

Updating Internships: Determining the Added Value of Capstone Internships in Recreation, Hospitality and Parks Management

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Introduction and Context

A capstone internship is required of academic recreation and parks management programs accredited by the NRPA Council on Accreditation. The internship program in one California program, largely unmodified for more than 30 years, was recently revised due to changing student culture, agency employment needs, and funding for higher education.

Several cultural shifts necessitated these changes:

- Students requested more flexibility and a system adaptable to a growing range of field placements.
- Agencies desired students who are thoroughly prepared to succeed in fast-paced, technology-saturated environments.
- The academic department's labor-intensive intensive staffing model, though valuable, required a more cost-effective approach and better alignment with the national shift to outcomes assessment.
- Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) reports that employers give current graduates low marks on many qualities essential to successful entry level employment including: Global Knowledge, Self-direction, Adaptability, Self-Knowledge, Social Responsibility and Ethical Judgment. *See table below.*

https://keycenter.unca.edu/sites/default/files/aacu_high_impact_2008_final.pdf

Employer Views on Achievement of Essential Learning Outcomes: 2008 National Survey Findings

	Very Well Prepared (8-10 ratings)*	Not Well Prepared (1-5 ratings)*	Mean Rating*
Global Knowledge	18%	46%	5.7
Self-direction	23%	42%	5.9
Writing	26%	37%	6.1
Critical Thinking	22%	31%	6.3
Adaptability	24%	30%	6.3
Self-knowledge	28%	26%	6.5
Oral Communication	30%	23%	6.6
Quantitative Reasoning	32%	23%	6.7
Social Responsibility	35%	21%	6.7
Intercultural Skills	38%	19%	6.9
Ethical Judgment	38%	19%	6.9
Teamwork	39%	17%	7.0

* ratings on 10-point scale: 10 = recent college graduates are extremely well prepared on each quality to succeed in entry-level positions or be promoted/advance within the company

Note: These findings are taken from a survey of employers commissioned by the Association of American Colleges and Universities and conducted by Peter A. Hart Associates in November and December 2007. For a full report on the survey and its complete findings, see www.aacu.org/leap

Method

Faculty Learning Communities (FLCs) have emerged as a powerful mechanism for academic transformation. Diverse backgrounds and experiences are brought to bear on a theme, issue or concern in a short-term, outcomes oriented manner. Structure varies but most FLCs have a group leader and meet regularly through an academic term or more frequently during a short, intense period.

Three colleagues participated in a summer 2016 Faculty Learning Community to:

- 1) review research and scholarship about capstone experiences,
- 2) revise internship assignments and assessment forms, and
- 3) design a digital platform to better manage the internship experience and stakeholder communications.

Results and Discussion

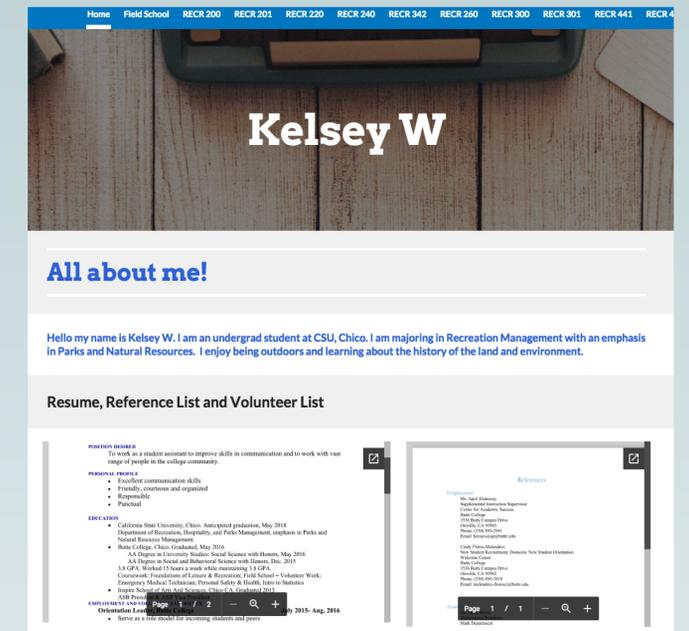
Initial data indicated students were satisfied, especially with digital submission of pre-internship documentation. Anecdotal reports from the first flight of interns singled out the ePortfolio as the most valuable change. More systematic feedback from the first full flight of interns, however, revealed differing levels of satisfaction with and comprehension of the value of the capstone internship. Open ended responses suggested greater focus of the purpose and intent internship might close the gap between expectations and experiences. Assessment forms are being revised to gain more detailed and specific information about the internship experience and associated student learning outcomes.

The revised internship program has provided means to better document the learning outcomes of entire academic program, including internship. Two re-designed course components illustrate this finding:

- 1) A new assignment, linking initial coursework to internship through an ePortfolio, was added to an entry level class. With the additional of this assignment the ePortfolio now provides a platform to integrate and reflect on major course assignments and other professional experiences across the curriculum. Internship is now integrated with academic course work from the very early stages of each student's academic career.
- 2) The Internship Preparation course that precedes the internship semester was revised to incorporate a Professional Development Conference. This weekend conference brings students, interns, alumni, faculty and professionals together for career enhancement and networking.

Seeking feedback from field-based professionals during the CPRS poster session provides another valuable opportunity to seek feedback to inform the ongoing evolution of the internship program.

Figure 1: A Sample of an Academic Portfolio



Notes:

1. The initial organization of the ePortfolio is designed around courses as an aid to students.
2. Later additions to the ePortfolio provide structured prompts for students to cross-list their skills with frameworks such as KSAs (knowledge, skills, abilities) and USAJobs, course assignments such as "11 Transferable Skills," or Essential Learning Outcomes (2008) described in column one.
3. Planned additions to the ePortfolio include tabs to track advising and pre-internship professional experiences.



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