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02A Lesson Proper for Week 1

What is an internship?

Internships have been a part of the landscape of higher education for a long time. In the helping, teaching, and health professions, they are the coin of the realm; virtually no program at the undergraduate or graduate level is without at least one major field experience. Internships are on the rise in some other disciplines as well, including many traditional liberal arts fields. As internships spread to a wider cross-section of disciplines, they are drawing more attention campus-wide.

An internship is a form of experiential learning that integrates knowledge and theory learned in the classroom with practical application and skills development in a professional setting. Internships allow students to gain valuable applied experience and make connections in professional fields they are considering for career paths; and allow employers to guide and evaluate talent (NACE, 2011).

This definition rightly identifies that students in internships make connections between the workplace and their classroom learning while exploring a professional field of interest to them. Similarly, the definition offered by the Council for Standards in Human Service Education (CSHSE) emphasizes the integration of theory and practice as central to the internship experience. Using the terms “fieldwork” and “internship” synonymously, CSHSE (2013) describes the internship in the following way:

Field experience such as a practicum or internship occurs in a human services setting. Fieldwork provides an environment and context to integrate the knowledge, theory, skills, and professional behaviors that are concurrently being taught in the classroom. It must be an integral part of the education process.

A Few Basic Terms



Although internships exist at many colleges and universities, different language is often used to describe the various aspects of the experience and the people associated with it. For example, the term supervisor sometimes refers to a person employed by the placement site and sometimes refers to a faculty or professional staff member on campus. So, at the risk of boring those of you who are very clear about these terms, we take a moment now to be clear about what we mean by them.

* **Intern** - This is the term that refers to you, the student who is at the site to learn through an internship, even though you may not be called an intern on your campus.

* **EXperienced Intern** - This term refers to those of you who bring considerable life experience or prior internship experience to this internship.

* **Placement or Site** - This term refers to the place where you are conducting your internship. Sites can vary quite a bit, ranging from art museums, K-12 schools, universities, social service agencies, large or small businesses, or courthouses, just to name a few. Through the process of finding a placement, you probably are aware of the incredible variety of opportunities that exist in the community.

* **Campus Supervisor(s) or Instructors** - These terms refer to the faculty or professional staff member on your campus who oversees your field placement. These are the people who may have helped you find the placement, who may meet with you individually during the semester, visit you at the site, hold conferences with you and your supervisor, conduct a seminar class for you and your peers, evaluate your performance, or do all of the above. It is possible for more than one person to fill these roles. Even though they may go by different titles on various campuses (internship coordinator, seminar leader, supervising professor, facilitator, and so on), for simplicity's sake we will use campus instructor or campus supervisor to refer to all those roles.

* **Site Supervisor** - Your site supervisor is the person assigned by the placement site to help ensure your learning. This person meets regularly with you, answers your questions, guides you in your work, and gives you feedback on your progress. Most placements assign one site supervisor to one student, although in some cases there may be more than one person fulfilling these functions. Some academic programs use the term field instructor to describe this person to emphasize the educational (as opposed to managerial) nature of the role.

* **Co-Worker** - This term refers to the people who work at your placement, regardless of their title, status, or how much you interact with them. If there are other students at the site, from your school or some other school, they are functioning in the role of a co-worker when you are at the placement site.

* **Clients, Population, and Clientele** - These terms refer to the people who are served by your placement site or with whom the site does business. Given the wide variety of internships, it is not possible to use one term that works in all settings. For example, inhuman or social service settings, the term clients is very common, but the people served are also called customers, consumers, residents, students, or patients, depending in part on the philosophy of the site and the nature of the work. Other organizations, such as advertising agencies or public relations firms, have clients as well, although of a different nature and with different needs. Still, other settings, such as business or retail, use the terms customer or consumer more commonly. We will use the terms clients, population, and clientele to refer to these individuals and groups.



Understanding your internship as developing over time

Although you might think about your internship as one unified experience, you will more likely find that it develops and changes over time, somewhat like a living organism. Nothing is born fully developed, including your internship, so it is helpful and realistic to expect that your fieldwork experience will change as time goes by.

Some writers have suggested that human services internships progress through stages similar to those of the helping process itself, including such stages as exploration, relationship building, and goal setting (Grossman, Levine-Jordano, & Shearer, 1991), while others have suggested stages of internship development that parallel the eight stages of human development described by Erik Erikson, including stages such as developing trust, establishing autonomy, and developing initiative (Kerson, 1994).

