

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
Actual Completion	04-20-2012
Status	COMPLETED
Updated	03-01-2012
Reviewed	03-14-2012
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1: What is the primary reason for closing this project?:

A: The goals of this Action Project were to undertake a thorough review of all forms of internship and work experience programs at Northern Michigan University, enable campus-wide discussion of a draft set of common guidelines and procedures that monitor structured experiences and internships, consider legal issues, collect and track data on these entities and establish a strong on-going relationship between the Career Services office and department internship directors. The official Action Project is being concluded and the goals have been met. The annual update report for this project was reviewed in March 2012 with very positive feedback – "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."

A list of accomplishments is provided below and major documents are available on the NMU AQIP website at <http://www.nmu.edu/aqip> under the Action Projects menu.

- Inventory of all work experiences, resulting in four categories
- Tagging of all work experience courses in the institutional course records system, Banner, permitting accurate tracking of courses, credits, and enrollments
- Repository holding all academic departments' work experience documents
- Prototype for a searchable online job opportunities database available to employers, students and those who manage work experiences
- Templates for Affiliation Agreements and Learning Agreements and experience evaluations
- Academic Work Experiences Guidebook for faculty and work experience directors containing definitions, legal and liability issues, academic procedures, resources and templates
- Educational meetings for work experience directors and academic department heads
- Committee recommendations
- Partial Project assessment

The first six items were described in more detail in the annual update report. The following three items are described below.

During March 2012, a presentation and discussion at the Academic Cabinet served to further inform the top academic administrators on the Project's driving forces, the accomplishments and implementation recommendations. Comments were incorporated into a two-hour educational session for all 31 directors of work experiences held in early April. This session was preceded by distribution of the new Academic Work Experiences Guidebook and access to the shared repository; it was conducted by a panel of six Committee members and evaluated with an exit survey. A prepared question sheet was distributed at the session to collect additional questions; answers to these were posted on the shared repository discussion board forum that allows continued activity. An informational presentation was delivered to all academic department heads in mid-April to summarize the changes resulting from the educational session and answer additional questions of administrators.

The Action Project Committee developed six formal recommendations:

1. To be compliant, all work experience Directors should adopt a written agreement policy using the appropriate

template and include the Learning Agreement content.

2. Registration for individually arranged work experiences is done through a new form processed and stored by the Registrar's Office.
3. Each work experience is assessed by evaluation process that includes, per experience, evaluation of the student by the Agency and evaluation of the Agency by the student; and periodic evaluation of the work experience program by the Agency and evaluation of the Agency by the Director.
4. In addition to any local means of work experience announcements, Directors should direct employers and students to the new online internship job posting database to be located on the Career Services website.
5. Unless a course numbering conflict exists, new non-practicum work experience courses should be numbered to end in _91 or _92.
6. Reports are generated at least annually to monitor the number of enrollments and credits earned aggregated at the Department and University levels by Internship or Practicum, Paid or Unpaid.

We feel confident that the essence of these recommendations will be accepted and acted upon. In doing so, NMU will have improved its procedures for overseeing and documenting all forms of work experiences and be well aligned with the newly approved Higher Learning Commission Accreditation Criteria on Assumed Practices. After final approval by the President's Council, a timeline will be established for implementation beginning Summer 2012 and span one academic year.

In a reflective assessment, the Committee judges the Action Project as being successful in that it fulfilled its goals, has generated sufficient momentum and detailed procedures to be assured of implementation and has satisfactorily educated the 31 work experience directors (see results of exit survey under question #2). Further, discussions with representatives at three peer Michigan institutions indicate NMU has practices that meet or exceed its peers and will be well aligned with federal policy and accreditation criteria on work experiences. Final assessment must wait one year until implementation is complete.

2: What aspects of this project would you categorize as successful?:

A: Tagging all work experience courses in the master database is a strong aspect of the Project because it transfers tracking to a centralized system and generates integrated reports. In combination with new procedures, relying on this technology aids accuracy and consistency over time. Creation of an Academic Work Experiences Guidebook, including appendices with templates for affiliation and learning agreements, was a tangible product of the Project. Using common work experiences procedures will improve learning outcomes oversight. These contribute to Category 1 Helping Students Learn.

As confirmed by the reviewers' comments in the March 2012 annual update, the inclusive approach taken by the Action Project Committee was perhaps the most successful aspect. Having a Committee membership representing faculty, academic department heads and support staff enabled better decision-making and increased the credibility and acceptance of the work produced by the Committee. Including the Registrar, Risk Manager, Legal Counsel and the Curriculum committee in the development and deliberation enabled the Action Project Committee to prepare more actionable outcomes. Using various forms of communication throughout the project to gather information, offer drafts, solicit comments and educate directors helped to keep the project alive and acceptance of recommendations more likely.

The repository stored on a university intranet is considered a high value. All documents, templates, shared examples and a discussion board are in a central location that will be preserved after the Action Project is closed. The reviewers commented that, "A most impressive accomplishment of this project is the development of a repository for documents associated with internships/work experiences."

Results of an exit survey of participants at the work experience directors April educational session were positive, particularly those showing understanding and buy-in. Additional training is planned for Fall 2012 to cover written agreements (affiliation and learning). Exit survey items:

- This session fulfilled its [educational] objectives (92% "strongly agree" or "agree")
- I know the reasons behind the recommended changes (100%)
- I basically buy-in to the recommended changes (100%)
- I know where to go for documents and to provide feedback (93%)
- I know what kind of written agreement I need to use (86%)
- Having multiple Project Task Force members present added credibility (93%)
- I would attend two one-hour refresher sessions offered in the fall (64%)

The above aspects ultimately contribute to Category 3 – Understanding Students' and Other Stakeholders' Needs and Category 9 – Building Collaborative Relationships.

3: What aspects of this project would you categorize as less than successful?:

A: Given that the goals were met and recommendations appear acceptable, there are no aspects that were unsatisfactory. The project was estimated to take one year and actually spanned eighteen months due to the thoroughness and magnitude of the Project, not the result of problems.