

PRACTICUM GUIDE

(PART OR FULL TIME POSITIONS)

(1-3 CREDITS)



ELIZABETHTOWN COLLEGE
Elizabethtown, PA 17022

INTRODUCTION

Internships and Practicums are valuable experiences linking the academic and professional worlds. These experiences provide a properly prepared student with a bridge between the worlds of the classroom and the world of work. Students integrate classroom experience and practical experience, testing their understanding and abilities in a field related to their career choice.

Depending on the number of credits chosen, task assignments are given in addition to the student simply being able to observe various aspects of a business operation. Practicum site supervisors provide counseling, guidance and supervision to the student.

A positive internship/practicum can be one of the best experiences of a student's career preparation. Students interested in securing such a position should be aware of the responsibilities and duties of the position, as well as those of the college and department. Subsequent sections of this guide provide an overview of those areas.

Internship and practicum defined: In the Department of Communications at Elizabethtown College, these two terms delineate two different experiences. But in the business community, these two terms are often used for to describe the same type of work; that is a student who is taken on (paid or unpaid) to explore their career preparation through a work experience.

In the Department of Communications, the term *internship* is used to describe an experiential activity that is reserved for seniors who must meet eligibility requirements and then be engaged for no less than 40 hours/week for 15 weeks to earn 12 credits. It is a letter-graded course that requires a number of academic assignments as well as the company assignments. (Please see the Internship Guide for full details.)

A *practicum* is a less intense "intern" experience. Any student majoring in communications is eligible for a practicum, which requires a minimum of 10 hours per week on site for 15 weeks. The student can earn between 1 to 3 credits for a practicum, determined by required additional coursework.

YOUR ROLE

As a student in Elizabethtown College's Department of Communications it is your decision whether or not to obtain a practicum. A practicum is an option in the communications curriculum. Credits earned through a practicum experience are general elective credits only.

Initial contact is made with the department chair or department chair representative who coordinates the internship and practicum program. This meeting usually results in a discussion of your career goals, course preparation, and a delineation of requirements and procedures

Once deciding to pursue a practicum, the student explores possible practicum opportunities through a number of avenues. Finding a practicum position is similar to finding a job.

Companies advertise their openings, student apply for the positions and are interviewed just like in a job search. The company makes a final selection and contacts the candidate of their choice.

There are a number of places to look for practicum or internship positions. In the Department of Communications, internship/practicum positions are posted on bulletin boards in the main hallway. In the Office of Student Success, there are databases of jobs and internships, too. Lastly, if there is a company or organization you are interested in working with, go to their website and check out career opportunities. Most companies and organizations list internship opportunities on their websites.

Practicum experiences during the school year should be with organizations close to the college so students can attend classes and complete practicum work hours. In the summer, you may want to pursue an experience with a company that is closer to your home or summer address.

Some internship/practicum positions are supported by a stipend payment, other experiences are voluntary (unpaid) in nature. Students are encouraged to pursue experiences that best align with their career goals and interests. Getting paid does not make one experience better than another. It is the work that you do that is most important.

Often, letters, resumes, credentials, interviews, etc. may be required before being selected for an opening. During the final interview process, the student and the organization's practicum supervisor at the company will delineate duties and responsibilities that will be performed during the experience. This agreement then results in practicum the goals and objectives which form the basis for a learning contract with the department and the college.

This contract details what will be accomplished during the experience (as well as, additional coursework and requirements specified by the department or college.)

Once accepted into a practicum program, plans must be developed to set up a priority schedule for the position (making other activities on campus less important.) Costs for practicums may run high. Provision for transportation, meals, special clothing, etc. must be taken into consideration. Students are required to pay for 1-3 credits of tuition. In some situations, companies hosting students pay a minimum salary, a stipend, or a scholarship. This, however, is not a requirement and special expenses may be entirely borne by the student. Professional standards and government regulations do not require pay when 1) the student is performing duties for which the company would not regularly pay, 2) when students are only a small part of a working staff, or 3) the presence of a student does not effect a lowering of wages or staff size.

