

## 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>Status</b>	DRAFT
<b>Category</b>	3-Understanding Students' and Other Stakeholders' Needs	<b>Updated</b>	
<b>Timeline</b>		<b>Reviewed</b>	
<b>Planned Project Kickoff</b>	10-15-2010	<b>Created</b>	10-06-2010
<b>Target Completion</b>	11-15-2011	<b>Last Modified</b>	10-06-2010

#### 1: Describe this Action Project's goal in 100 words or fewer:

**A:** 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. 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 placements 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 the department internship coordinators.

#### 2: Describe briefly your institution's reasons for taking on this Action Project now -- why the project and its goals are high among your current priorities:

**A:** 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, one NMU academic department that regularly places interns, raised questions about the responsibility of faculty and the liability associated with placing interns and if there were there 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 and 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. 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.

#### 3: List the organizational areas -- institutional departments, programs, divisions, or units -- most affected by or involved in this Action Project:

**A:** 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. In some disciplines, student organizations could have a role in work experience that warrants representation.

#### 4: Name and describe briefly the key organizational process(es) that you expect this Action Project to

**change or improve:**

- A:** To best describe the potential improvements, quotes from the campus feedback solicitation regarding this project are given.
- 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."
  - Clarification of internship application and evaluation processes: "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."
  - 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."
  - Standardize measurement/counting of internship experiences: "NMU should be able to more easily quantify these experiences for continued improvement and accurate marketing."
  - Federal and state labor law 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."

**5: Explain the rationale for the length of time planned for this Action Project (from kickoff to target completion):**

- A:** During the remainder of the Fall 2010 semester, a campus-wide internship / work experience coordinators network will convene for broad discussion of problems, practices and draft recommendations prepared by the NMU Risk Manager. A core team will collect existing procedures at NMU and other schools and agencies will be documented and analyzed, and distributed to the wider network to discussion in January. Long-held work experience infrastructures exist and must be acknowledged. 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. In-depth discussions of core needs and problem resolutions, a draft of common guidelines and procedures, development of a web-based catalog of internship opportunities, and establishment of a metrics collection and reporting process are planned for winter through early summer months. Concurrently, all affected academic units will review their procedures to identify possible changes in procedures. During the early Fall 2011 semester, curriculum proposals for any changes would be expected. Development of a continued education vehicle for internship/ work experience coordinators to share practices and keep abreast of legal issues should happen during late summer and early fall.

**6: Describe how you plan to monitor how successfully your efforts on this Action Project are progressing:**

- A:** A two-tier approach is likely wherein all internship/ work experience coordinators are included in a broad network for discussion of problems, practices and guidelines; a smaller group is charged with document collection, review of practices, and drafting solutions. By using a two-tier approach, all areas involved will have input and be kept abreast. A project website located in an NMU collaborative intranet will hold collections, forum, minutes, and drafts. 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.

**7: Describe the overall "outcome" measures or indicators that will tell you whether this Action Project has been a success or failure in achieving its goals:**

- A:**
- Meeting of timeline.
  - Sharing of best practices and problem identification and resolution would be expected through dialog among a network of internship/work experience coordinators.
  - A web-based catalog of internship opportunities and student/employer guidance information will be developed and posted.
  - Clear, consistent application procedures for all internship opportunities
  - Standard core guidelines for department administration of internship opportunities offered by departments that allows flexible expansion of procedures within disciplines.
  - Annual reporting of statistics, i.e. number internships, agencies, disciplines.