The four stages of internship development discussed in the subsequent section of this chapter reflect a synthesis of ideas from some different models. Understanding some of the predictable ways in which your internship is likely to develop and change over time will help you know what to expect and better prepare you to master the challenges of each stage.

Stage 1. Preplacement Stage

The first stage of internship development occurs before you arrive for the first day of work. This stage is critical to the success of your experience because important foundations for your work are laid during this time. Usually the student and the faculty members of the sponsoring academic program work together to decide upon an appropriate field placement. Efforts are made to secure a placement compatible with the student's learning needs. Once a positive contact has been made with an organization, you, the student, are responsible for scheduling an appointment with your field supervisor. In this meeting, your supervisor will be particularly interested in hearing about your interests and learning needs, and you will both try to assess whether that particular internship site is a good fit for you.

If you both see the placement as appropriate and workable, the agency begins to make preparations for your fieldwork. Your field supervisor will plan for your arrival by giving thought to such issues as the types of assignments to give you and the location of a workspace for you. Colleagues, and in some cases even clients, will be informed and prepared for your impending arrival. As you approach the internship, you too will be making necessary preparations. Clearing your schedule of any responsibilities that could interfere with your internship, engaging in any reading that might prepare you for your responsibilities, as well as more mundane activities, such as pulling together an appropriate wardrobe, are all essential parts of your preparation.

Stage 2. Initiation Stage

As you meet new people and become acquainted with the organization, you will probably experience a range of emotions, including excitement, anxiety, and anticipation. With this emotional intensity can come a burst of energy and eagerness to dig in and get started on the work of learning by doing. In contrast, as discussed earlier,



supervisors and agency administrators may take a more measured approach to start the internship. There is often reading and observation that they wish you to do before you become more involved.

In the initiation stage, your supervisor will also try to assess more fully your strengths and limitations to make appropriate assignments for you. Although students vary in their readiness for independent work during the internship, many express a need for structure and direction during the initiation stage of the internship. An orientation to the agency, a schedule of meetings that you might attend, and a set of tasks that you are expected to accomplish are particularly helpful during this time. If you find that your needs for structure and focus are not being met, tactfully approach your supervisor to discuss this. Just as your internship will develop and change over time, your relationship with your supervisor will do so as well.

Chatting with various staff members, learning more about their work and interests, and sharing information about yourself is all part of forging the relationships that will support you throughout your experience. Of particular importance, of course, is developing mutual trust and a positive relationship with your field supervisor. Direct, open communication is essential to building this trust. The process of establishing your learning agreement is one of the most fundamental tasks of the initiation stage and is an excellent vehicle for establishing open communication with your supervisor about your interests and goals in the internship. Also essential in building trust during the initiation stage is proving your trustworthiness by being reliable, prompt, and eager to assume responsibility.

Stage 3. Working Stage

As relationships are developed, the learning agreement completed, and expectations voiced and negotiated, the internship begins to move into a third stage, which might be referred to as the working stage. During this stage, less energy is invested in establishing relationships and negotiating mutual expectations and more energy is invested in achieving your learning goals and accomplishing the organization's work. The trust that has developed between you and your supervisor by this stage generally results in your supervisor allowing you more autonomy and delegating more responsibility to you. Also, by this time in the internship, both you and your supervisor have achieved a better understanding of your strengths and your learning needs.

Another characteristic of the working stage is that daily activities settle into more of a routine. You have acclimated to the agency culture and learned its procedures. Earlier anxieties are reduced and you may generally feel more relaxed and confident. This increased comfort and confidence, in conjunction with a greater understanding of the learning opportunities available within the organization and your supervisor's increased knowledge of your learning needs, might result in some renegotiation of your learning agreement at about midterm in your internship. At this stage in the experience, both you and your field supervisor are in a better position to plan and implement learning experiences specific to your particular needs.

In the working stage of the internship, the student engages more deeply in the process of learning to be a professional. Student learning during this stage may focus on such issues as developing practice skills, learning about agency administration, writing needed materials, documenting various kinds of work, developing professional responsibility, learning to use supervision, and learning to juggle multiple tasks effectively. As a result, the working stage can be an exciting, challenging, and deeply satisfying time in the internship.



