



FIRST-YEAR INTERNSHIPS: DRIVING IMPACTFUL OUTCOMES

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Research has consistently demonstrated the value-added that internships provide students in finding a position after graduating, developing critical professional competencies, and establishing career direction and satisfaction. According to LookSharp's 2016 State of Millennial Hiring Report, graduates with three or more internships are more likely to be employed full-time in a professional position and much less likely to be unemployed (LookSharp, "State of Millennial Hiring" 2016). In the same report, 81.1% of students responded that internships helped them tweak their career choices either significantly (34.8%) or by slightly changing the focus of their classes/majors (46.3%). The ability to refocus career goals is likely one of the reasons why students with internship experience are more likely to start in jobs that meet or exceed expectations (LookSharp, "State of Millennial Hiring", 2016).

Employer responses to the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) 2016 Internship and Co-Op Report, indicate that converting students who have taken part in an internship or co-op program into full-time employees is a primary goal for most experiential learning programs (NACE, "Internship & Co-op Report", 2016). "Falling Short? College Learning and Career Success" a survey conducted by Hart Research Associates in conjunction with The American Association of Colleges and Universities, found that 73% of employer respondents think that requiring college students to complete a significant applied learning project before graduation would improve the quality of their preparation for careers (Hart Research Associates, "Falling Short? College Learning and Career Success, 2015). While businesses should not set the terms for college learning, they continue to be an important partner in student success whose ideas and voice should be considered to help graduates reach their destinations. Nearly all employers in the Hart survey said they would be more likely to consider hiring a recent college graduate who had completed an internship or apprenticeship, with three in five (60%) indicating that their company would be much more likely to consider that candidate (Hart Research Associates, "Falling Short? College Learning and Career Success" 2015).

The significant, validated benefits of applied learning, coupled with a desire among college and university career services and experiential education professionals to engage

students early on in the career development process, has led to a heightened interest in exploring and implementing first-year internships. Endicott's unique program has had a freshman internship requirement for all undergraduates since its inception. This article will provide an introduction to Endicott's experiential education model and explore Endicott's required first-year internships, highlighting coursework and a multi-pronged approach that fosters self-awareness and professional skill development from day one. Outcomes such as career readiness/ planning and on-time graduation will be featured as well as programmatic challenges and implementation strategies on fostering a required first-year internship on your campus.

THE ENDICOTT INTERNSHIP MODEL

Internships have been a vital component of the academic experience at Endicott College since the institution's beginnings in 1939. The College founders believed in a philosophy of "learning by doing," a perspective that continues to shape the curriculum, in which students prepare for their future careers by integrating theory and practice in all of their studies. Through their internship experiences students are better prepared to apply knowledge within a particular discipline, explore career options through field experiences, and develop professional competencies. Graduates leave Endicott with both their diplomas and robust résumés as a result of comprehensive programming integrating academic coursework and professional application across all majors from

freshman to senior year. Students are required to undertake three internships: two 120-hour internships during the January or summer break of the freshman and sophomore years and a full-semester internship during the fall of the senior year.

Comprehensive career preparation is central to the success and uniqueness of Endicott's internship program. Internship and career preparation classes support the internship and ultimately the employment search process and a student's integration into the work environment of the internship site. Each student is assigned an internship coordinator who is based in an academic department, understands the theoretical and professional aspects of a student's major, assists in the search process, and approves internship proposals once a site has been secured.

During the fall semester, first- and second-year students complete class sessions and assignments designed to help prepare them for the internship experience. These assignments include the development of a resume/LinkedIn profile and a target list of potential internship sites. An internship strategies course during the junior year prepares students for the full-semester, twelve-credit senior internship by helping them refine their resumes, practice interviewing techniques, and develop networking skills. The internships are overseen by qualified faculty in collaboration with site supervisors. Students are at their sites full-time, four days per week and participate in weekly on-campus seminars designed to support the internship experience.

