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**Innovating the Internship Experience for Business Education Programs**

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***ABSTRACT***

Internships are the building blocks of student potential. They provide the necessary means for students to gain real-life experience and exposure to industry opportunities while learning about themselves and evaluating their areas of interest for the long-term. As such, internships have demonstrated success in students gaining relevant knowledge, skills, and experiences. Furthermore, internships contribute to the development of student professional networks and contribute to improved competitiveness in the job market post-graduation. With several growing markets and increased competition for talent recruitment, institutions must direct efforts and emphasize developing and supporting internship programs and opportunities for students. This panel was intended to begin to build a network of administrators, faculty, and support staff to further identify and promote best practices and collaboration of resources relative to supporting and sustaining internship opportunities for students.

**Keywords**   
internship, NACE standards, employer recognition, career fair, student development

**1 INTRODUCTION**

Internships are the building blocks of student potential. They provide the necessary means for students to gain real-life experience and exposure to industry opportunities while learning about themselves and evaluating their areas of interest for the long-term. As such, internships have demonstrated success in students gaining relevant knowledge, skills, and experiences. Furthermore, internships contribute to the development of student professional networks and contribute to improved competitiveness in the job market post-graduation. With several growing markets and increased competition for talent recruitment, institutions must direct efforts and emphasize developing and supporting internship programs and opportunities for students. Stockton University has designed and developed internship programming and its measures of success from the perspectives of administration, faculty, and the employer. The purpose of this panel session was to discuss, disseminate, and brainstorm designing, supporting, measuring, and sustaining internship programming through critical partnerships. Presenters at the panel discussed their experiences and perspectives on internship programming with the ultimate goal to frame and evaluate their program’s effectiveness, identify structures, systems, and considerations necessary to build a powerful and distinctive program, and share best practices. Several of these areas are highlighted below.

**2 NACE GUIDELINES ON INTERNSHIP CRITERIA AND BEST PRACTICES**

The National Association of Colleges and Employers provide a framework and guidelines for internship programming. These guidelines focus on ensuring internship programming success through providing interns with relevant work, related to their major as a primary focus. Based on student internship success and satisfaction with their internship experience, this work should be challenging as well as recognized by the organization as valuable. As part of student development and career services, university programs can promote greater internship success through partnering with hiring managers and developing criteria that includes providing real work assignments as part of the internship offering. This includes university staff partnering with these hiring managers to review job descriptions, emphasizing the real work assignments as well as develop an employer affiliation agreement with this requirement, communicating frequently with interns, and conducting property/internship checkup visits. The complete list of NACE guidelines can be found at https://www.naceweb.org/.

**3 DEVELOPMENT AND MAINTENANCE OF EMPLOYEER RELATIONSHIPS**

Not all programs require students to complete an internship. In the case of Stockton University’s Hospitality, Tourism and Event Management Studies program, an internship is a graduation requirement. This emphasizes the importance of developing and maintaining relationships with employers to support the longevity of the program as well as build credibility of the quality of student interns that reflect the program. There are several strategies that help to develop and maintain employer relationships. Program administration, staff, and faculty must be active members of the community and express their commitment to these business partnerships. This can include the development of an advisory board in which internship employers can influence curriculum, share their operational challenges and future needs, as well as stay up to date on program enhancements. Internship recognition is also important. An annual employer breakfast as well as an annual advisory board meeting have provided these opportunities as well as to showcase highly successful interns. Lastly, the development of an employer residency program, in which an employer visits the campus to promote opportunities in addition to participation in career fairs, has also proven to be successful.

**4 CAREER FAIRS**

Careers fairs are pivotal to a strong internship foundation. Career fairs are useful for a range of students including those required to obtain an internship or for those that an internship may be optional. This also includes students starting their degree and looking for work experience opportunities, as well as recent graduates looking for full-time employment to find out about potential employers. Employers come to the event ready to hire. Potential employers may include casinos, hotels, social service agencies, law enforcement and heath care businesses and agencies relative to the student population. Many employers list the jobs or internships they have available so students could see the variety of options. Those attending the career fair are encouraged to be prepared for on the spot interviews with their resumes and to ask any questions they wish to prospective employers and take notes on their answer, as well as being able to take any promotional material. Post the event, it is also advised to solicit student feedback.

**5 CONCLUSION**

In order for internship programming to be successful, it requires collaboration between university administration, staff, faculty, and business partners. Developing clear standards and expectations for employer internship requirements as well as provide opportunities for employers to influence university programming provides mutual positive benefits. The integration of several tools including employer toolkits, recognition breakfasts, participation on advisory board meetings, are just some strategies. Defining measures of success from the perspectives of all involved promote greater longevity and satisfaction. For more information and best practices, contact the panelists directly.