ACADEMIC INTERNSHIPS

An academic internship is a supervised work experience combined with a structured academic learning plan directed by a University of Vermont faculty member or a faculty-staff team in which a faculty member is the instructor of record, for which academic credit is awarded. Academic credit may be awarded if the learning that takes place in the internship experience satisfies the criteria listed in this policy.

The focus of this policy is on academic internships. Academic internships may be distinguished from other forms of experiential learning. The following are not explicitly addressed in this policy, either because they are handled according to existing protocols or because they are not currently offered at the University: cooperative education (co-op); student teaching, practicums, and clinical training experiences in professional programs; service learning experiences, and student research. Where one of these experiences is gained through an academic internship, this policy applies to it. For example, if a service learning experience may be gained through an academic internship, the experience is considered service learning and internship simultaneously, and this policy applies to it.

Need for a Policy

There are two reasons to have such a policy. First, internships address important learning outcomes. College graduates today must combine content knowledge with the ability to apply, extend and test that knowledge in order to understand complex issues and address real-world challenges. The ability to integrate and apply knowledge can be developed by encouraging students to take part in internships (and other forms of experiential education), and by offering effective guidance, support, and feedback during the process. Second, a university-wide policy for awarding academic credit for internships at the undergraduate level is necessary in order to set forth the minimum requirements that ensure learning and academic rigor as well as equitable treatment of students across academic units. Such a policy also provides clarity for students, faculty members, advisors, and employers.

Flexibility for Academic Units

Academic units have the freedom to design specific curricula and guidelines for such credit-bearing experiences, but those guidelines should conform to the minimum requirements set forth in this policy. For example, academic units may choose to limit the number of internship credits allowed or specify a number of credits, particular coursework or a minimum GPA before a student is eligible for internships. Moreover, as stated earlier, other forms of experiential learning are not affected by this policy.

Procedural and Legal Matters

The Career Center keeps updated forms and procedures online, and faculty members, staff, student, and employers are strongly encouraged to review these legal guidelines and make use of these tools and procedures in considering an internship. The University's Internship Coordinator, housed in the Career Center, is available for consultation on these procedures.

CRITERIA FOR AWARDING CREDIT

Any internship experience for which a student receives academic credit must include the following components:

1. Appropriate student preparation. The student should have the academic preparation that allows the student to apply, extend and test knowledge in order to understand complex issues and address real-world challenges in the proposed internship experience. In addition, the student's academic supervisor may require the student to engage in a program of readings or other work prior to or concurrently with the internship in order to ensure the learning to be gained from it.

2. Support and supervision from a faculty member, advisor or mentor. The student's internship experience must be guided and evaluated by a UVM faculty member or staff member working in concert with a faculty instructor of record ("academic supervisor") to ensure an appropriate balance of challenge and support during the process. The academic supervisor should provide the student regular feedback on progress in the internship and on the demonstration of learning and is solely responsible for issuing a grade upon completion.

3. Work experience capable of advancing learning. Work that is only routine, does not engage the student's academic preparation or advance the student's learning goals is not appropriate for an academic internship. The internship itself must engage the student in an on-site or remote work experience of sufficient depth, complexity and engagement that the student's learning goals (discussed below) may be achieved. A memorandum of understanding agreed to by the student, the University, and the internship site should reflect this understanding.

4. Sufficient length. Credit is not granted for completion of a certain number of hours of work. Demonstration of learning must also take place. Nonetheless, an internship must be long enough to allow for this learning: a minimum number of work and study hours per credit earned is required. In addition, these hours should be spread over several weeks so that there is sufficient time for students to reflect on and absorb what they are learning. Note that the following indicates a minimum number of hours; the requirement may be higher in particular departments.

- Each credit requires a minimum of 40 hours. For example, 3 credits require a minimum of 120 hours, or at least 8 hours per week during a 15-week semester or 10 hours per week during 12 weeks in the summer.
- Ordinarily, no more than six credits of internship credit may be granted for work with a single employer during the semester or summer.

- Typically, a student taking a credit-bearing academic internship will also take other courses during the internship semester. The time devoted to the internship should not be so much that it interferes with the student carrying a full-time course of study. Ordinarily, an internship assignment should not exceed 20 hours per week unless the student is not taking classes full time, as during the summer. Usually, unpaid interns work 8 to 10 hours per week.

5. Articulation of learning goals. The student, in consultation with the academic supervisor must identify a set of intended learning goals to be achieved through the internship process. These must be captured in a document, such as a learning contract, syllabus, or project design, that expresses the connection between the work experience, the desired learning to be achieved, and an identified product(s) that will demonstrate that the learning has occurred (see below), and indicates the means of assessment. This document should be specific enough to prepare and guide the student for effective learning, but also be flexible enough to allow for the unplanned opportunities that may arise in a workplace.

6. Demonstration of learning. Academic credit is not granted for the work experience itself. It is granted for academic learning of sufficient academic rigor and elaboration that takes place in connection with the internship. Learning is demonstrated in two ways. (a) By means of work products that show the application, deepening or extension of academic concepts (such as laboratory tests, handbooks, posters, forecasts, software, hardware, designs, studies, surveys, presentations, reports, plans, budgets, films, websites and so on) and in writing describing these. (b) By means of reflection on the internship experience showing what was learned and how this knowledge relates to prior and future academic learning. This reflection and synthesis may be shown in writing or other ways (in an essay, report, presentation or talk, for example). Students may demonstrate learning and reflection on their experience in a variety of ways, but the details of this requirement should be agreed upon in advance with the academic supervisor and included in the learning goals document, with mutually agreed revisions being possible.

7. Prior approval. Academic credit is granted when learning goals, the means for their demonstration, and appropriate supervision are settled prior to the initiation of the internship work experience. However, it may be appropriate to add detail to learning goals and make them final after the internship begins in order to permit consultation with those at the internship site. In any case, credit is not granted retroactively.

GRADING

A student taking internships may receive a letter grade or be given a Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory grade, as the offering department determines is appropriate.

PAYMENT

Payment for an internship does not affect the granting of academic credit unless there are well-known professional standards mandating otherwise.