

## The Higher Learning Commission Action Project Directory

### Northern Michigan University: Internships/Work Experiences Processes Review

Project Details	
<b>Title</b>	Internships/Work Experiences Processes Review
<b>Category</b>	3-Understanding Students' and Other Stakeholders' Needs
<b>Timeline</b>	
<b>Planned Project Kickoff</b>	10-15-2010
<b>Target Completion</b>	11-15-2011
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#### 1: Project Accomplishments and Status

##### A: Describe the accomplishments to date and the current status of this Action Project:

At its initial meeting, the Action Project Working Committee adopted a project charter with a one-year timetable to complete its objectives. This document is available on the public action project webpage < <http://webb.nmu.edu/aqip/SiteSections/ActionProjects/InterWorkExperienceProcessReview/InternshipsWorkProcessReview.shtml> > . A University intranet portal was used to give committee members continuous online access to all documents, resources, and meeting files related to the Action Project. This shared repository requires member login.

Work has progressed according to the timetable's schedule. Two early tasks launched the Action Project. They were: convening two campus-wide internship / work experience coordinators meetings for a broad discussion of problems, practices and a general awareness of people involved; and conducting an inventory of internships and work experiences from all academic departments, including identifying course numbers used for any type of work experience and obtaining policies, procedures and forms. From these exercises, the Committee categorized internships /work experiences into four scenarios:

- NMU-agency relationships with regularly contracted numbers of students in non-paid, credit-earning placements. Examples are student teaching and health services practica.
- Individually arranged (one-off) non-paid, credit-earning placements. These might be through NMU-agency relationships with irregular occurrences or student-agency relationships where students assume an active role in obtaining the placement. Examples are biology field experiences and political science internships.
- Individually arranged (one-off) paid, credit-earning internships. These are most often through posted job positions or through NMU-agency relationships with irregular occurrences. Examples are hospitality management or business internships.
- Individually arranged (one-off) paid and non-paid placements where students did not need or desire to pay for the credit, but wanted the formal experience.

This categorization formed a crucial foundation for the Committee's next major task -- drafting guidelines and agency agreement templates. It was initially believed that the Action Project could result in a standardized process, i.e. that we could draft a set of common guidelines and procedures that monitor all structured experiences and internships. As discussions ensued, the Committee realized that a "one-size fits all" approach was inappropriate and unlikely to be accepted by either academic departments or employers and work placement agencies. Instead, multiple drafts were considered for agency agreement templates under different scenarios. These documents have been discussed at length, are not yet finalized, and are stored in the shared intranet repository.

The Committee began an inventory of departmental forms, policies, agency agreements, and letter templates. The purpose of this collection was to enable discussion and comparison to better understand the current state. The correct contact for every department is now documented. Some of the collected documents were provided in paper form; others were digital and stored in the intranet repository. While the Committee is aware the inventory is incomplete at this time, an assumption that motivated this Action Project was confirmed: there is a large variation in departmental processes regarding internships and work experiences. Some of this variance is due to the scenarios defined above and have rationale; some differences are ad hoc and departments may be receptive to change.

External resources and documents were identified and links created to them on an intranet resources webpage. These are primarily laws and regulatory guidelines from the U.S. and states' Departments of Labor and the National Association of Colleges and Employers. One goal of this Action Project is to educate the coordinators on regulation and ensure continued compliance. A portion of this goal was accomplished to the extent that the Committee now has a better understanding of these issues.

Per the timetable, work began on two remaining components of the Action Project: development of an expanded internships/ work experiences website and an improved system of metrics allowing NMU to track and provide annual university-wide statistics for all types of curricular work experiences.

##### R: The Action Project Working Committee convened the campus's work experience/internship coordinators, which led to the recognition of distinctive internship/work experience categories that challenged the initial assumption that a single college-wide process could be developed. It is admirable that rather than adhering to the one-size fits all assumption, the committee has been able to 'shift gears' and begin process development for the four identified scenarios. Such flexibility is a signature of an institution willing to accept input from a diverse range of stakeholders to drive institutional quality change, rather than pushing process development from embedded beliefs.

The Working Committee is organized and providing good project management. Clearly, Northern Michigan University has experience in pursuing Action Projects with a 'doable' scope. The inventory collection is confirming not only are there different scenarios, but that ad hoc and siloed and disparate departmental work over the years has led to a confusion of forms, letters, policies and communication protocols, the resolution of which should have a positive impact on student experiences that connect their education to the workforce.

#### 2: Institution Involvement

##### A: During 2010-11, the Action Project used a two tier committee approach: a Review Committee and a Working Committee.

The "Review" Committee was to be a broad network of all internship/ work experience coordinators and used for discussion of problems, practices and guidelines. Thus far, the membership has been sufficient to accomplish its tasks, but has not had the desired all-encompassing representation. As the Action Project moves forward towards completion with guidelines and on-going education, all coordinators should be involved.