Once the practicum is begun, the greatest responsibility is to show good work habits. Be on time, pleasant, reliable; do the best work possible, show assertiveness (contributing ideas), but follow instructions and learn.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

- Take advantage of the resume and cover letter writing services of the Center for Student Success to make your application package the best it can be.
- Respond to all the requests outlined in a position description, i.e., writing or work samples, list of references.
- Identify faculty and past supervisors for your reference; these people should be willing to speak on your behalf; they should know your skills and have positive comments to make about your work practices.
- Contact your references in advance and let them know what companies or organizations you are contacting. That's just a courtesy.

THE COLLEGE'S ROLE

Initially, the role of the college and the department is to set policies and requirements for practicums. Often these seem stifling, but are necessary for efficient and proper operation of the program. These policies include: eligibility, credits, number of hours, pay, and supervision.

Most importantly, the college's role is vested in the department's interaction and supervision of the practicum while in the field. Students are required, in addition to on-the-job employer requirements, to complete coursework responsibilities. These may include: class meetings, reports, logs, journals, and projects. The coursework is delineated in practicum requirements based on the number of credits taken. Additionally, the practicum supervisor for the college will require several evaluations during the experience.

Responsibility for grading falls within the province of the faculty supervisor and the college, although the site supervisor will certainly be asked for a recommendation. Additionally, grades on required coursework will also be taken into consideration when calculating the final grade.

THE ROLE OF THE SUPERVISING ORGANIZATION

Once a company agrees to accept an intern or practicum student, an individual within the firm is identified as the student's supervisor. Usually it is someone who genuinely likes young people, likes to teach/coach, and is tolerant of the learning process.

It is with this individual that the student plans goals and objectives for the field experience, and who ultimately agrees to provide day-to-day guidance to the intern. A practicum is a learning experience for the student and a way for the company to assist in the training and development of future professionals in the field, as well as a means for the student to contribute to the company.

A salary is not a requirement of the program, although it is expected that the student will be reimbursed for expenses directly incurred by the student while performing assigned duties for the organization.

The supervisor decides in what activities the student will be involved. The student can also suggest activities that will augment his interests and abilities. Be prepared for the student; plan his/her duties. Refrain from asking fellow employees in front of the student if there is any task to be done. Involve the student; include him/her in meetings. In this entire range of assignments, the student is evaluated by his supervisor. Areas for this evaluation usually include: accuracy, dependability, willingness, quality of work, initiative, maturity, promptness, etc. Evaluations are usually made on a continual basis and informally communicated to the student. However, twice during the practicum, the process is formalized and a form is submitted to the college supervisor.

Companies realize students often come to internships/practicums with less knowledge and experience than a regular job applicant--therefore, the agreement to teach and learn on-the-job.

However, the company supervisor can reasonably expect that the student will be eager to participate and will display the self-confidence, initiative, and assertiveness that are important elements of success. Set standards. Your student is a budding professional. Don't accept work you wouldn't accept from your permanent staff - but, explain carefully and patiently what it is you expect. Students not meeting these expectations may be requested, by the company supervisor, to terminate the practicum.

PRACTICUM GUIDELINES AND REQUIREMENTS

- 1 Any student desiring a practicum must develop a proposal for approval PRIOR to enrolling in the course. **Practicums of 1, 2, or 3 credits are available (Practicum is repeatable to a maximum of 4 credits.)** All Practicums are Pass/Fail and will only count as free elective credit. Both communications majors and minors may elect a practicum.
- 2 The proposal must be developed with the direct field supervisor of the practicum. Once that approval has been received, it must be presented to the department faculty coordinator for practicums for final approval.
- 3 The proposal must clearly establish a single GOAL for the Practicum and 7-10 objectives.