THE FIRST YEAR INTERNSHIP

As previously mentioned, all Endicott students are required to complete an internship consisting of 120 hours and three credits in the winter or summer of their freshman year. Prior to heading into the field, first-year students participate in a pre-internship seminar class, INT 010, taught by their respective Internship Coordinator. The classes are held both online and in person a minimum of once per month depending on the Coordinator's requirements, allowing for important dialogue among peers. Coordinators host a minimum of five sessions throughout the semester, with the goal of fostering group collaboration, reflection and support. The Internship and Career Center also partners with employers and alumni to offer dynamic programming to support professional development.

A variety of topics and assignments designed to prepare students for their experiences are covered by the Internship Coordinator: resume and cover letter development, instructions for using the online recruitment platform EC Launch, effective interviewing and networking techniques, social media tips, and internship search strategies. The classroom discussions are supplemented with individual meetings with the student's Internship Coordinator to monitor progress and provide guidance and advice. This high-touch approach ensures students stay on track and builds a strong relationship with a member of the College faculty that they will be collaborating with over the course of their four years.

Upon identifying an internship site and, deciding if they will complete the experience in the winter or summer, students submit an Internship proposal form for approval by their Internship Coordinator. During the approval process, the Coordinator reviews the described job duties and vets the site through either a site visit or conversation depending on distance. The Coordinator then sends a confirmation letter to the site that describes the program goals and the supervisor's, student's, and College's roles and responsibilities.

At the start of the internship, the students develop learning objectives for the internships with input from their site supervisors and submit the documents online. During the 120-hour internship, students are required to complete reflective essay assignments and weekly time sheets to account for their work. Students update their resumes at the conclusion of the internship to include their most recent experiences. Each supervisor is required to complete an online evaluation of the student's performance near the end of the internship field-experience which impacts the student's final grade. We ask that site supervisors discuss this feedback with students so that it can be used as a learning opportunity. Upon returning to the College, all students attend group conferences in which instructors and students discuss experiences and field-related trends. Individual conferences with faculty advisors affords students an opportunity to reaffirm their career expectations. This reflective process allows for maximum personal and professional growth.

Endicott College does not stipulate that interns have to be paid for their work, recognizing the inherent personal and professional value to their short- and long-term development. The primary purpose of the internship and the pre-internship seminar, which is a required part of the academic curriculum, is to have students develop key competencies, explore majors and test career paths and help create meaning in their work. Compensation is a matter left entirely to the supervisor and the intern.

CHALLENGES, OPPORTUNITY & OUTCOMES

The implementation and execution of a required first-year internship program is not without its challenges. Employers can often be reluctant to bring in freshmen for internships, making educating organizations about Endicott's pre-internship preparation and site supervisor requirements paramount. The College has found the greater understanding employers have of the model, the more willing they are to engage with the institution to host an intern.

Student anxiety and feelings of being overwhelmed can occur. In addition to starting their first year of college and getting acclimated to the academic and social life, students are being asked to secure internships as early as the winter. Building a strong relationship with an Internship Coordinator, seeking out assistance and resources at the Internship and Career Center to gain career perspective, and using a robust collection of data to review and connect with previous successful peers and sites provides encouragement and can alleviate angst.

Similarly, students can express a lack of confidence in finding an internship opportunity and reservations about the process, highlighting the importance of having an accessible database containing historical internship data on sites and a mechanism to search and apply for internships. Endicott utilizes an internal system called COAST to house information on completed internships, allowing students to search prior experiences and feel much more comfortable knowing those who came before them were successful in landing an internship. EC Launch, Endicott's online recruitment platform, connects students to a vast network of internships and full-time jobs across the nation.

OUTCOMES

By all measures, the first-year internship model has been incredibly effective in developing young professionals, bolstering career confidence and preparing them for success upon graduation. The National Association of Colleges and Employers recently identified seven competencies associated with career readiness, incorporating feedback from college career services and HR/staffing professionals:

- critical thinking/problem solving
 - oral/written communication
 - teamwork/collaboration
 - information technology application
 - leadership
 - professionalism/work ethic, and
 - career management
- (NACE, "Career Readiness Defined", 2015).