Stage 4. Termination Stage

The internship shifts into its final stage when the student and supervisor begin to anticipate and plan for the end of the internship. New assignments are not as freely given due to time constraints. Either the work that the intern is currently doing must be completed, or plans must be made to transfer responsibility to other workers. As you bring the work of your internship to a close, you must say goodbye to supervisors, colleagues, and clients. Depending upon the nature of these relationships, this can be a time of great emotional intensity. At the same time, however, the termination stage can also be a period of equally great satisfaction and even pride.

The final stage of the internship is also a time for reflection. You might think about such questions as: How well did I perform in this internship? What have I accomplished here? What have I learned? What do I have regrets about? What do I value and appreciate about this internship? How has my professional identity been shaped by this experience? Where will I go from here in my professional development? Such reflection is a positive and valuable aspect of your experience and will help you to engage more thoughtfully in the formal evaluation process with your field supervisor that occurs toward the end of this stage.

Maintaining good Work habits

In the working world, there are some generally recognized commonsense traits of a good worker in virtually any environment. These traits include:

- arriving to work on time;
- staying at work for the full day;
- coming to work early and/or staying late occasionally, as needed;
- attending work reliably;
- using good grammar;
- dressing appropriately for the position;
- using time productively;
- accepting assigned tasks graciously and without complaint;
- being pleasant, energetic, and alert;
- relating cordially to co-workers;
- writing well;
- being flexible; and
- carrying out responsibilities reliably, promptly, and efficiently.

Supervisors value these behaviors in their employees in any type of organization, and human service organizations are no exception. Although you are probably not being paid for your internship, you should treat it just as you would a very desirable job. If you are about to complete your academic program, your supervisor will be evaluating your performance concerning your readiness to handle an entry-level position in an organization. It should be your goal to demonstrate that you are fully prepared to assume such a position and handle it well. If you enter your internship consistently demonstrating the behaviors mentioned above, you are well on your way to at least a satisfactory performance, possibly even an outstanding one.



A Guide to the Tools for Staying Engaged

Active engagement with that journey is key for getting the most from your internship. Maintaining this active stance and regaining it when you lose it, will make a substantial difference in your experience. These essentials include an awareness of the assets and challenges you bring to the journey, information you can easily get if you don't have it, skills you need to start developing, attitudes you need to cultivate, and resources you need to take an empowered stance.

- **Essential Attitudes and Values**

Many professions have lists of essential attitudes and values.

- o *Being open-minded* - You approach an internship with at least some preconceived ideas about the profession, the work you will be doing, your likes and dislikes, and so on.
- o *Being flexible* - We hope that you and your campus support people have planned your internship carefully; if so, the internship site is clear with you about what will happen, when, and with whom. The more flexible you can be, the better you will be able to respond.
- o *Being receptive* - Consistent with the principles of high impact practice, there are multiple opportunities for feedback in an internship and you must be receptive to constructive feedback on your work. If you are not, you will surely make a bad impression, but more importantly, you will miss out on great learning opportunities. If you think of feedback as criticism, you are apt to become defensive. If you react defensively, you will be less likely to get feedback in the future, and even less likely to benefit from it.
- o *Being open to diversity* - You will likely meet people whose cultural backgrounds are different from your own, influenced by factors including race, class, gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation.

- **Essential Skills**

Your attitudes form a solid base for you to move forward, while your skills are the hands-on tools you will need.

- o *Reflection* - is a fundamental concept in any kind of experiential education activity, and the internship is no exception. To turn your experience into a learning experience, you need to stop, recall events, and analyze and process them.
- o How to keep a journal - journal keeping will give you a way to see yourself growing and changing. It also forces you to take time regularly to reflect on what you are doing. A well-kept journal is a gold mine to be drawn on for years to come. It becomes a portfolio of the experience as well as a record of the journey.
 - *Make Time Again*, perhaps the most important thing you can do for your journal is to allot sufficient time to do it. As you plan your days and weeks, leave at least 30 minutes after each day at your internship to write.
 - *Adapt It to Your Needs*, If you have learning challenges that make it impossible or difficult for you to write this type of assignment.



