Assessing the Internship Experience: Practical Application of Knowledge to Support Program Learning Outcomes

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Today fashion internships are under more scrutiny than ever from the U.S. Department of Labor. While the Fair Labor Standards Act requires employees to be paid, there are exceptions when an intern is receiving an educational experience. The specifics of that experience, however, are not well defined for fashion firms, and some doubt the worth of internships (Bellafante, 2012). Despite the controversy, an internship experience featuring substantive work remains an important stepping-stone for the student pursuing a career in fashion. Fashion firms offer experiences to students that cannot be recreated in the classroom. Evaluation of the skills displayed during the internship experience, if measured properly, can be an important assessment tool for fashion programs. A supervisor's review upon an internship's completion allows program faculty to see the quality of a student's skills through the eyes of an unbiased third party. Most importantly, this third party person is an industry professional who should have a good understanding of the current needs and expectations employers will have as they hire new graduates.

Linda Suskie discusses supervisor evaluations in her book *Assessing Student Learning: A Common Sense Guide* (2009, p. 8). She says of the internship experience that "supervisors' ratings of [interns'] performance can be powerful evidence of the overall success of a program in achieving its major learning goals. Rubrics make it easy for supervisors to provide this information." The rubric can easily be integrated into a supervisor's end-of-internship evaluation of the student. Suskie recommends using a ratings scale and/or comments as direct assessment measures (2009). These assessment measures, paired with other direct and indirect assessment tools utilized within the fashion program, can form a comprehensive assessment plan that easily reflects student learning.

Once the program learning goals are set, faculty must decide which of those goals can be measured through the internship experience. When those are determined, an appropriate supervisor evaluation form must be created. Interns at Stephens College are required to use the text *The Fashion Intern* (2010) by Michele Granger. The book includes an employer evaluation that served as the basis for our supervisor evaluation. We have customized it to fit our assessment needs and required it be used at the end of the internship. All supervisor evaluations were tabulated when received and point values were given that were figured into students' grades. We created an assessment spreadsheet and scores from the evaluations were entered into the spreadsheet. Only portions of the evaluations that were tied to assessment were scored. In our method, there were multiple questions that make up a content area such as "work habits." Each question included a ratings scale with 5 being exceptional, 2 below average and 1 meaning that the supervisor did not observe any interactions that met the question criteria. After all of the

information was gathered, benchmarks were set and data was evaluated. Faculty agreed that only ratings of 4 or 5 were acceptable and benchmarks were set to indicate the percent of students we believed should receive these scores on each question. Scores of 1 were precluded, as those signified behaviors that were not observed or expected as part of the internship experience. After all of the data was collected and benchmarks set, the spreadsheet was divided by program major. Any specific question for which the benchmark was not met was evaluated and an action plan was created for the following year. An example of the spreadsheet that was used to collect the data for fashion communication majors is below. This method has worked so well for the fashion program that the Office of Career Services has decided to implement parts of the evaluation to be used for all students at the college that complete an internship beginning in 2013.

         The supervisor's evaluation as a means of assessment is a very beneficial tool that adds additional third party viewpoints to our assessment plan. A well-constructed assessment plan that includes not only internal departmental scores but those of outsiders as well ensures a meaningful, non-biased viewpoint of the skills of program graduates.

FAS496 - Intern Evaluation Assessment 2012 - FCO

5 = N/A (1) on eval - intern didn't experience this and gets 5 points

Last Name	First Name	Major	Work Habits						Knowledge of Work				Human Relations			Personal Attributes				Intern Comparison						Work Quality					Overall Performance				
			A	B	C	D	E	F	A	B	C	D	A	B	C	A	B	C	D	E	AA	A	BA	P	N/A	E	AA	A	BA	U	E	AA	A	U	
		FCO	5	5	4	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	4	4	5	5	5	5	x						5					10				96
		FCO	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	5	5	4	4	4	4	4		x						4				10				83
		FCO	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	x						5					10				100
		FCO	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	x						5					10				99
		FCO	4	5	5	4	4	5	4	4	4	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5		x						4						8		91
		FCO	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5		x					5					10				99
		FCO	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	x						5					10				100
		FCO	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	x						5					10				100
		Average	4.75	4.875	4.75	4.75	4.75	4.75	4.5	4.75	4.75	4.875	4.875	4.875	4.714	4.875	4.875	4.875	4.875																
		Met or Exceeded Criteria (4, 5)	8	8	8	8	8	8	7	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8																
		Did not Meet Criteria (3 & Under)	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0																
		% of Students Meeting Criteria	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	88%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%																

Intern Comparison:
E (Excellent) = 4 (50%)
AA (Above Average) = 5 (38%)
A (Average) = 1 (13%)
BA (Below Average) = 0
P (Poor) = 0
N/A (Never Supervised Intern Before) = 0

Work Quality:
E (Excellent) = 6 (75%)
AA (Above Avg) = 2 (25%)
A (Average) = 0
BA (Below Average) = 0
U (Unsatisfactory) = 0

Overall Performance:
Excellent = 7 (88%)
Above Average = 1 (13%)
Average = 0
Unacceptable = 0

1 = Not observed, 2 = Below Average, 3 = Average, 4 = Above Average, 5 = Exceptional

Work Habits	Knowledge of Work	Human Relations	Personal Attributes
A - Is reliable under pressure	A - Understands systems and procedures commonly used in the fashion industry	A - Exhibits cooperation with co-workers	A - Dresses in an appropriate manner
B - Practices punctuality and good attendance	B - Performs job efficiently	B - Is receptive to supervision	B - Is emotionally mature
C - Accepts criticism constructively	C - Understands and follows instructions	C - Handles customers or vendors tactfully and professionally	C - Shows enthusiasm for job activities
D - Shows consistent quality of work	D - Showed knowledge of department and procedures by end of the internship		D - Exhibits initiative and creativity
E - Demonstrates logical thinking ability			
F - Exhibits decision-making ability			

References

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