Upon comparing Endicott's site supervisor evaluation with NACE's career readiness competencies, the College was pleased to see that site supervisors were already being asked to assess students in these critical areas. Rating students on a seven point scale, with seven equaling an excellent score, first-year Endicott interns consistently performed well in their positions, a testament to the preparation they receive and the growth they experience in the field. Some examples of evaluated competencies/areas and the average scores across all freshmen are as follows:

- *Communicates ideas and concepts clearly in writing:* 5.28
- *Supports and contributes to a team atmosphere:* 6.33
- *Demonstrates ability to think critically and apply analytical processes to solve problems:* 5.78
- *Dress and appearance are appropriate for this organization:* 6.65

Internship Coordinators incorporate this vital supervisor feedback into the pre-internship seminar, adjusting and updating content in any areas where interns underperformed to ensure students are meeting the needs and expectations of employers when entering the workplace.

With college student debt a critical national issue, incorporating a required internship program in the curriculum that allows students to explore careers early and often can be a pathway to on-time graduation and help lessen the financial burden on graduates. The

most recent data provided by Endicott's Office of Institutional Research shows that the median time to degree completion for Endicott's bachelor-degree recipients who began as first-time students in 2009 is 45.3 months (3.77 years); 94% of the students completed their degree in 48 months or less. The College attributes this to the internship program. By affording students an opportunity to discover their passions, develop a professional skill set, network, and gain valuable experience, they are ready to graduate with confidence in their career direction and job offers in hand.

Each year, the Career Center surveys the May graduating class of undergraduates. The data collected is compiled and disseminated annually in the Post-Graduation Report, which examines the effectiveness of the internship program by assessing career outcome variables including the percentage of students employed/pursuing graduate school, the percentage employed through a former internship site or internship contact, and the impact their internship had on their success in their first-year of employment.

Endicott's data shows that as a result of their internship experiences, students have a consistently high rate of positive career outcomes, which are measured using the National Association of Colleges and Employers criteria: full-time/part-time employment, voluntary and military service, and enrollment in graduate school. Highlighting Endicott's most recent post-graduate report, the overall career outcomes rate for 2016 graduates was 99%

with 75% employed full time and 27% in graduate school. Furthermore, the majority of students consistently report former internship sites/ internship site contacts (53 %) as the primary methods of securing full-time employment within one year of graduation. On average, 90% of graduates report employment within their fields of study, showing how important internships are in validating major choice. In addition, graduates (85%) indicate that their internships had an impact on their successes in their first year of employment.

RECOMMENDATIONS & STRATEGIES

With all of Endicott's outcome data pointing to the positive impact a first-year internship has on student success, what are strategies/steps an institution can take to implement a successful required freshman internship program on their own campus? Based on Endicott's long history and commitment to experiential education in the first-year and throughout a student's college career, one of the key elements is that support for an internship program must come from the top. Endicott's administration recognizes the value that experiential education has at the College, and they provide the program with the resources needed to thrive. The importance of internships permeates the campus.

Having the internships be part of the academic curriculum weights the experience and adds another layer of personal responsibility for the students, who know that it is required for graduation and will be graded. Employer buy-in is critical. Fostering an understanding of the

requirements of the program and a site supervisor's role leads to dynamic learning outcomes and competency development and a willingness to host students for internships at each stage of the process. Establishing a course focused on professional preparation prior to a student's field experience, provides interns with an advantage in both applying to positions and starting at the workplace as employers have to invest less time in training.

Finally, it is helpful to take advantage of the outcomes and statistics collected by Endicott and other institutions with first-year internship programs in place. Sharing their impact with administration, faculty and staff is instrumental in creating consensus and value around implementing a similar program and painting a picture of what could be.

References

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