

Policies for Practicum and Internship Courses

Approved by Faculty on April 25, 2003

Background

Academic Policies Committee (APC) received several proposals during 2000 and 2001 for new and expanded internship courses, some for up to 12 semester hours. While such lengthy internship experiences can provide significant professional growth opportunities, they generally remove the student from the academic community for an entire semester. Thus, before approving lengthier internships APC sought to carefully consider their effect on students and the College's academic program. Issues considered include:

- the desire to support meaningful internship experiences, assuming that appropriate planning, supervision and evaluation are in place;
- the need for more consistent and rigorous evaluation criteria, especially for lengthier internships;
- ongoing concerns regarding grade inflation in off-campus courses (an automatic ticket to the Dean's list, in some cases); and
- the need for students pursuing off-campus experiences to enroll full-time to maintain financial aid eligibility.

In Fall 2001, APC established a subcommittee to consider internship-related concerns including site selection, rigor of the internship experience, internship supervision, student evaluation, distinction between internships and practica, and the potential impact of semester-long, off-campus internships on students.

The subcommittee solicited department chairs for materials related to departmental internship procedures and practices. While nearly 20 programs and majors listed internships or similar courses in the *2001-2002 Catalog*, only six sets of materials were received. Many departments have students seeking internships only rarely, and thus create individual plans. More structure within each program and greater congruency across the entire campus will be useful in assuring consistently high-quality experiences for our students.

Overview

Given the diversity of College programs offering internship or practicum experiences, it is appropriate to establish basic minimum standards. Departments may then develop their programs beyond these minimum standards as they see fit. The primary focus of this proposal is on the minimum number of work hours per hour of academic credit awarded, the minimum requirements for supervision of students, and the minimum requirements for student evaluation.

Within both the subcommittee and APC as a whole, there was considerable discussion about the grading of experiential courses. Issues included concerns about grade inflation, difficulty in assigning meaningful grades to internships, and consistency of grading both within and among departmental programs. Creating a policy requiring all internships and practica be evaluated P/NP was considered at length. After much debate and consultation a less intrusive approach was sought. As members of one department stated, if the issue is grade inflation, particularly with the lengthier internships, then the standards for supervising and evaluating students should be raised, rather than throw out grades altogether. It is in this spirit that the following policies are proposed.

Throughout this document ***bold italic type indicates proposed policies***, while rationale and notes are in regular type. The term “field experience” will be used to include all types of off-campus experiential courses not directly supervised by a faculty member.

Definition of field experiences

#1 Practica are limited and introductory experiences and may be open to students at all levels. As stated in the current Catalog (p. 14), a practicum “permits students to observe a profession or provides application of previously studied theory. It allows students to participate in activities typical of a professional but does not demand a high level of responsibility or professional judgment.”

An internship is “work performed in actual service for a public/private organization. This experience links classroom instruction to a career.” (Catalog, p. 14) Internships require a higher level of involvement and professionalism than do practica and thus require junior or senior standing. Internships may also be identified by nomenclature appropriate to specific disciplines, such as “Field Placement,” “Field Instruction,” or “Student Teaching.”

#2 Practica may be offered for 1 to 4 semester hours. If a department permits, practica may be repeated by a student in a different professional setting.

Internships may be offered for 1 to 12 semester hours and may be repeated up to a maximum of 12 hours, if a department so chooses. Internships receiving 9 or more credit hours must include experiences that require the student to master knowledge or skills new to the student, relevant to their discipline.

Rationale must be provided to the Academic Policies Committee (APC) by any department wishing to allow more than 3 semester hours credit for field experiences to apply toward a major or minor.

Rationale: Students engaged in an off-campus field experience can maintain full-time status by enrolling for 12 semester hours of credit. While the number of clock hours could in some cases warrant additional credit, capping the credit awarded at 12 semester hours addresses concerns regarding the proportion of a student’s total graduation hours spent in off-campus experiential courses. Internships should generally be considered as electives for the most capable students, rather than requirements within the major.

Note: Student teaching, which currently is approved for up to 13 semester hours, is recognized as an exception to the 12-hour limit.

#3 Enrollment in a Special Problems course concurrent with a field experience is permitted only when its content is substantially different and in addition to the learning and written product resulting from the field experience. Special Problems courses must be pursued under the direct supervision of the faculty instructor.

Rationale: Special Problems courses should not be added to enrollment in a field experience as a way to increase the credit hours beyond what has been approved by the Faculty and listed in the *Catalog*. The definition of Special Problems is an independent study under the direction of a faculty mentor (2002-2003 *Catalog*, p. 15).

Hours of work per hour of academic credit

#4 Departments and programs must require a minimum of 40 work hours per academic credit hour. These hours may include work supervised by the instructor, either in preparation for the field experience or in completion of related assignments.

