – Writing intensive courses
  – Collaborative assignments and projects
  – Undergraduate research
  – Diversity/Global learning
  – Service learning, community-based learning
  – Internships
  – Capstone courses and projects
What makes internships “high impact”? 

- Students “devote considerable time and effort to purposeful tasks.”
- Students “interact with faculty and peers about substantive matters, typically over extended periods of time.”
- Students “experience diversity through contact with people who are different from themselves.”
- Students receive “frequent feedback about their performance.”
- Students get to “see how what they are learning works in different settings.”
- Students gain understanding of “themselves in relation to others and the larger world.”

(Kuh, 2008)
Human Services Internship Program

• Internship is required for human services majors

• Characteristics:
  – An academic, capstone experience
  – Students have a site supervisor and a university supervisor
  – Students complete regular assignments for their university supervisor

• Initial structure:
  – 12-credit internship
    • 40 hours/week, 16-week semester
  – 6-credit internship – plus 6 credits of additional upper-level coursework
    • 20 hours/week, 16-week semester
Examples of Placements

- United Way
- YMCA
- Big Brothers/Big Sisters
- Child welfare
- Community mental health centers
- Autism treatment centers
- Community centers/afterschool programs
- Senior centers and assisted living communities
- Probation and other court services
- Advocacy and fundraising organizations
The Re-Design

• Supervision journal assignment
  – **Goals:**
    • Increase frequency and timeliness of communication
    • Increase emphasis on *two-way* communication
  – **Assignment:**
    • Students must make at least one journal entry each week about a significant internship experience
    • University supervisor responds
    • Student responds
  – **High-impact:** This increases students’ interaction with faculty and provides them with more frequent feedback
The Re-Design

• Weekly reflection assignment
  – **Goals:**
    • Increase reflecting on connections to past learning and future goals
    • Increase expectations
  – **Assignment changes:**
    • Assignment was rewritten to reduce overlap with supervision journal and increase focus on connection to previous learning and impact on future
    • Evaluation rubric was rewritten to be more specific and more rigorous, while still allowing for efficient grading
  – **High-impact:** Increased the students’ ability to make connections between their learning and the “real world”; they also experienced feedback with higher expectations
The Re-Design

• Virtual site visits for distant placements

  – **Goals:**
    • Increase sense of connection between university supervisors and students completing their internships at a distance
    • Increase communication/connection between university supervisors and distant site supervisors
    • Catch any problem situations earlier by monitoring student performance and internship appropriateness more effectively

  – **Changes:**
    • Emphasis on using appropriate technology (Skype, web conferencing, etc.) to conduct a face-to-face virtual site visit

  – **High-impact:** Quality of faculty interaction and feedback is improved
The Re-Design

• Summer Schedule
  – 8 weeks (half the length of typical semester)
  – Changes:
    • Had students set goals earlier and more often
    • Maintained two professional development days on campus
    • One site visit (instead of two)
  – High-impact: We maintained many of the high-impact advantages, while compressing them into a shorter time period that offered new placement opportunities
Outcomes

- Spring vs. summer
- 53 spring interns; 14 summer interns

* $t = 1.869$, $p = .066$
Outcomes

• Spring vs. summer
• 53 spring interns; 14 summer interns

Site Grade*

*<i>t = -2.315, p = .025</i>
Outcomes

- Summer vs. Fall
- 14 summer interns; 14 fall interns

*Supervision Journals*

\[ t = 2.168, \quad p = .039 \]
Outcomes

• Local interns vs. distant interns
• 68 local interns; 13 distant interns
Summary

• A well-run internship can be a high-impact practice
  – Important to focus on:
    • Frequent and meaningful student interaction with faculty
    • Frequent and timely feedback for students
    • Requiring students to make connections between classroom learning and the “real world”

• An 8-week summer internship can be a high-quality experience
  – Student performance was largely unchanged
  – Internship sites that hosted summer interns were eager to do so again

• Possible disadvantages of distant internship placements can be minimized through the effective use of technology to increase communication and relationship-building