

The Higher Learning Commission Action Project Directory

Northern Michigan University: Internships/Work Experiences Processes Review

Project Details	
Title	Internships/Work Experiences Processes Review
Category	3-Understanding Students' and Other Stakeholders' Needs
Timeline	
Planned Project Kickoff	10-15-2010
Target Completion	04-20-2012
Status	REVIEWED
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1: Project Accomplishments and Status

A: As indicated in the prior report submitted in September 2011, work towards successful completion of the project was, and continues to be, underway. The Action Project formally will close in April 2012, but work will continue. The purpose of this report is to describe accomplishments over the past six months.

Our significant finding, also reported last year, is that there are four types of internship/ work experiences with unique legal and curricular implications. Accommodating this diversity added complexity to the Project, but will make it more robust and useful in the long-run.

Type 1: NMU-Placed with ongoing agency relationship, unpaid, credit-earning

Type 2: Individually arranged by student, unpaid, credit-earning

Type 3: Individually arranged by student, paid, credit-earning

Type 4: Individually arranged by student, non credit-earning

A major accomplishment was the completion of a repository holding all academic departments' work experience documents: policies, handbooks, applications and evaluation instruments. The use of this repository will be two-fold. First, a permanent and categorized storage on an intranet server called Share will make these samples accessible to all academic department heads and internship/work experience directors. Second, the documents were examined by Action Project subcommittees to create best practice templates for Roles and Responsibilities, Learning Agreement and Evaluation Forms.

An *Academic Work Experiences Guidebook* for faculty and work experience directors was created containing sections on Definitions, Checklist, Affiliation Agreements, Legal Issues, Liability and Indemnification, Academic Procedures, Resources and the above mentioned templates. Together with the samples on the Share server, this *Guidebook* provides a centralized resource to help align co-curricular activities with learning objectives, provide instruction for new directors, and to ensure consistency and compliance.

A completed master spreadsheet now accurately catalogs the work experience practices of every academic program/department employing any type of work experience. A course inventory documents every course that involves work experiences. The statistics garnered from the inventory makes departments aware of the widespread use of work experiences and the need for some standards. The Registrar's Office uses this master to tag courses as either a Practicum or Internship. NMU is now able to regularly collect data related to work experience and generate reports for the System Portfolio: helping students learn, community engagement (the "Other Distinctive Objective" for NMU) and meeting students' and other stakeholders' needs.

A potential solution was found for tracking non-credit work experiences (Type 4) through the use of 091/092 course numbers. Not all academic programs will use this option, but having it available with a structured process enables a more complete picture of our programs' depth and breadth.

R: Northern Michigan University's (NMU) Action Project Internships/Work Experience Processes Review continues to

stay on track for its target completion date. A most impressive accomplishment of this project is the development of a repository for documents associated with internships/work experiences. That it contains everything from policies and handbooks to applications and evaluation instruments demonstrates the forethought that went into its creation. In reviewing this project it became apparent that every principle of a high performing organization was demonstrated. That is a rather exceptional feat and one which hopefully prompts NMU to present this project at some point to the greater higher education community.

The other accomplishments reported clearly support the institutions efforts to support the Systems Portfolio with specific emphasis given to Categories 1, 2, and 3 (Helping Students Learn, Accomplishing Other Distinctive Objectives, and Understanding Students' and Other Stakeholders' Needs). NMU's desire to provide accurate and helpful data to its staff is clear evidence that they value and respect both their employees and their stakeholders.

Another way it has been demonstrated is by the decision to offer templates and samples to their various departments rather than mandating common documents. This flexibility will allow them to best meet their own needs and serve their specific student populations.

2: Institution Involvement

A: Involvement continues to be across campus with faculty / department head representatives from every College and multiple academic departments serving on the Action Project Committee. Based upon AQIP reviewer feedback, it appears that the 2011 update report did not make faculty involvement clear. Reviewer belief that "there appears to be little faculty involvement in the process thus far" needs to be corrected. At NMU, the internship and work experience directors are almost exclusively faculty or academic program administrators; eight of the eleven members of the Action Project Committee hold faculty or academic department head status and the other three are support staff, such as Career Services. The response rate from all academic department heads to a request for data and documents was 100%. A January 2012 presentation to academic department heads and directors described the progress of the Action Project Committee, addressed concerns, and collected feedback.

