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Group
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Developing An Intership Program: A Study of POP

Peter A. Fog

All of us in one way or another have participated in graduation exercises. As teachers we must have been troubled occasionally by the thought of how good a job we did in preparing that young graduate for success in his/her chosen career. And possibly we have wished that more "true to life" laboratory and classroom experiences could have been available to apply lecture and classroom principles with conditions that students will encounter when they are employed. The internship and cooperative education program can make such wishes become realities.

Students enrolling in agriculture at two- or four-year universities and colleges are changing continuously. Several years ago it was the exception to have an urban student enrolled in agriculture; most students came from the farm. Today at least 50 percent of the students enrolled come from non-farm backgrounds with little or no first-hand farm experience. Their goals have changed as well. Instead of entering agricultural education, extension, or farm production, students today enroll in agriculturally-related business as managers, merchandisers, technicians, or salesmen. While farm background is valuable, such experience does not insure knowledge about agricultural business careers or the student's aptitude for such a career. There is the problem, then, of developing the skills and competencies which the agricultural graduate will need to succeed in his/her chosen career.

Another problem to be faced in preparing for this type of career is the ever-changing quality of the agricultural industry. To be kept current on new methods,

Workshop session presented by Peter A. Fog, Coordinator, Pre-Occupational Preparation, University of Minnesota Technical College — Waseca; during the 26th annual Conference at New Mexico State University, June 15-18, 1980.

techniques, and technology is a big order. No university could afford the expense or have the flexibility required for such training.

The internship and cooperative education program may be the means by which the student can bridge the gap between classroom teaching and actual work experience.

The work experience program at the University of Minnesota Technical College, Waseca, was developed for a two-year technical college of agriculture. However, the program can be adapted to the needs of four-year institutions as has been done with the University of Minnesota Professional Experience Program (PEP) at St. Paul. Such a program can be even more beneficial to four-year graduates, with more in-depth training possible.

The single mission purpose in establishing the two-year technical college for agriculture at the University of Minnesota, Waseca, was to develop educated and competent young men and women to enter the agricultural industry in mid-management, sales and merchandising, and technician level positions.

To accomplish this mission it was necessary for students to gain work experience in the particular career industry which they selected. The Pre-Occupational Preparation (POP) program was developed to accomplish this purpose.

At UMW, POP is an additional quarter added to the six academic quarters in a two-year program. It requires that a student spend a minimum of 12 weeks as a full-time paid employee in the business in which he/she plans a career. A prerequisite is that the student must be enrolled for a minimum of two quarters and must have earned at least 24 quarter credits before being eligible for the POP quarter. Students may enroll any quarter after

this, but are expected to be on campus the last quarter before graduation. The students may also enroll in an optional POP II quarter before they graduate. This is a more in-depth study for those who prefer it, and in some cases it provides an optional career choice. The student receives one credit for each 40-hour week and must earn 12 POP credits to graduate with an Associate in Applied Science degree. Presently 400 students are in POP (in a student body of 1,000), and fewer in POP II.

The goals and objectives of the UMW Pre-Occupational Preparation program are as follows:

- a. To enable students to learn more about the occupations of their choice through work experience.
- b. To allow students to experiment with occupational goals early enough to enable them to alter these without losing valuable educational time.
- c. To encourage students to assume a more mature attitude toward their academic preparation.
- d. To assist students in seeing the need for classroom instruction as it relates to their occupational goals.
- e. To permit students to work in actual situations that cannot be duplicated in the classroom.
- f. To give students the experience of working with equipment which, because of size or content, is not available at the college.
- g. To enable students to acquire experience gained through actual customer and employee relationships.
- h. To allow students the opportunity to develop a sense of responsibility required in the business world.
- i. To help students learn — through real experience — the values of personal qualities such as neatness, politeness, courtesy, and concern for the clientele with whom they are working.
- j. To familiarize students with the experiences related to the process of seeking employment.
- k. To provide the college with valuable information about industry, and to establish public relations contacts and obtain advice from business leaders in areas of curriculum, laboratory planning, student recruitment and placement (Fog and Kaas, 1978).

Freshmen students are given a complete explanation of the Pre-Occupational Preparation program and its goals in the Agricultural Orientation class the first quarter they attend UMW. A 16 mm film developed by the POP Coordinators is shown during the class period and is followed by a more detailed presentation (Fog and Kaas, 1976).

Students are assigned an instructor-counselor, a faculty member teaching in the major in which the student is enrolled. The instructor-counselor becomes a key person in the student's work experience program and is largely responsible for its success. It is his/her responsibility to advise the student on (1.) when to enroll in the POP quarter, (2.) future career goals, (3.) development of learning goals and objectives and (4.) other pre-POP decisions. When the student is in POP, the instructor-counselor visits the station, conferring with both employer and student, assigns and reads the student's monthly reports, and finally, assists in establishing the final grade.

The first step in participating in the POP experience is the completion of a Student Planning card. This information affords insight to the POP Coordinator as to

the student's plans regarding time of enrollment, the type of work station desired and the career goals developed.