Rationale: Program materials APC received commonly required 40 on-site work hours per academic credit hour. This makes it possible for a student to complete a three-credit field experience during the January session by working three forty-hour weeks and equates roughly to the time per credit hour students should devote to a traditional course.

Arrangement and supervision

#5 The faculty member responsible for the course must present to the site supervisor a letter of understanding summarizing the terms and requirements of the field experience. This must be signed and returned by the site supervisor before the course begins. This agreement must specify expected duties and responsibilities of the intern, and the frequency and nature of contacts that the site supervisor will have with the student. It must also specify the evaluation criteria and the feedback required from the site supervisor.

Rationale: The ultimate responsibility for arranging and supervising the field experience rests with the faculty member. Faculty supervisors must ensure the quality of the experience and monitor the student's accomplishments. Site supervisors need to act as mentors and evaluators as well as instructors for students. Clear communication among all three parties is essential for guaranteeing a quality experience.

#6 The supervising faculty member must outline the requirements, learning objectives and evaluation criteria for the field experience in a syllabus to be given to the student before the experience begins. The syllabus must also be submitted to the Office of Academic Affairs before the experience begins. Syllabi may either be generally written to cover a category of departmental field experience or be customized to each student's individual experience.

Rationale: This requirement is similar to what is required for all classroom and Special Problems courses. The course requirements, learning objectives, and evaluation criteria are communicated to the student and filed with OAA, assuring appropriate course implementation and providing documentation in case a student protests the course grade.

#7 *In addition to the initial contact, during the time the student is on site the faculty member must have at least one contact, in person or by phone or e-mail, with the site supervisor for every three credit hours the field experience represents. The faculty member must also have at least this many contacts with the student during the experience. Upon conclusion of the experience the faculty member must again contact both the supervisor and the student to discuss the experience. Specifically, the minimum number of contacts during a field experience must be:*

<u>Credit Hours of Field Experience</u>	<u>Contacts Required During the Experience</u>	<u>Number of Total Contacts</u>
1 to 4	1	3
5 to 7	2	4
8 to 10	3	5
11 or 12	4	6

Note: This means that a faculty member would have at least three contacts with both the supervisor and the student in connection with a 3-hour field experience; a 9-hour experience would require a minimum of five contacts with each.

Rationale: To ensure the experience is progressing as planned the instructor must maintain an appropriate amount of contact with both the student and the site supervisor. Any issues related to inadequate supervision, inappropriate work assignments, or poor student performance should be addressed as soon as possible, allowing successful completion of the course.

Evaluation of students:

#8 *Every student must be given documentation specifying the criteria to be used to establish the course grade. (This information must be included in the syllabus discussed in Item #6.) To ensure consistent and rigorous grading, the faculty member must solicit the site supervisor's feedback on each of the established evaluation criteria, rather than simply relying on a grade proposed by the supervisor.*

A student's performance must be assessed at minimum through: a written evaluation from the site supervisor, a written evaluation from the faculty supervisor based on the ongoing contacts made with the student and site, and some kind of written work done by the student in which he/she assesses or applies what was learned through the experience.

Rationale: As with other courses, the application of consistent, fair and rigorous grading standards requires that the student be made aware of the evaluation criteria to be used. Written documentation assessing the student's performance must be available to support the instructor's

1 assignment of the course grade. Final responsibility for assigning the course grade rests with the
2 supervising faculty member and should be based on objective assessment of the student's
3 performance, as measured against established criteria.

4 In order for the field experience to be credit-worthy, students need to be evaluated both
5 on their performance on the job and on how the experience taught them more about their fields
6 of study. This can best be assessed by some sort of reflection and documentation produced by
7 the student.

10 **Site selection**

12 Determination of a site that will provide the student an appropriate experience is a matter
13 best left to individual programs and departments. Once a site is chosen, Item #5 requires that a
14 site supervisor is identified and clear criteria for the field experience are established before a
15 student can be placed.

18 **Rigor of the field experience**

20 Through more formal communication of expectations, evaluation criteria and
21 performance feedback, Items #4–8 address the rigor of both the field experience and the
22 evaluation of the student.

25 **Administrative procedures**

27 ***#9 Departments must submit plans for the administration of any new or existing field***
28 ***experiences to APC for review. These plans will include the process for approving and placing***
29 ***interns, sample letters of understanding and syllabi, evaluation criteria, and the evaluation***
30 ***form to be completed by the site supervisor. After the initial review by APC, only substantive***
31 ***changes in departmental practices need to be submitted for review. The Office of Academic***
32 ***Affairs will maintain a file of departmental plans. These examples will be made available to***
33 ***other departments as they develop their own practices.***

35 Note: Departments planning to offer new or existing field experiences during the 2004-2005
36 academic year will need to submit their plans to APC by February 15, 2004.