The Registrar's Office, working with the Action Project Committee, implemented solutions in the registration and scheduling system to enable NMU to generate aggregate statistics reports based upon new codes, and developed a new Work Experience Enrollment Form to standardize the student registration process for individually arranged types of experiences. This form remedies an inconsistency issue, serves as a procedural checklist for faculty and collects a new data item to identify the student's experience as unpaid/paid. Both of the latter aid compliance with program accreditation standards and the Fair Labor Standards Act. Use of an existing and well-understood system, i.e. registration and scheduling, to maintain work experience records should be more sustainable.

The NMU Risk Manager played an active role in developing two Affiliation Agreement templates for Types 1 and 2 work experiences, and a procedure for using them. He was also involved in editing the Roles and Responsibilities template and the *Academic Work Experiences Guidelines*.

The Committee on Undergraduate Programs (Academic Senate curriculum committee) was consulted to develop an expedited process for renumbering internship courses; the goal was to encourage use of a consistent number to improve readability of the course catalog by students and employers.

Staff in Career Services collaborated with Information Technology staff to develop a prototype of a web application for employers to post internship jobs and students to find them. Currently, NMU is unable to accurately identify employers or their locations for individually arranged internships, and students had no central database to locate opportunities. The new web application, to be housed on the Career Services website, will address both issues. This employer database will provide a vehicle for determining employer satisfaction with the process of obtaining an intern as well as the academic preparation of those interns. The internship job database prototype must be finalized and put into operation.

R: The involvement in this project was wide spread and robust. The team took care to include a diverse group including members from every academic department. The team has done a great job of documenting its faculty

involvement in this update. The student input during the evaluation will further enhance this diversity. Multiple areas interacting on this project again showcases NMU's likelihood to be identified as a high performing organization. The 100% response rate from the academic department heads is exceptional.

3: Next Steps

A: An evaluation template is drafted and under final revision. It includes question topics for a supervisor to evaluate the student; the student to evaluate their experience; and the supervisor to evaluate the program. These evaluations will assess the effectiveness of the work experience programs and student preparedness for their careers, i.e. are stakeholders satisfied with these co-curricular programs and do these programs meet their learning objectives.

Rather than mandate use of common documents that do not suit all programs, departments will be able to access templates and samples from the Share server and use those most appropriate for their program's needs. To increase the likelihood that these samples get used, we want to be sure they are understood. Therefore, informational review presentations of the materials will take place in March for the Academic Cabinet and academic department heads; and in April for all work experience directors. The background of the project and most recent version of the *Guidebook* will be discussed, proposed procedures explained, and the new Share server resources demonstrated. Feedback will be collected from participants of these review meetings and discussed by the Action Project Committee.

As part of the Action Project closing process, the Action Project Committee's final report, recommendations and accompanying documents will be presented to the President's Council. The Council will provide input regarding a 2012-2013 acceptance and implementation of recommendations. In early Fall 2012, to fully complete the Action Project charter to provide ongoing education for directors, an information session for all faculty and staff involved in work experience will occur.

The bulk of the work is nearing conclusion and the Action Project will be closed out in April 2012.

R: As is appropriate in preparing to close a project, the team has identified evaluating the project as its next steps. As noted above, the student input will be collected during this process. The evaluation objectives are measurable and should be very helpful in assessing the improvements implemented. One aspect of the project cycle that some schools overlook is communicating the change. NMU will not be one of those and have prepared to communicate these tools to the college community.

4: Resulting Effective Practices

A: The inclusive approach taken by the Action Project Committee has proven effective thus far. It permitted input from a large number of faculty and staff enabling better decision-making and increased the credibility of the work produced by the Committee. Including the Registrar, Risk Manager and the Curriculum committee in the development and deliberation enabled the Action Project Committee to prepare more actionable outcomes.

The systematic data collection took a lot of time, but provided a foundation from which to discuss and decide based upon facts rather than assumptions. Presenting the facts to show that we had a lot of variation was more effective than just presuming it; this was an important component.

R: It is to their credit that the team notes the collaborative aspect of this project first in their response to effective practices. It has been a long held belief by many advocates of continuous improvement that if you included everyone who touches the process (be it the owner, the user, or the receiver), the end result will be of benefit to all. One benefit for this project is the development of more actionable outcomes.

5: Project Challenges

- A:** There are no significant challenges as the project appears to be completing. There may be hesitation by some departments who currently have scant procedure in handing their work experiences, but wide-scale involvement throughout the project is expected to mitigate resistance and concern over adoption.
- R:** The team noted no significant challenges to this project as they prepare to complete it. They do understand that not every department will immediately utilize the tools developed but have a positive outlook. Given the wide-spread involvement during this project, that seems to be a justifiable position.