Making the Most of Your Internship Experience

Laying the Foundation
In many ways, an internship is like an independent study. Because the experience takes place outside of the classroom, you as a student have the opportunity to take charge of your learning by developing your own goals and assessing your progress along the way. Students who put significant time and energy into this process often find that they have a more meaningful and beneficial experience.

The LEAD Learning Agreement (LLA) serves as a sort of “syllabus” or learning contract for your internship. In it, you outline where you will be working, who will be supervising you, what your responsibilities will be, as well as your learning objectives. (The LLA can be found in the Internship Packet, available at the CDC front desk).

You are required to develop SIX learning objectives for you experience. There are three different types of learning objectives you will be asked to complete: academic, professional and personal.

- **Academic** learning objectives are those that allow you to further explore or implement concepts you’ve learned in the classroom on the internship site. For example, if you are interning in an educational setting, your goal might be to put into practice a specific teaching technique.

- **Professional** learning objectives are those that are related to your development as a professional, or developing a better sense of the particular field in which you are interning. For example, you may develop a goal of conducting at least five informational interviews with various employees at your internship organization to get a better sense of the opportunities within the field.

- **Personal** learning objectives are those that are designed to help you develop skills for personal growth and enrichment. For example, you may have a goal of learning to better manage your time by balancing school, your internship, and involvement in student groups. Another personal goal might be to overcome shyness and get to know your colleagues at the internship organization better.

The Learning Objectives section of the LLA is structured in a chart format to help you clearly define what your goals are and how you plan to achieve them. Use the SMART acronym when developing your learning objectives to ensure that they have all the characteristics of an effective goal:

- **Specific** – What, exactly, are you hoping to achieve? (Avoid broad, abstract goals such as “become a better communicator”, and aim for specific goals such as “be able to write clear and concise memos.”)

- **Measurable** – What criteria will you use to measure your progress?

- **Attainable** – Is this goal truly within your reach, given your abilities and your time frame?

- **Realistic** – Do you have the skills needed to achieve this goal, and does it fit in with the overall functioning of your internship organization?
Timely – What is the target date for your goal?

Use the following chart to help you as you devise your learning goals:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Objective</th>
<th>Learning Plan</th>
<th>Evidence of Learning</th>
<th>Completion Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do I plan to learn or be able to do?</td>
<td>What are the steps I will take to accomplish my objectives?</td>
<td>How will I show that I learned or did what I said I would?</td>
<td>When will I be able to show this evidence?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Academic Learning Objectives:**
1. What academic concept or theory can you explore or apply?
2. What academic concept or theory do you want to learn more about as a result of this internship?

**Professional Learning Objectives:**
1. What professional skills do you want to enhance or develop?
   a. Oral communication
   b. Written communication
   c. Computer and technical competencies
   d. Interpersonal and cultural competencies
   e. Problem solving and decision making
   f. Teamwork or leadership
   g. Etc...
2. What research skills, ethical standards, or professional protocols can you learn?

**Ideas to consider (each objective may involve several steps):**
1. Read books or articles on topics related to your internship.
2. Observe professionals at your internship site.
3. Schedule meetings with your supervisor or co-worker to discuss issues related to your internship learning objectives.
4. Practice using specific skills on site such as speaking a second language, writing memos, using a computer program or working with customers/clients
5. Attend meetings or training events.
6. Complete a specific project such as writing a report or developing a resource binder for the organization.
7. Develop and administer a survey.
8. Facilitate a meeting, lead a workshop or conduct a focus group.
9. Attend a community event.
10. Write an op-ed piece for a local newspaper or write a letter to your congressman to seek support for issues related to your internship site.

**Ideas to consider:**
1. Keep a reflective journal of your experience on site.
2. Write a research paper related to the issues you work with at your internship site.
3. Create a piece of artwork or creative writing to reflect upon your learning.
4. Develop a web site or lesson plans around the topics you work with at your internship.
5. Achieve positive results on your evaluations.
6. Create a mission statement for yourself as a professional.
7. Write an annotated bibliography of the books and articles you studied while at your internship.
8. Write a project proposal of a suggested change or improvement related to the topics you worked with at your internship site.
9. Create an updated resume or a portfolio that details your learning from your internship.
10. Obtain a letter of recommendation from your site supervisor.

**Guidelines:**
1. Estimate completion dates for the steps of your learning plan.
2. With your faculty supervisor, determine which steps of the learning plan should be submitted for review.
3. Will you complete a “final product” to summarize your work throughout the course of the internship?
Additional Tips for a Successful Experience

Starting off on the right foot

- Have a conversation with your site supervisor to make sure you clearly understand his or her expectations of you and what to do if you have questions or concerns. Make sure they know your schedule (what days/times you will be working and when you will begin/end the internship) as well as when you need to turn in your internship paperwork (LLA, two-week, midterm and final evaluation).

- Schedule regular meetings with your faculty supervisor to discuss your activities and review the progress you are making on your learning objectives. If you cannot meet in person, plan to keep in touch regularly via phone or e-mail.

During your internship

- Observe the organizational culture and do your best to fit-in. How do people dress? Do they take breaks? Are they chatty or do they keep to themselves? When and where do they eat lunch?

- It goes without saying, but it’s important to work hard at your internship. Putting your nose to the grindstone is the ticket. Working hard also means not refusing or complaining about distasteful assignments that come your way, no matter how menial they seem.

- Seek out extra work, new projects. Show your willingness to go beyond what's on the job description for your internship by making a great impression while sharpening your skills.

- Maintain a positive, eager-to-learn attitude. Ask questions. Show that you want to learn the job and understand the company.

- Develop your skills. Learn unfamiliar software programs. Try projects that help you to hone skills you've never used or don't use often.

- Be creative and bring your ideas to the table. Show that you can learn, but also that you can add value.

- Track your contributions and accomplishments. Be sure to keep a record of all the ways you've contributed during your internship.

Wrapping-up

- Schedule a final meeting with your site supervisor to review your experience and thank them for their time. Ask if they would be willing to serve as a reference for you in the future, and be sure to get their business card. Follow-up with a written note or letter thanking them for their time and attention.

- Schedule a final meeting with your faculty supervisor to review your experience and turn in any final assignments. Reflect on what you learned about yourself and talk about next steps in your career planning process.

- Complete the student site evaluation, available to you via Piperline, to share your feedback about your internship site with other students.

- Schedule a meeting with a career counselor for assistance with incorporating your internship into your resume. Discuss what you learned about yourself and next steps in your career planning process (future internships, academic plans, job search, grad school, etc.)