

SOME THOUGHTS ON SERVICE LEARNING

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Author of *Studying in Washington: An Guide to Academic Internships in the Nation's Capital*, APSA, ©2001.

SERVICE-LEARNING COURSE OBJECTIVES:

-Recognize the importance of courses being “demand driven”— Consider What can't we do using traditional approaches, and look at service –learning as a potential enhancement.

-Recognize the “flight from academic irrelevance syndrome” and build on it. Many students seek out service learning opportunities out of a perception that traditional courses lack relevance. Rather than bemoaning the fact, we can build on it and in the process challenge students to rigorously analyze their experiences in the context of their academic learning.

(use a reality testing exercise...see *STUDYING IN WASHINGTON*, 5th edition which asks students to compare their experience with that of the traditional literature <www.apsanet.org/pubs/washington.cfm>).

-Recognize multiple potential goals students have when seeking out service learning.

- substantive knowledge
- attitudinal confrontation
- skill development
- low-risk experiential career trials

DEVELOPING ASSESSMENT TOOLS

Students and internship sponsors need clear guidance as to what is expected. The following internship contract could serve as the basis for the initial set of understandings. Clear expectations by all parties reduce the potential for misunderstanding. Many internship programs have the intern, intern supervisor and faculty advisor sign a contract to assure clarity. The contract can serve a number of purposes:

- to clarify the expectations of both the intern and the sponsor
- to establish clear criteria on which the intern will be evaluated

The following contract can be modified for specific situations outlining specific learning goals and or expected written output. (From Stephen Frantzich *STUDYING IN WASHINGTON* (5th edition), Washington D.C. American Political Science Association)

INTERNSHIP CONTRACT

Read BOTH sections before signing the appropriate portion

INTERN SECTION

1. I understand that my internship is an academic opportunity in which I will be required to relate my experiences to relevant academic theories and findings both as an active class participant and in writing. In this dual capacity, I will do my best to balance the competing responsibilities.

2. I will approach my internship professionally and as a job, arriving on time, working expected hours and maintaining appropriate professional ethics. In my job, I will seek increasing levels of tasks, but will contribute to the particular needs of the office that emerge while I am there. If the tasks I am assigned do not move beyond the menial, I will attempt to work out better assignments with my supervisor in a professional manner, seeking the help of the program director if necessary.

My particular commitment is to: hours per week for weeks, beginning

My schedule is:

3. I will maintain regular contact with the program director

4. At the end of the internship, I will depart in a professional manner, recognizing my primary goal of completing my education and paving the way for future interns in my host office.

..... (signature).....(date)

INTERNSHIP SUPERVISOR

1. I understand the placement of an intern in my office is primarily for the educational enhancement of the intern and will be sensitive to the competing demands on him or her. When necessary, I will facilitate appropriate academic tasks assigned to the intern.

2. I will work with the intern to explain both the purposes and methods of accomplishing assigned tasks. I will seek out opportunities for expanding the intern's responsibilities and offering a variety of meaningful tasks.

3. I will help integrate the intern into the office, introducing the intern to colleagues, office procedures and expectations. I will explain the role of the intern to colleagues and encourage that the intern be offered enhancing opportunities.

4. I will maintain contact with the program director to head off impending problems.

5. I will offer a frank, but constructive, personal evaluation of the intern

..... (signature).....(date)

FACULTY ADVISOR APPROVAL

..... (signature).....(date)

A more complete internship contract can be found at <http://muhlenberg.edu/ocdp/internship>

SOME RANDOM OPPORTUNITIES AND CONCERNS

-Building bridges— Use intern placements to open the door for practitioners to come into the classroom

-Think long and hard before requiring service learning. There is a potential trap in promoting “required” volunteerism

-Retaining the political in political science—There is a danger the danger of sanitizing and privatizing service-learning by not allowing student to do their service in partisan and/or political activist groups.