- *Work in Cyberspace*, Advances in web-based technology such as Blackboard make it easy to send journal entries back and forth. If you do not have access to these technologies, e-mail can work just fine.
- *Keep It Safe*, If you do decide to keep a journal, make sure you are very clear with your instructor, supervisor, and clients about the intent of the journal and issues of confidentiality.
- *Choose a Structure*, Your instructor may have forms and techniques that you are required to use.

o Processing techniques - Some techniques are specific to a discipline, such as “verbatim” in pastoral counseling or “process recording” in social work.

o *Communication Skills* - There is a wide range of such skills, and we cannot cover them all here. Once again, we have chosen two that we believe are essential for an internship.

o Listening well - Active listening means giving the other person your full attention and making sure that you understand what the person is trying to tell you.

o Giving effective feedback - Effective feedback is specific and concrete, as opposed to vague and general; it should refer to very specific aspects of the situation being discussed. It is descriptive rather than interpretive.

• **Essential Personal Resources**

The most valuable assets you have for engagement in this journey of learning are what you personally bring to it. By this, we mean the wealth of your life experiences, aspirations, knowledge, hopes, expectations, attributes, and relationships.

o *Making the most of your learning style* - Learning style means the way that you most effectively take in and process information, and knowledge of your learning style is critical for you, your campus instructor, and your site supervisor (Birkenmaier & Berg-Weger, 2010). If you are involved in an internship that is not well matched to your learning style and strengths, you can still learn, but something needs to give. You may be able to take steps to change or augment the learning experience so that it is better suited to your strengths.

o *Understanding your life context and commitments* - Your life context consists of all the other things going on in your life in addition to the internship. That context will vary according to your family situation, your social life, and the configuration of your academic program.

o *Accessing your support systems* - Staying engaged requires that you balance all the demands we were just discussing in a good support system; these are the people who give you what you need to get through life's challenges. Your support system will be an important part of helping you meet the demands of your internship and the other demands in your life.

Regardless of the nature of your internship, your support system is made up of many different people, and you will need different kinds of support at different times. Here is a partial list of the kinds of support you might need. You may be able to add to it (Seashore, 1982).

- * *Listening* - Sometimes you just want someone who will listen to you without criticizing or offering advice. Think of these people as your “sounding boards.”



- * *Advice* - On the other hand, sometimes you need sound advice. Think of these people as your “personal consultants.”
- * *Praise* - There are times when what you need most is for someone to tell you how great you are. Think of these people as your “fans.”
- * *Diversion* - Some people are friends you can count on to go out and have fun with. Think of these people as your “playmates.”
- * *Comfort* - When we were children and we became ill, there was nothing we wanted more than pure comfort. Think of the people in your life who comfort you as your “chicken soup people.”
- * *Challenge* - There are times when a challenge is the last thing you want. Think of these people as your “personal coaches.”
- * *Companionship* - It is good to have people in your life with whom you feel so comfortable that you can do anything, or nothing, with them. Think of these people as your “buddies.”
- * *Affirmation* - Another kind of support comes from people who have some of the same struggles that you do. Knowing that others feel the way you do, even if they can’t change it, can be very helpful.

• Essential Knowledge

In this section, we will introduce the sorts of knowledge you may need as well as some issues you could encounter in your role as an intern that could have professional, ethical, and/or legal implications.

- o *Cultural competence* - The term *culture* is a shared and commonly accepted set of beliefs, practices, and behaviors by Donna Gollnick and Philip Chinn (2005). As such, culture does not simply refer to race, ethnicity, and nationality, but also characteristics such as gender, social class, and sexual orientation.
- o *Knowing about your site* - You need to know where the site is located and your options for getting back and forth. You also need to know the norms of dress and behavior at your placement site. Finally, you need to understand the rules and conventions about confidentiality.
- o *Knowing what is expected* - There must be a clear, preferably written, and mutual understanding among all parties—yourself, the site, and the academic program—about what your start and end dates will be, your hours, those days (if any) that you will not be there (for example, during semester breaks) or that the site will be closed, and your basic responsibilities. There should also be a clear understanding of any other conditions or requirements of you, the internship site, or the academic program.
- o *Knowing your resources* - Most interns have assigned supervisors on-site, and we believe that supervision is a critical component of a successful internship. As you begin your work, you should know who will be supervising your work, providing you with feedback, and answering your questions. You may also have a campus staff or faculty member who visits you at your site; reads your journal, papers, and assignments; and provides you with feedback. Many campuses require liability insurance coverage for all students who are involved in off-site learning, such as internships, service-learning, course-based practica, and co-op education.



o *Important legal and ethical issues* - There are some aspects of your internship that you may encounter early on and could necessitate discussion, usually with your supervisors or your co-workers.

The following list lays the groundwork for knowledge about your role as an intern and the three related issues of academic integrity, competence, and supervision.

