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Assessing Student Learning in Internships

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“Assessment” is an often-used word in higher education today. At BYU in the last few years, every department has devoted much time and effort to ensuring that we have measurable learning outcomes and that we assess whether we are meeting them. The goal of assessment, of course, is to determine whether the curriculum we offer—including activities, assignments, papers, and tests—is enabling students to reach the outcomes we have established. Just as classroom-based courses need to be assessed, so do internship courses.

But because internship courses are experience-based and because there are at least two instructors for every student intern—first, the supervisor(s) mentoring the student at the internship site and, second, the internship coordinator or BYU professor monitoring the student’s work—assessment of internships is different in important ways. The same principles of good assessment still apply, but there has to be more coordination among all the parties involved. One way to ensure that coordination is effective is to involve the internship provider from the start.

Once you, as the internship coordinator, know who will be supervising a student intern, make sure that this supervisor is aware of the learning outcomes you have established and that he or she will provide activities and mentoring that will help the student achieve the outcomes. If the supervisor has additional objectives in mind, see if these can be incorporated into the outcomes you will assess at the end of the internship. Share your syllabus with the supervisor or at least explain what you will expect the student to do to demonstrate learning both during and at the end of the internship.

Ask for formative assessment of the student from the supervisor at least once during the internship so that you can know whether he or she believes the student is performing as desired. If there are problems, it is better to correct them early. You can work with the supervisor to help the student understand how to behave professionally, how to do certain tasks, and how to ask the right questions. The more you can work together with the student’s supervisor, the more likely it is the student will benefit maximally from the internship. Ask the supervisor also to contribute significantly to the summative assessment, or final grade, for the student intern. BYU’s Health Science Department asks internship supervisors to contribute 40% of each student intern’s final grade. The Communications Department has a rubric for final grades which internship supervisors use to contribute 10% of each student’s final grade.

Besides assessing student performance, it is important to assess the provider at the end of each internship. There are many ways to do this (see Shiloh Howland’s article below). However you choose to do it, you need to know if the provider has met expectations and has given the student a meaningful learning experience. If not, you may need to work more closely with the provider in the future—or you may even decide not to send student interns to that provider.

Assessing Your Internship Program

Shiloh Howland



The conclusion of an internship experience is a busy time for internship coordinators but it also provides an opportunity for you to collect meaningful feedback from students about the quality of their internship provider. Below are examples of how department internship coordinators have met the requirement in the Internship Policy to conduct “routine assessment of internship providers to ensure quality learning experiences.”

Assignments: The most common way departments assess internship providers is by incorporating questions about the internship provider into a final paper or assignment.

- RECM 496R students complete a final report and answer specific questions about the strengths and weaknesses of the agencies they worked with.
- NEURO 496R students’ final report asks them to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of their provider and if they would recommend this provider to others.
- DES 496R students submit a final summation of their experience: “Please tell us what your internship was like. Expound on your responsibilities, what worked, what didn’t, what suggestions you would have for future interns.”

Questionnaires: Several departments gather information about the internship providers by asking students to complete questionnaires.

- PSYCH 399R/496R students complete an Internship Profiling Questionnaire where they rate work climate, career preparation, meaningfulness and importance of the work, and long-term value of the training.
- SFL 399R students submit a Qualtrics survey about their experiences. They can select an option to allow other Family Life students to contact them and ask about their internship.
- LING 399R students complete a final site evaluation through Google Forms, where they rate the internship provider on providing sufficient supervision, explaining expectations and assignments, and offering adequate direction, support, and feedback.

Interviews: This approach is used less frequently, but if your internship course already requires a final interview, you can ask about the internship provider as well as the students’ experiences.

- IS 599R students complete a final Evaluation of Company form and bring it with them to be discussed in an interview after the conclusion of the internship

Student Spotlight - Whitney Tibbets

“I spent a lot of time on my laptop emailing and coordinating things prior to our Pinners shows in Dallas, Phoenix and Salt Lake.”



Whitney Tibbets is a communications major with a public relations emphasis who interned with Bennett Events (pinnersconference.com) as a public relations representative.

What were you doing for your internship?

I started my internship with Bennett Events in August and helped with the Pinners Conferences for Dallas, Phoenix and Salt Lake. I reached out to women's organizations to offer promotional tickets, made schedules for TV news segments, drafted press releases and reached out to multiple print news organizations to get coverage for Pinners Conference. I also contacted our Pinners Conference presenters to help them with their social media marketing. I attended Pinners Conference in Salt Lake and helped with set up, ticketing, classroom registration, and cleanup. We had great success in Dallas and Phoenix even though it was Pinners Conference's first year in those locations. Our Salt Lake Pinners Conference was our most successful yet in attendance and news coverage. I don't have any photos of my working at the internship, but I spent a lot of time on my laptop emailing and coordinating things prior to our Pinners shows in Dallas, Phoenix and Salt Lake.

What was the most useful thing you learned from your internship?

I learned to be aggressive and self-motivated to in order to be productive and get tasks accomplished. It was disheartening after contacting 20 news organizations in a day and still not hearing back from any of them after a week. I had to be persistent and willing to reach out to any contact that I could find in order to have my message received.

Would you recommend this internship to other students? Why?

My communications courses taught me to be a creative problem solver and a strategic thinker. I learned how to work hard and establish connections with my classmates and professors in a friendly and professional way. These skills helped me make connections with people over phone calls and emails to be able to earn news coverage for Pinners Conference and to establish credibility and lasting relationships with our Pinners Conference presenters.

What professional skills did you develop?

I got a lot of practice pitching the events to reporters and journalists while trying to earn news coverage. I became a more efficient communicator in my phone calls and emails to be able to accomplish more within a workday. I became more willing to solve problems on my own (especially during the event) because all of my managers and co-workers were busy with their own tasks. Events are exciting and very fast-paced, but a willing attitude and level-headed thinking are essential to being successful and efficient.

How did this internship move you forward in your planned career?

After I finished my internship, Bennett Events offered me a job as a sales representative selling booth spaces Conference. I also work for a boutique corporate PR firm located in Orange County, California. I am grateful to be able to work both part-time jobs from home so that I can do my favorite job: being a mom to my cute 16-month-old boy and another baby boy coming in February! forPinnersConference. I also work for a boutique corporate PR firm located in Orange County, California. I am grateful to be able to work both part-time jobs from home so that I can do my favorite job: being a mom to my cute 16-month-old boy and another baby boy coming in February!

Would you recommend this internship to other students?

Yes! Kendall and Roxanne, who own Bennett Events, are fabulous. They were such good examples to me of how to be a successful communicator and how to run a large-scale event. They were also good examples to me of how to establish a good work-life balance.