

Planning an Internship Learning Agreement

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

- It provides a framework or structure for the internship, describing how all parties involved will help the student achieve specific learning objectives.
- It serves as a guide and reminder to the student, work supervisor and faculty supervisor as to the academic purpose and activities of the internship course, regarding both the professional concepts 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 widely accepted educational goals for learning that are important to incorporate into any academic internship. Three important categories for learning goals 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 enhance one's classroom education by acquiring new knowledge in a new setting.
- To integrate or synthesize knowledge from a variety of disciplines, courses and experiences.
- 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 that are specific to a particular occupation or profession.
- To improve one's 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 apply practical interpersonal communication and/or group 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.

Developing a learning agreement plan that clearly incorporates learning goals from these categories will help you get the most out of your internship and make it worthy of academic credit.

Creating Your Internship Learning Agreement

The Learning Agreement form will help you to structure the academic focus of your internship experience. 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 main elements to consider when creating your Learning Agreement: the **work component** and the **academic component**.

The **work component** is largely decided by your onsite internship supervisor, and includes on-the-job tasks, responsibilities and projects you will be involved in during the internship. A written job description is always the clearest, helping both you and your onsite supervisor make realistic plans and help determine expectations. It will also help ensure that your on-the-job tasks include challenging and meaningful work. Finally, this also gives your collaborating faculty sponsor an overview of what the learning opportunities of your internship are.

The **academic component** outlines in detail how you will use the internship experience to further your own learning, and connect it to the concepts, theories and practices of your major field and learning you have done in the classroom. For you, the academic component should ideally combine cognitive development, general skill development, and personal development – as proposed in your Learning Agreement. This Learning Agreement is completed before the beginning of the internship experience; its purpose is to provide direction, focus and objectives for you and to outline the process for evaluating what you will know and be able to do, and to demonstrate what you have learned by the end of the internship experience. The academic component is broken down into three main categories for you to develop:

REQUIRED ELEMENTS OF THE 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.

The following are some general examples of internship learning objectives. You may use or adapt these objectives to match your goals, or write your own learning objectives.

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 my chosen field.
- To evaluate my vocation and professional goals and plans.
- To set priorities and manage my time efficiently.
- To build my self-confidence in professional settings.

2. Strategies for achieving Learning Objectives

After deciding upon your learning objectives, you need to decide upon the way you will accomplish or make progress toward achieving your objectives. First, think about the on-the-job tasks, responsibilities and projects you will be involved in during your internship. Many of your strategies will come from your job tasks, but can also come from many different places. Are there people at the job site, apart from your immediate supervisor, who may be able to help you achieve your learning objectives? Are there journals, books or articles that you might read? Are there company or community meetings that you might attend that could broaden the boundaries of your internships? For each of your learning objectives, “assign” yourself two or three activities that relate directly to achieving that objective. Students who are creative, who stretch themselves, and who go beyond the minimum expectations tend to gain the most from the internship experience.

3. Evaluation Methods

After you have determined what your learning objectives will be and decided upon strategies to help you achieve them, you will need to identify how your learning will be evaluated and documented. The methods (you’ll want to use more than one to fully describe what you learned) you choose will give your collaborating faculty member evidence that you have achieved or made progress toward what you set out to learn. You are free to negotiate with your instructor how you will show what you have achieved during your internship.

Examples of evaluation methods used during an academic internship:

- A formal paper on a specific topic related to your internship.
- An overall, reflective, analytical summary essay about the internship experience.
- A journal or blog/vlog -- 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 with other interns.
- Site visit with faculty member and on-site 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, St. Norbert encourages you to develop an internship portfolio that is submitted to your collaborating faculty sponsor.

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

Faith Hagedorn, Administrative Assistant to the Associate Academic Dean.

faith.hagedorn@snc.edu 403-4044

One last thought

Since learning is never truly "completed," be sure to consider your learning agreement a fluid document; it can be amended during your internship if new opportunities present themselves or you find that your original learning goals need to be changed (be sure to talk with your collaborating faculty member if you plan to change your learning objectives).

During the internship experience, you will probably discover many more opportunities for learning than you 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?"