- * *Academic integrity issues* include a quality field site, responsible acceptance and learning contracts, and a seminar class that ensures a “safe place” for reflective discussions (Rothman, 2002).
- * *Competence issues* include knowing your limitations and finding a balance between challenging work and a realization that you have exceeded your level of competency. It is important that you know the limits of your skills and seeks help as needed (Gordon & McBride, 2011; Taylor, 1999, p. 99).
- * *Supervision issues* include the assignment of an appropriate supervisor who knows how to supervise interns in a particular setting and can appropriately deal with such complex issues as client abandonment, the dynamic of attraction in the supervisory relationship, and quality evaluations of the intern.

o *Personal safety* - In our experience, some interns worry when there is no realistic cause for concern, and there are interns who perceive no risk—and hence take no precautions—when the risk, while manageable, is very real. Whether you have these concerns or not, you must make sure that you assess your level of risk and develop a plan to minimize it, and that you seek help with this crucial task.

o *Stages of an Internship (DSI-2)* - The four developmental stages of an internship—Anticipation, Exploration, Competence, and Culmination—reflect your phenomenological experience while you are learning. Each stage of an internship brings with it certain challenges. When interns engage in those challenges they meet them head-on, continually empowering themselves as they resolve challenges in productive and proactive ways.

• **Essentials for Empowerment**

Next, we identify five sources of personal power, combining knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values, that will ensure the vitality and endurance you need to remain engaged and make your way through the challenges of learning experientially in your internship. They are the powers of positive expectations, perspective, discussion, humor, language, and mindfulness—which, if used effectively, will empower you in the ways you go about your work.

o *Positive expectations* - This self-fulfilling prophecy, as it's come to be known, occurs when people live up to the labels and expectations of others. What we expect of others is in fact what we get because of how we treat others. In your internship, what you expect of your supervisor, co-workers, community leaders, clientele, and others will affect how you interact with them and, in turn, how they work with you. So, too, will their expectations of you.

o *Keeping perspective* - We all are prone to blind spots because we bring ourselves in its entirety to bear on our perspectives. In our seminar classes, we use exercises that demonstrate that not everyone perceives illustrations similarly—case in point the glass that is half-filled or half-empty. In your internship, using the



power of your perspectives to question your possible blind spots and how they can contribute to biases, prejudices, or oppressive actions will make the difference between an empowering experience and a disempowering one.

- o *Using discussion* – Discussions allow perspectives of situations to be brought into the open and talked about. Confrontations can set up turf and battle lines that are difficult to rise above and even more difficult to move beyond. Discussions, on the other hand, allow you to work with your supervisor to address the issues and develop realistic resolutions. If you think these sorts of sensitive discussions will be difficult for you, ask your campus instructor or supervisor to create scenarios for you and your peers to role play so that you can move beyond the confrontation
- o *Using humor* - Humor used appropriately has been shown to lift us above feelings of fear, despair, and discouragement. It helps us cope, especially with anxiety, and gives us strength to get through adversity; it keeps us “in balance” when all seems to be falling apart. Its physiological benefits have been well documented: It’s good medicine for the heart and the mind. It heightens and brightens mood, releases tensions, and leaves us feeling uplifted, encouraged, and empowered. Very importantly, it allows us to transcend predicaments, be flexible, and see alternative ways of looking at situations. It allows us to deal with high stress that we can’t escape from by making fun of it, removing us from our pain, and providing us the strength we need to get through difficult times.
- o *Awareness of language* - The language we use to describe our experiences is often a reflection of how we feel about the experience. However, some theorists see this dynamic in reverse, maintaining that the language we use to describe an experience affects how we feel about it, which can in turn affect our behavior. Psychologists Robert Kegan and Lisa Lahey have argued that the way we speak about work has an impact not just on our experience but our performance (2001).
- o *Keeping mindful* - Mindfulness is a centuries-old practice central to contemplative traditions, poets, and religions such as Buddhism. Mindfulness meditation is described as the capacity to be fully present at the moment, that is, to pay attention to what is going on in the actual moment in time, without allowing our thoughts to drift to the past, to the future, or other aspects of the present. Mindfulness is being used more and more in mainstream health care in this country because of the growing evidence that it can increase our enjoyment in life, expand our capacity to cope, and possibly improve our health, emotionally as well as physically (Schatz, 2004). Mindfulness meditation can be learned on your own or by taking a brief course on your campus, through your local hospital, or at the local community center.

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