



INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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INDUSTRY-SPECIFIC INTERNSHIPS

Of all the changes that have taken place in my brief teaching career, the most influential and tradition-changing has been the increase in corporate-sponsored programs with internships. Beginning in the late eighties with an automotive parts program and a Toyota program, corporate-sponsored programs and internships on the Oklahoma State University-Okmulgee campus have increased rapidly. In the past five years, corporations, companies, professional associations, and participating dealerships have directly influenced how education occurs on our campus. These programs not only provide better employment opportunities for graduates, but provide employers with technologically advanced employees who have completed an Associate in Applied Science degree.

Corporate Involvement

Corporations currently involved in internship programs on our campus are Caterpillar, Chrysler, Ditch Witch, Ford, Freightliner, General Motors, Komatsu, Nissan, and Toyota. In addition to these national companies, the Gas Processors Association (natural gas) has implemented an internship program. The air conditioning and refrigeration program has two internship programs: one operates on a half-trimester schedule while the other offers students a full trimester internship in their fifth trimester. Computer Systems Technology has three areas of specialty which require a full trimester internship. In addition, two diesel programs, Fluid Power Technology (hydraulics and pneumatics) and Heavy Service Technology, train technicians for companies who need a specialist or do not currently have an internship program.

Some corporate participants have multiple dealerships and have interns working at more than one branch; examples include J.A. Riggs Caterpillar, ATC Freightliner (over-the-road trucks) and Darr Caterpillar. Another corporate sponsor, Ditch Witch (ditching and trenching equipment), has interns in California, North

Carolina, Louisiana, and Oklahoma; Komatsu (heavy equipment) has interns in Kansas, Oklahoma, Alabama, Georgia, Ohio, and Texas; Ford and General Motors have interns in Kansas, Missouri, Oklahoma, and Arkansas; Chrysler and Toyota have interns in Oklahoma, Arkansas, Missouri, Kansas, Louisiana, and Texas. Nissan, with only about half a dozen programs nationwide, has interns in Oklahoma, Arkansas, Missouri, Kansas, Colorado, Tennessee, Louisiana, and Texas. A newly added program, Natural Gas Compression, has interns in Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico, and Missouri.

How Internships Work

Internship programs, as they are organized currently on our campus, divide a student's time between a participating dealership or company and campus classes. Most interns spend 7 1/2 weeks (1/2 trimester) on campus taking their specialty classes and general studies classes; at the end of that period, they report to their participating dealership or company for the remaining 7 1/2 weeks of the trimester. Since OSU-Okmulgee is on a trimester system, students work and attend school year-round. As programs are added, the school adds additional classes, allowing staggered starting dates for internship groups. The Caterpillar I group, for instance, is on campus during the first half of the trimester while the Caterpillar II group will not arrive until midterm. Rotating groups of interns allows maximum usage of classrooms and instructors; additionally, students are consistently serving internships in a variety of locations.

Interns and participating companies read and sign a mutual agreement outlining the responsibilities for both parties. The agreement also specifies a beginning and ending internship employment date, a beginning rate of pay, and includes an intern evaluation form for the employer. As part of the internship, most programs require students to keep a daily log of activities and make periodic reports to their instructors as well as writing a detailed internship report—a narrative of their experiences during that particular work period. Stu-



dents, as part of their education and work experience, are expected to assume the duties of a full-time employee and have the basic required tools needed for their job.

In turn, companies assign students to a mentor who oversees the intern's work and offers technical assistance throughout the internship. The agreement also asks companies to provide students with tasks and duties which will reinforce their most recent experience on campus and provide them with positive learning experiences. Participating dealers and companies are asked to provide instructors with regular evaluations of students and their progress. This cooperative agreement between the school, the student, and the participating company has worked well and is very effective in producing high-quality technicians for companies who require more technologically advanced employees.

Corporate Advisory Councils

Advisory council members, composed of industry representatives, help faculty and department heads of technical departments maintain currency in their respective fields. As advisors, they keep departments informed on technology updates, provide industry information, furnish contacts for potential placement of interns, and provide feedback on the effectiveness of the training provided by the school. In addition, advisory council members often sponsor students and furnish training equipment for the program.

Corporate Training Equipment

Educating well-trained technicians for specific industries would be very difficult without equipment, current information, and training aids. An added benefit for the school is the teacher training furnished by the participating corporations. During the 7 1/2 weeks students are on internship, faculty visit those locations, recruit new students and, most importantly, have time to receive factory training on the newest equipment and systems. The training aids and teacher training are major investments on the part of corporate sponsors; in return, however, the school trains students with the most recent technology and then returns those students to sponsors and dealers as highly trained technicians.

The most visible internship programs and training equipment on campus are in the automotive and diesel programs. In the automotive department, for example, Ford, General Motors, Chrysler, Toyota, and Nissan furnish automobiles and automotive components to students for training purposes. In the diesel department, Freightliner, Ditch Witch, Caterpillar, and Komatsu also furnish equipment.

General Studies Classes for Interns

Writing classes for industry-specific interns require more sections than any other general studies class in the students' degree programs. The teaching load for internship writing classes is divided among the English teachers. Other general studies faculty teach half-trimester classes in speech, history, government, business math, college algebra, psychology, ethics, introduction to business, and general physical science. Most programs require technical writing; a few programs require freshman composition. Lecture time is very limited in the half-trimester writing classes, so most instructional time is spent completing assignments in a computer classroom.

Students must become more responsible for their own learning. Limited class time and increased student responsibility are great motivators. Students who fail a class are out of the scheduled rotation; they may have to take a night class later on or leave the internship program altogether. Not surprisingly, enrollment and attendance are more consistent among these students than among the general student population.

Final Comments

As the number of internship programs and classes increase, departments and teachers are having to rethink the way instruction is presented. In addition, schedules have to be reworked and traditional teaching assignments dismantled. Traditional 15-week trimesters are still with us, but the complexion of teaching at OSU-Okmulgee has changed dramatically in the past five years. Changes will continue to occur because the internship programs are so effective and so are popular with students and businesses alike.

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