

Guidelines for Writing an Internship Learning Agreement Plan

SO, YOU'RE DOING AN INTERNSHIP FOR CREDIT. WHY?

Different students have different reasons. One student may be looking for a resume builder, another wants specific job and skill experience and yet another is trying to break into a particular occupation. Perhaps an internship is required for your major. Maybe you need one more elective credit and you would prefer not to take another class. Perhaps you already have a job, why not get credit for it? These are all understandable reasons for doing an internship, but if you want *academic credit* for an internship, you do need to look at things differently.

When getting academic credit for an internship, you need to consider, what am I getting credit for?

An internship experience can offer you the important benefit of career exploration and be an excellent resume builder, but it is important to remember that academic credit is awarded for the learning achieved, not for the work experience alone. The primary purpose of doing an academic internship is to better understand the theories, ideas, and practices of your discipline or major by actively engaging in a "hands-on," work-based, learning experience. In addition, an internship can be a very exciting way to learn. Your internship can provide you with an opportunity to question and examine the tension between theory and practice. In other words, how does what you read and talk about in your classes compare to what you observe and experience outside the classroom? An internship is also a time of inquiry. Inquiry is seeking to learn by asking and observing. Students can discover new knowledge and understanding for themselves by being curious explorers and investigators during an internship.

You cannot expect the internship setting, the work supervisor or even your faculty supervisor to make an internship a meaningful learning experience for you.

The quality of the experience is dramatically affected by your attitude and efforts. Most organizations and internship sites are looking for student interns who are enthusiastic, quick learners, personable, reliable, and capable of working on their own. They will provide job related tasks and responsibilities and offer you an opportunity and environment in which to learn; but do not assume that your work supervisor knows what you want to learn or knows your skills. It is your responsibility to negotiate activities related to your educational goals. Part of the process a student goes through when negotiating and developing an internship is learning how to learn from experience. This is not always easy and often is a new way to learn for many people.

Typically, in a classroom situation, the instructor develops the course content, hands out the syllabus, and assigns readings, projects and tests. In contrast, during your internship, you will need to move from being dependent on the faculty sponsor "telling" you what to learn to being self-directed and finding your own resources for learning. During an internship, you are being asked to design your own course of learning, in essence, to develop your own syllabus for what you want to learn. Therefore, the more you plan what you want to learn, the more likely it will come about.

PLANNING FOR YOUR LEARNING

Planning for your learning can be done effectively through the construction of your internship learning agreement plan. The learning agreement plan serves several purposes:

- It provides a framework or structure for the internship, describing the roles and responsibilities of all parties involved.
- It serves as a guide and reminder to the student, work supervisor and faculty supervisor of the academic purpose and activities of the internship, regarding both the learning and skills fostered by the work experience.
- It provides the basis for evaluation and validation of the learning gained from the experience.

Before you write your learning agreement plan, a good place to start is with the widely accepted educational goals for learning that are important to incorporate into any academic internship. The three categories for common learning goal are:

1. Cognitive Development Goals

- To apply knowledge and skills related to the concepts, principles, and methodologies of one's major or discipline and liberal arts education (i.e., connecting theory to practice).
- To acquire new knowledge in a new setting to enhance classroom education.
- To integrate or synthesize knowledge from diverse disciplines, courses and areas of experience.
- To apply higher order thinking skills (critical thinking, analysis, synthesis, evaluation, complex problem solving) to "real world" situations.

2. General Skill Development Goals

- To develop skill competencies specific to an occupation or profession.
- To expand oral and written communication skills.
- To increase skills for understanding and working with people of diverse backgrounds and cultures and to work effectively within diverse environments.
- To acquire additional interpersonal communication and interaction skills.
- To develop skills to work effectively within formal and informal networks and work cultures.
- To further develop observation, recording and interpretation skills.
- To develop skills needed for effective citizenship.
- To acquire skills in leadership.

3. Personal Development Goals

- To develop self-awareness.
- To clarify one's own values.
- To develop self-reliance and self-confidence.
- To develop and use an ethical perspective.
- To develop career awareness, direction and exploration of vocation

If you develop a learning agreement plan that clearly incorporates learning goals from these categories, your internship should be acceptable to a faculty supervisor and worthy of academic credit.

WRITING A LEARNING AGREEMENT PLAN

At Augsburg, we use the Augsburg Internship Learning Agreement form to structure the academic focus of your internship. It is designed to help you address the following three questions:

1. What do I want to learn and/or what do I think I might learn?
2. How will this learning be acquired or accomplished?
3. How will I reflect on what I learned and demonstrate to others what I learned?

There are two parts to your Learning Agreement plan: the work component and the academic component.

