

Agricultural Internship Program Administration

Richard H. Munson

Abstract

Agricultural internships effectively provide practical experience for students with non-agricultural backgrounds. While the reasons for internships are generally well-understood, few teachers are experienced in the overall administration of internship programs. Topics relating to record-keeping forms, evaluations, assignment of credit hours, assignment of grades, selection of internship stations, on-the-job visitations, and employer recognition are discussed in this paper. Guidelines presented should be useful for beginning programs or programs under review or revision.

Introduction

Internships in agriculture have become increasingly popular and are an effective method of exposing inexperienced students to various agricultural professions. In addition to providing experience that helps students become more employable, internships often provide students with their first exposure to the "real world" of agriculture. For most the experience is enjoyable, while a few realize that they are not really interested in agriculture. For all, the experience is enlightening.

Most persons (students, employers, and educators) who have been associated with internships readily express the belief that internships are highly valuable to the student as well as the industries they serve (2,4,5). Others point out that good internship experiences frequently lead to offers of full-time employment for graduating students (2,3,5).

In order to maximize benefits and minimize problems associated with an internship program, it is critical that the program be administered in an orderly and professional manner. Most persons understand the philosophical basis for internships while few are expert in the day-to-day administration of such a program. Fog (1) mentions briefly the requirement of completion of monthly reports by students and the fact that grades are assigned on the basis of three employer and three student reports. However, few other details are given. This paper defines more clearly an overall administrative program for agricultural internships.

ADMINISTRATIVE REQUIREMENTS

Some of the more important administrative requirements in an effective internship program are shown in Table 1. A discussion of each topic should be helpful to persons involved in beginning internship programs.

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There are two basic administrative documents which contain all the information pertaining to the student, the employer, and the actual internship itself. Perhaps the most important document is the internship agreement. This is usually a written gentlemen's agreement (normally not a legal document) between the student, the employer, and the faculty advisor. It sets forth in as much detail as possible the activities in which the student will participate. This section should be evaluated critically by the faculty advisor so that the student receives a broad exposure to the operations typical of the business. Unfortunately, some employers will use student interns for repetitious and unskilled labor, such as unloading trucks or hoeing weeds for the entire internship period. The internship agreement also sets forth the hours and days of work, the hourly wage, and whether or not overtime will be paid. A well-conceived internship agreement will reduce the occurrence of problems relating to the actual job.

The second general administrative document is the first form completed after the beginning of the internship. It may be called a tenth day report or a first week report. It serves to inform the faculty advisor of the student's address and telephone number while on the internship and to handle any initial problems with the internship. In addition, the report should include complete directions to the intern's place of employment in the form of a map. This makes it considerably easier for the faculty advisor to locate the student for an on-the-job visit.

The third administrative requirement is student self-evaluation. Periodically during the internship the student should be given an opportunity to evaluate his or her progress in learning new skills and improving old ones. The form may include spaces for listing the tasks the student has performed during the rated period and an evaluation of his or her proficiency in these tasks. The form should be completed by the student and verified by the employer. Several student self-evaluation

TABLE 1. Administrative Requirements for an Agricultural Internship Program.

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| I. | Administrative Records |
| II. | Student Self-evaluation |
| III. | Employer Evaluation |
| IV. | Writing or Presentation Requirements |
| V. | Assignment of Credit Hours |
| VI. | Assignment of Grades |
| VII. | Selecting and Approving Internship Stations |
| VIII. | On-site Visitation |
| IX. | Recognizing Employer Participation |
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reports will be completed on a weekly, monthly, or quarterly basis, depending on the length of the internship.

The student will also be evaluated by the employer. Employer evaluations of interns are usually completed less frequently than student self-evaluations in order to lessen the administrative burden on the employer. These evaluations serve to inform the faculty advisor of the intern's performance and help the advisor assign a grade for the internship. Rated attributes may include, but are not limited to, any or all of the following: attendance, punctuality, general attitude, thoroughness or quality of work, quantity of work, acceptance of constructive criticism, initiative and responsibility, personal appearance, cooperation with fellow workers, work speed, physical attributes in terms of appropriateness for the industry, and technical competence. Rating categories range from superior or outstanding to poor or unacceptable. Employer evaluations should **remain confidential** with only the employer and faculty advisor seeing them. Employer evaluations may be completed monthly, quarterly, or at the mid-point and end of the internship.

A brief word about the actual forms is appropriate at this point. Carbonless or "no carbon required" (NCR) forms with instructions for the distribution of copies are very easy to handle and can be produced by most printing companies or university printing facilities. However, until you are satisfied with the content and layout of the forms, photocopied forms with carbon paper inserts will be more cost-efficient. Once the evolution of your forms is complete, the more expensive "NCR" forms are usually justified.

Another important aspect of an internship program is the requirement for the intern to complete a written report or to make an oral presentation on their internship experience for their peers, or both. These requirements add to the academic value of the internship but, more importantly, they serve as a very effective recruiting tool for potential student interns. If a student has had a particularly good experience and does a good job on his or her presentation, many other students will likely become enthused about internships. If a written report is required, the student must be given explicit instructions detailing what is to be included in the report. For example, if a student is working in a production nursery he or she should find out about the overall fertilization or insect and disease control program at the nursery. A student on a dairy farm should know about daily, weekly, or monthly milk production totals. By giving the student rather explicit instructions he or she will be more likely to complete a satisfactory report and gain more knowledge from the experience.

