

**Action Project Title:** Internships/Work Experiences Processes Review

**Action Project AQIP Category:** # 3 Understanding Students' and Other Stakeholders' Needs.

**Start date:** Oct. 15, 2010      **Target completion date:** Nov. 15, 2011

### **Background**

An "internship" is an on-the-job or experiential learning opportunity which enables students to connect what they have learned in their academic program to what is required in the employment area of interest. Internships can vary in their details but the distinguishing characteristic they all share is that they are a supervised work experience performed in a bona fide job setting where the emphasis is on learning about the work or job rather than employment per se. Many professional programs such as education (supervised student teaching) and nursing (clinical practicum) provide it through the curriculum and it is becoming an increasingly popular option for students majoring in other areas. Formal internship as NMU courses with variable credit based on time/effort required have been available to NMU students in a number of majors for over thirty years. When enrolled in an internship course the student works in a public or private agency or firm with an emphasis on linking their academic preparation to the work tasks and is supervised by a specific employee of the agency and administered by an NMU faculty member. The intern may or may not be compensated by the agency or firm providing the learning experience.

As interest has grown amongst students and employers alike, awareness has grown that the processes associated with internships at NMU are sometimes inconsistent, weakly documented and administration is variable in attention to detail. While preparing a successful 2008 application for Carnegie Community Engagement Classification, it was found that NMU lacks a systematic, university-wide method for easily documenting and reporting work experience activities. In 2009, internships became listed as a priority within the NMU strategic plan, "Road Map to 2015." During 2009-2010, the Art & Design department (which regularly oversees interns), raised questions about the responsibility of faculty and the liability associated with interns and if there were differences when the intern is paid or not paid by the agency/firm. This led to investigative research by a small group of faculty and staff. In addition to representatives from academic departments and student service offices, the university Risk Manager and General Counsel became involved in the discussions. The consensus was that while work experience was an important element of the curriculum in numerous majors and no wrongdoings existed, there were a number of weaknesses in many of the programs, procedures varied widely, and that internships could become much more valuable if there were improvements in the processes associated with promoting, administering, and evaluating the internships. There is also concern that some faculty intern supervisors work in isolation and lack knowledge of legal issues, such as the Fair Labor Standards Act. It is an appropriate time to address the matter at the university level. Finally, Internships was the cover story for the Winter 2010 issue of the NMU Alumni magazine, Northern Horizons; NMU wishes to increase its work experience network and is turning to an employer group who knows NMU well – its alumni.

### **Project Scope**

This project will undertake a thorough review of all forms of internship and work experience programs at NMU, enable campus-wide discussion of a draft set of common guidelines and procedures that monitor structured experiences and internships, consider legal issues, and collect and track data on these entities. A goal of this project would be to establish a strong on-going relationship between the Career Services office and department internship coordinators.

### **Expected Improvements**

To best describe the potential improvements, quotes from the campus feedback solicitation regarding this project are given.

- Document department internship administration processes: “NMU needs to document the interactions between the external community and internship programs in helping NMU students achieve their academic goals and increasing their value in the market on graduation from NMU;” “Documenting and standardize NMU’s Internships, Work Placement and Clinicals are critical to NMU’s community engagement mission.”
- A web-based catalog of internship opportunities and student/employer guidance information will be developed and posted.
  - Documenting/cataloging internship opportunities: “I think we could do a better job of letting students know what internships are available, as well as providing a way for potential employers to communicate with students; ”
  - “We are curious how to improve our outreach through our NMU alumni network in various parts of the world to organize quality student teaching placements;” “While departments should continue to reach out to the community to probe possible internship opportunities, we could encourage community participation by easing and centralizing the process of setting them up.”
- Standard core guidelines for department administration of internship opportunities offered by departments that allows flexible expansion of procedures within disciplines.
  - Clear, consistent application and evaluation procedures for all internship opportunities: “Students are not given enough guidance in securing an internship ... an internship process could be developed to assist students in finding appropriate internships;” “Our placement process does an excellent job informing and preparing students... we are hoping [this project] will inform our practice as we work to use technology to enhance the observation and feedback component of the student teacher’s practice;” “NMU needs to evaluate the quality of the internship experience from both the employer’s and student’s perspective.”
  - Federal and state labor law (Fair Labor Act) does not permit interns or other types of trainees to replace workers who would otherwise be doing the work assigned to an intern: “NMU needs a standardized policy explaining how the outside community can access our student interns while remaining compliant with federal and state laws regarding internships.”
- Annual reporting of statistics, i.e. number internships, agencies, disciplines. Standardize measurement/counting of internship experiences: “NMU should be able to more easily quantify these experiences for continued improvement and accurate marketing. “
- Sharing of best practices and problem identification and resolution would be expected through dialog among a network of internship/work experience coordinators.

### ***Operational Procedures***

By using a two-tier approach, all areas involved will have input and be kept abreast:

1. Co-chairs are Fred Joyal (through May 2011) and Yvonne Lee.
2. Working committee - a small, core group is charged with document collection, review of practices, and drafting solutions. This group is to include a representative of Career Services as well as academic departments and college administrators who will meet regularly to carry out assigned tasks. The working committee membership:
  - Dale Kapla (CJ)
  - Steve LaFond (Career Services)
  - Rob Lion (Business)
  - Joe Lubig (Education)
  - Susan Morgan (International Programs)
  - Sandra Poindexter (AQIP Liaison)
  - Fran Quinnell (Psy)
  - Linda Riipi (Clinical Lab)

3. Steering committee - broad network of all internship/ work experience coordinators for discussion of problems, practices, and guidelines.
4. A collaborative project website has been created using SHARE, a new tool at NMU in pilot mode. It will hold collections, forum, minutes, and drafts.
5. Diffusion of information will occur in several venues: presentations to Academic and President's Councils after project milestones, convening of the broad network at least three times during the project, and presentation to community and campus forum of recommendations prior to project closure.
6. A schedule of meetings will be established to best fit the Working Committee members' available times.

<b>Timetable: Tasks and Milestone Evidence</b>	<b>Duration</b>
Campus-wide internship / work experience coordinators network will convene for broad discussion of problems, practices and draft recommendations prepared by the NMU Risk Manager	November
Collection across academic units of all forms of internships and work experiences and their procedures; prepare a digital documentation binder and convene network in January. Long-held work experience infrastructures exist and must be acknowledged.	November - January
Collection of existing internship resources at other schools and agencies, e.g. Department of Labor and National Association of Colleges and Employers, will be documented and analyzed, and distributed to the wider network to discussion in January	November - January
In-depth discussions of core needs and problem resolutions; draft of common guidelines and procedures based on consensus views of issues/needs/solutions presented to all stakeholders	January-March
Development of a web-based catalog of internship opportunities; Operational website	March - June
Development of metrics collection and reporting processes; guidelines	March – July
Departments consider possible changes to their programs; CUP proposals, procedures documented	March – May; August - October
Development of continued education vehicle for internship/ work experience coordinators to share practices and keep abreast of legal issues; as determined by project team	September – November

### **Stakeholders**

- To varying degrees, all academic departments (internship coordinators), Student Services offices of Career Services and Admissions, Risk Manager, University General Council, President's Council, Academic Cabinet, Information Technology or NMU webmaster, and the Academic Senate have an interest in this project's outcomes.
- In some disciplines, student organizations could have a role in work experience that warrants representation.

This project will include exemplar firms and public agencies in our review of draft policies and guidelines to insure that any changes in NMU policy will not provide unexpected burdens for those who provide these extremely important experiential learning opportunities.