1. The **Work Component** describes your on-the-job tasks, responsibilities and projects. The work component should include a written job description from your on-site work supervisor. This is important for clarification of the expectations of the work supervisor and to make sure that your on-the-job tasks include challenging and meaningful work. This also gives your faculty sponsor an overview of what the learning opportunities are.
2. The **Academic Component** outlines, in detail, how you will use the work experience and expand upon it to make connections to the concepts, theories and practices of your major and your liberal arts general education. The academic component should include a combination of cognitive development, general skill development, and personal and professional development that were outlined earlier. The overall learning agreement plan is completed at the beginning of the internship experience and its purpose is to provide the direction and the process for what you will know, be able to do, and how you will show what you learned by the end of the internship. The academic component is broken down into three main categories for you to develop, plus a timeline.

CATEGORIES OF YOUR ACADEMIC COMPONENT

1. Learning Objectives

Your learning objectives are your learning targets or what you want to learn or be able to do by the end of the internship. After deciding upon the general areas you want to focus on, write your specific learning objectives as clearly and succinctly as you can. Use action verbs to develop your objectives. Some action verbs are: apply, solve, design, develop, present, describe, compile, identify, determine, become familiar with, evaluate, understand, know, produce, implement, explain, analyze, critique, compare.

Following are some general examples of learning objectives in each of the three categories for learning during an internship.

EXAMPLES: Cognitive Development

(By the end of the internship, I want.....)

- To be able to explain various treatment methods for autism spectrum disorders in preschool children.
- To develop a working knowledge of the methods of cost accounting used by this firm.
- To understand the role of the public relations department at the art museum.
- To analyze how public policy at the state level is influenced by interest groups.

EXAMPLES: General Skill Development

(By the end of the internship, I want.....)

- To enhance my counseling and group facilitation skills when leading support groups for teenagers.
- To apply effective writing skills to grant writing.
- To develop and improve my speaking and presentation skills in front of professional groups.
- To apply research skills to the environmental impact study project.
- To understand and incorporate “coaching” sales techniques.

EXAMPLES: Personal Growth and Development

(By the end of the internship, I want.....)

- To identify and compare three entry-level positions I would be qualified for in the field of _____.
- To evaluate my vocation and career goals and plans.
- To set priorities and manage my time efficiently.
- To build my self-confidence in professional settings.

2. Learning Activities & Strategies

After identifying your specific learning objectives, you need to determine **how you will accomplish or make progress toward achieving your objectives**. Ask yourself: What tasks, projects, or assignments will I do? Who are the people I will consult and what resources (written, verbal, etc.) will I utilize? Many of your learning strategies will come from your job tasks, but go beyond your job description. What will you do on your own to enhance your learning and understanding: Read related journals, books, or articles? Interview professionals in the field? Attend business/staff meetings, or a community or board meeting?

For each of your learning objectives, “assign” yourself 3-4 learning activities that relate directly to achieving that learning objective. Students, who are creative, stretch themselves, and go beyond the minimal expectations, tend to gain the most from their internship.

3. Evaluation

After you have determined your learning objectives and strategies, you will need to decide how your learning will be documented, assessed and evaluated. The methods you choose for showing what you learned will supply the evidence to your faculty supervisor that you have achieved or made progress toward what you set out to learn, and provide a basis for grading your internship. Your faculty supervisor and you are free to negotiate how you will show what you have achieved during your internship. You will want to use more than one evaluation method to fully describe what you have learned.

The following methods of evaluation are often used during an academic internship:

- Paper on a specific topic related to your internship.
- Overall, reflective, analytical summary paper.
- Learning journal -- a daily or weekly record of your observations, activities, reflections and analyses, i.e., making connections to your learning objectives.
- Examples of projects or work produced on the job.

- Oral presentation in class, seminar or colloquial.
- Periodic “check-in” meetings with faculty sponsor/supervisor.
- Participation in a concurrent internship seminar
- Site visit with self, faculty supervisor and work supervisor.
- Intern final self-evaluation (required).
- Work supervisor final evaluation (required).
- Final oral presentation/meeting with faculty supervisor.

To organize and showcase your learning, Augsburg recommends that you develop an internship portfolio that is submitted to the faculty sponsor.

For more information or questions about internships for-credit, contact:

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One last thought, since learning is never "final," neither will your Learning Agreement Plan be "completed" in terms of your learning goals and objectives and growing interests and questions. Your learning agreement is a fluid document and can be amended during your internship if new opportunities present themselves or you find that your original learning goals need to be changed.

During your internship, you will probably discover many more opportunities for learning than you ever initially planned. We hope, that by being a self-directed learner throughout the internship experience, you will develop learning skills that can equip you for life-long learning and keep you asking, "What more can I learn?"

One must learn by doing the thing; for though you think you know it, you have no certainty until you try.

- Sophocles