The question of how many credit hours to award for an internship is a difficult one to answer. There are no magic formulas. One has to arrive at a total which is

consistent with the effort expended and the knowledge gained. As a general rule, most internships range from three to six months in duration. Programs on a semester system usually grant three to six credit hours for internships of this length. Programs on a quarter system normally give six to nine credit hours for the same length of time. However, internships completed on a part-time basis should be evaluated not on the length of the internship but on the total number of hours expended.

The assignment of a grade for the internship can be based on several factors. Consideration should be given to the timely receipt of required reports, the employer evaluations, the faculty advisor's visit and discussions with the intern and employer, the quality of the written or oral presentation, and all other indications of student performance. While there are no rules for the weighing of these factors, many advisors give the strongest consideration to employer evaluations, the written or oral presentation, and to the timely submission of reports, an indication of student responsibility. An evaluator must be careful when dealing with the situation in which a student has not been satisfied with the internship and changes jobs during the work period. The difficulty lies in determining whether the student, the employer, or both, have been at fault. When a student has been fired for non-attendance or a poor quality performance, a failing grade is usually assigned. This situation is not common but should be expected occasionally.

Criteria used in selecting and approving internship stations must be carefully evaluated. Will the employer afford the student enough opportunities to experience the entire operation? Does the employer have a good professional reputation? How much supervision can the employer or foreman give the student? Are the wages offered consistent with the level of performance expected? What has been the past experience with this employer? Negative answers to these questions may suggest that a different station should be selected. A common pitfall to avoid is that of approving an internship in the student's family operation or one in which the student has worked for several years previously. If the main purpose of the internship is to expose the student to new ideas and experiences, then allowing the student to receive internship credit for work he or she has been doing for years is non-productive.

Whenever possible, on-site visitation by the faculty advisor is strongly advised. Two very important matters can be accomplished by meeting both the student and employer at the job site. The advisor usually receives a much clearer picture of the student's performance during the visit than can be obtained from written reports. In addition, the visit is a very important public relations measure which serves to bring the school and the industry closer together. In a large state such visits may not be feasible because of time or

budgetary constraints. In this case the best alternative is to make telephone visitations. Although they are not as effective as personal visits, they usually accomplish the same ends.

The final consideration is that of employer recognition. Although it is primarily a public relations exercise, it does allow the advisor to express appreciation on behalf of the school to employers for their support of internship programs. Appropriate expressions may include framed certificates, books, or tickets to movies or plays. As a minimum, employers should receive a letter of appreciation from the department chairman or internship co-ordinator. A framed certificate has two advantages: it is rather inexpensive and if displayed by the employer, it serves as an effective advertisement for your internship program.

Texas Tech University Program

The Department of Plant and Soil Science at Texas Tech University has patterned its internship program almost entirely after that developed by The Agricultural Technical Institute in Wooster, Ohio and Clark Technical College in Springfield, Ohio. The procedures and forms developed by these schools have been used for several years and represent a very effective system for internship administration. At Texas Tech we have adopted the Ohio forms for our use with minor changes to comply with our specific needs. Copies of the complete set of administrative forms are available from the author.

Although the internship has been a viable, ongoing program at Texas Tech for many years, the incorporation of the formalized procedures described previously has been well-received by faculty, students, and employers. The system provides an orderly method for internship administration which is particularly useful to new faculty members.

CONCLUSION

The overall effectiveness of an agricultural internship program depends on many factors, including faculty, student, and employer enthusiasm, the support of college administrators, and the orderly administration of program requirements. This paper has dealt exclusively with the last factor. Although the system described here may not exactly fit all the requirements that a school may have, it should serve as a practical guide.

Internship is one of the most effective hands-on programs that exists. Proper administration of the program enhances its values and assures uniform evaluation and grading practices.

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SURVEY REPORT

Achievement Tests: Need and Use

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Abstract

In response to current pressures to improve quality in education, a survey was conducted to determine how many agricultural institutions are currently administering achievement tests to agricultural students and how many planned to administer tests in the near future.

Of the 103 institutions responding, three required tests in their major field and ten indicated a plan to administer achievement tests during the next five years. A majority of the institutions responding did not think achievement tests were needed.

quiring more math and science at the secondary level, and academic tests for high school graduates are all examples of efforts to improve educational quality.

When the number of college and university students is increasing there is very little concern by legislators about quality in educational programs. However, when enrollments stabilize or decrease and educational costs continue to increase, legislators no longer assume that universities are providing high quality programs. They require proof. This pressure is increased when the economy slows down, unemployment increases, and tax collections decline as they have during the 1980's.

In response to this national trend the Higher Education Commission in Tennessee has included a quality variable in the formula for funding educational institutions throughout the state. Those institutions who participate in the quality process may receive funds above those justified by the number of students enrolled. Each institution must prove that it has high

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