The "Working" Committee is a nine-member core group charged with document collection, review of practices and drafting solutions. Membership was solicited through an email announcement of the Action Project to all internship/ work experience coordinators. Though self-selected, this group does include a representative of Career

Services as well as academic departments that heavily employ internships / work experiences in the different scenarios. The Working Committee functions as planned, meeting monthly or more frequently as work was ready to be reviewed. It continues to meet through the summer months.

The Working Committee involved two other university resources. The University Risk Manager is responsible for preparing and signing agency agreements. This individual met with the Working Committee several times and prepared drafts of guidelines and agreements for two identified scenarios. These meetings were instrumental; the Risk Manager better understood the variations and flexibility needed in internships and the coordinators better appreciated the need for policy. The Registrar's Office provided background on tracking of internships and work experiences, suggested options on streamlining processes and making them more consistent, and offered continued support as the Action Project moves on to recommended curriculum changes.

**R:** It is not uncommon that broad stakeholder involvement requires time to 'ramp-up.' In fact, it may be to the review committee's benefit that involvement has been limited to a more workable number of representatives which has allowed for the in-the-trench work to take place. As recommendations emerge, other coordinators will want to become involved.

An important 'plus' to this project is the involvement of the Risk Manager and Registrar, whose input will help ensure that the recommended changes will be in concert with institutional policy/safety and can be implemented into the institution's student management and tracking systems.

It is not clear what the extent of faculty participation has been; however, the differences in work experience and internship programs for students may be due, in part, to differences in program outcomes in different departments. It may be of benefit to the working committee to have involvement from those most deeply involved in program outcomes, such as program chairs.

### 3: Next Steps

**A:** The timetable for the conclusion of the Action Project includes:

- Finalization of agency agreement templates for each scenario. These drafts must be circulated to all internship/ work experience coordinators for feedback and involve the Risk Manager and Review Committee in adoption.
- Verification and completion of the collected inventory of existing forms and procedures.
- Completion of the coordinator's guidelines, including template agreements, forms, checklists, letters, evaluations.
- Discussions with the chairperson of the Committee on Undergraduate Curriculum are needed to establish a one-time expedited process for curriculum changes, i.e. renumbering internship courses to a common number, and review of current procedures for approving new work experience related courses.
- Development of common procedures for the Registrar's Office to approve and enroll students into an internship / work experience course, use of a tracking tag in the course registration system, and a potentially non-credit bearing course code.
- Complete development of an internship / work experience website with resources for students, employers and coordinators. All guidelines, templates and collected resources would be available on this site. An improved method of posting opportunities should be incorporated into the finished product.
- Conduct an educational workshop for internship / work experience coordinators.

**R:** A clear progression of next steps is detailed, including the timetable for adoption of curriculum changes by the Committee on Undergraduate Curriculum. It is not entirely clear what the process is for involving the Committee on Undergraduate Curriculum ahead of proposed changes coming its way. Additionally, there appears to be little faculty involvement in the process thus far. Having a member of the Curriculum Committee on the Working Committee may promote faculty buy-in, if there is not already faculty participation. The recognition for the need for professional development at the conclusion of the project is to be commended. This activity should cement the project buy-in as long as all the stakeholders are involved.

### 4: Resulting Effective Practices

**A:** Sending a detailed notice to all coordinators ensured awareness of the Action Project's goals. Inviting all coordinators to participate in the Working Committee gave a sense of inclusion and openness to the Action Project. Requesting in-depth information and suggestions from the Registrar's Office was appreciated by the Registrar and helpful to the Working Committee. There is little point in developing recommended policies that will operationally be difficult to implement. These efforts to involve constituents at the outset should improve acceptance of recommendations.

**R:** Although more involvement was hoped for, the inclusiveness of the project from the outset will result in a smooth adoption and implementation of changes. As noted, the involvement of those responsible for operationalizing the approved changes is a positive element of the overall project. Too often, the critical involvement of ancillary services and stakeholders comes too late for an action project to be brought to successful conclusion.

### 5: Project Challenges

**A:** There are still a number of tasks to complete in the timeframe of the Action Project. Web developer resources are not available until fall semester. Even if the tasks take longer than the planned scheduled, sufficient progress has been made to see the Project through to conclusion. A three-month extension may be requested on the completion date, if needed.

**R:** It is understandable that this project which extends into so many elements of student and institutional processes may be difficult to wrap-up. However, the Working Committee has adapted to unanticipated variables already, and so even if required resources may not be available on schedule, this project is well on the way to completion.

The institution is making reasonable progress toward completion of the project *and* development of an institution-wide continuous quality improvement culture.