GOALS & OBJECTIVES

- A. Develop a goal (the single most important all encompassing reason for the practicum). This paragraph is a statement of the most important reasons for pursuing the particular practicum position with a particular sponsoring agency. It is not a listing of the things you will learn or do; those are best listed as objectives. Rather, it summarizes the relationship of what you hope to learn from the experience and relates it to career interests and direction.
- B. Develop 7 to 10 objectives, more specific performance oriented statements that will assist you in reaching your goal. Learning objectives must state unambiguously what the student intends to accomplish. They should identify the competency or skill that is expected to result from the project. Objectives commonly include such results as the ability to describe, explain, answer, solve, construct, write, differentiate, etc. "To learn" or "to understand" is not an objective but the means to achieve it. Such words should be avoided when writing the objectives.

Example: Incorrect - To learn about the different ways news is gathered.

Correct -To be able to list news gathering processes of TV news and outline their components and practices.

Since the student has said only that he will learn, the objective does not have a natural conclusion and cannot be completed. However, the improved objective clearly identifies the result expected and what the student must be able to do before considering the objective accomplished.

Example: Incorrect - To know how to develop a media press kit.

Correct -To be able to identify and list the important components of a media press kit and describe and explain the techniques of utilizing the kit.

Knowing something is not enough. The student must be able to communicate that competence in a form, which the faculty person can evaluate.

Objectives give clear direction to the project, are precisely stated, and reasonable in number. They may vary from the simple to the complex, and include cognitive, effective (attitudinal, emotional, or valuing behaviors), and psychomotor (physical) skills.

POSSIBLE OBJECTIVES

The following is a very short list of generally stated objectives. Note the terms used are not specific and when devising learning contract objective statements must be very specific with regard to skill or activity as it relates to the particular practicum site. The list is only meant to be an aid in devising objectives, it is not all inclusive, and use words like “learn” only in the sense a skill or other demonstratable skill is accomplished.

- practice specific complex job skills under real-life conditions;
- learn specific job coping skills;
- learn how to do something from the real environment;
- develop a skill in communication;
- synthesize many specific facts, methods, techniques, etc. learned in the classroom;
- learn variations in certain approaches to be used;
- learn how to deal with people in a real setting;
- develop certain problem solving abilities and how to make decisions and act under conditions of uncertainty;
- develop self-confidence and independence;
- field research;
- application of theory.

- 1 **ALL practicum proposals** must indicate that you will spend an average of 10 hours or more per week in the fulfillment of regular duties and responsibilities. Freelance work is not acceptable. Ten hours of on-site, on-duty fieldwork must be scheduled (for an entire semester -- 15 weeks.)
- 2 **A journal is required of all practicums.** It is to be submitted on a weekly basis to the department faculty supervisor of practicums. It specifies days and hours worked, work assigned, accomplished and in progress. It details reactions to the week and provides insight into the learning experience. The journal is NOT A LOG (or list) of jobs by hour and day. It is a narrative in which the student reflects on their goals and objectives and the week's activities.

At the end of the practicum, the final weekly Journal entry is a detailed evaluation report of the practicum experience. A typed document, the following items should be discussed.

- To what extent were your practicum objectives reached. How and Why? Be specific to each objective.
 - Evaluate the effectiveness of your practicum supervisor in helping you meet your objectives and in assisting you generally during the experience.
 - Were assignments and responsibilities clearly delineated? Were they meaningful to you and your employer?
 - Did the practicum provide you with sufficient challenge? In what ways was it a valuable experience? In what ways was it disappointing?
 - What kind of regular interaction did you have with your practicum supervisor?
 - List strong and weak points of the experience.
- 3 A midterm and final evaluation from the field supervisor is **required of all practicums.** These forms are available in the faculty HOMDIR.
 - 4 **For a two-credit practicum,** the student must create and submit (at the end of the field experience) a satisfactory portfolio of all work completed showing accomplishment of each of the objectives of the practicum.
 - 5 **For a three-credit practicum,** the student must design, develop and produce either a final project or a research paper, both of which need the prior approval of the faculty coordinator.
 - 6 Grading will be determined by the department faculty supervisor in consultation with the field supervisor regarding the level and quality of accomplishment of the goal and objectives.

Once each of the above elements have been developed and approved by the field supervisor, the SIGNED proposal is submitted to the department practicum coordinator for final approval.