One quarter before the POP work experience begins, the student contacts the POP Coordinator for more extensive planning. After discussing plans and goals the student completes an Employment Application form similar to that used by most prospective employers or companies. Next the student meets with his/her instructor-counselor and completes a Student Learning Goals and Objectives form. This is an important document because it forces the student to think through his reasons for enrollment in POP, what specific objectives are to be achieved, and how the work experience program can assist in attaining final career goals. The Objectives form is attached to the Employment Application Form and both serve as an important part of the job interview.

The POP Coordinator contacts an agricultural business and arranges for a job interview for the student. The employer is asked to conduct the interview as professionally as possible, in the same manner as hiring a prospective employee, to afford experience to the student in job interview procedure. The Learning Goals and Objectives are discussed, giving the employer the opportunity to become cognizant of the student's needs, and thereby being able to plan employment experiences accordingly to fill these needs.

Before the student interview, however, some preliminary contact work has been done. When an agribusiness has declared its need or desire to be used as a training station, an interview is arranged with the POP Coordinator, with several goals in mind. To begin, the agribusiness is informed as to the goals and purpose of the POP program. The fact that the POP program is an educational experience is stressed and that the employer will be cooperating in a learning and training experience. The employer must be agreeable to meet the student's Learning Goals and Objectives and also to offer as wide a range of experiences as possible during the 12-week period. He/she must also agree to evaluate the student once a month and then to discuss the completed employee evaluation with the student. The evaluation discussion is the most important learning task the employer performs. Public relations plays an important role in employer-coordinator-student relationships. A spirit of cooperation is essential for all.

Students complete three monthly written reports which are evaluated by the instructor-counselors and are a basis for the students' final grade.

Instructor-counselors conduct two on-the-job student visits during the 12-week period. The first visit takes place 3 or 4 weeks after the student starts work, and the second 8 or 9 weeks into the quarter. The visits serve two purposes; the first is student-oriented, to assist the student who is having difficulties and to assess his/her progress; the second is faculty-oriented, to expose faculty members to current agricultural business changes and improvements and thereby update and improve know-

ledge in their fields. A faculty member approaching these visits on a positive note, willing to learn, can add a whole new dimension to his/her classroom and laboratory instruction. A visitation report is turned in to the POP Office by the instructor-counselor on his/her return from a student visit.

Upon completion of the 12 weeks a grade is established by the POP Coordinator and instructor-counselor based on the three employer and three student reports.

Any cooperative internship education program must have three essentials if it is to be successful. In addition to an organized plan for development and student involvement, such a program must have the following:

- (1) An administration that believes in the worth of the program and supports and defends the program against criticism. It must be willing to commit financial resources necessary for success.
- (2) A faculty supportive of the work experience program and willing to accept the responsibilities involved in directing students, providing advice, assistance in planning, supervision, and evaluation.

- (3) Employers willing to provide a real educational experience for students. Such employers must be willing to go one step further and become teachers as well as employers.

Fortunately, all three of these essentials are present at the University of Minnesota Technical College, Waseca, and can be credited with making the internship and cooperative education program here a successful reality.

A complete Faculty-Student Handbook (developed by Peter A. Fog, POP Coordinator, and Duane A. Kaas, Assistant POP Coordinator) is available to anyone who desires more information. Samples of all forms and procedures in developing a work experience program are included in the handbook. For further details write Peter A. Fog, Coordinator, Pre-Occupational Preparation, University of Minnesota Technical College, Waseca, MN 56093.

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IDEA SHARING SESSION

NACTA Conference

Project 120: A Public Relations Program Oriented To Prospective Agriculture Students

Robert L. Beck
Associate Professor of
Agricultural Economics

and

Mike Richey
Director of Student Relations,
College of Agriculture
University of Kentucky

Introduction

The best public relations for a product or service is a satisfied user. Based upon this premise, the University of Kentucky College of Agriculture in 1970 initiated "Project 120" — appropriately titled because of the 120 counties in the state. Project 120 is a public relations program which allows students in the college to visit their home high school and speak with students interested in pursuing agriculture as a career. Discussions pertaining to job opportunities in agriculture, student life at the university, and the academic and extracurricular programs offered by the College of Agriculture are held. The uniqueness of the program is its dependence on student input. Project 120 is an activity sponsored by the Agricultural Student Council and is coordinated through the Office of the College of Agriculture's Associate Dean for Instruction.

The basic objectives of the program are as follows:

1. Encourage enrollment in the College of Agriculture
2. Assist prospective students with enrollment, housing, and financial aid procedures
3. Inform students about careers in agriculture
4. Involve College of Agriculture students in a public relations activity.

How the Program Works

Planning and preparation for Project 120 starts early in the fall semester. A "fact sheet" is compiled with specific information about the university, costs, housing, and financial assistance. General information about the College of Agriculture's programs, farms, etc. is also provided. Agricultural students participating in Project 120 are required to attend a training session in early December at which time the fact sheet is reviewed and other information is presented. This aspect of the program is coordinated through the Associate Dean for Instruction's Office by the Director of Student Relations.

Immediately following the training session, the Director of Student Relations sends a letter to the high school teacher(s) designated by the student explaining the purpose of the program and indicating that during the university's semester break one of their former students would like to speak with students interested in pursuing a career in agriculture. The teachers are informed that the designated student will contact them regarding the visit and make further arrangements. Students are permitted to visit only their home school and to contact a teacher that they know personally.