

Template for Internship Coordination and Support Using Reflective Writing

This document offers a template for adapting an experience-based internship program to one that combines experience and reflection, specifically reflective writing. The basic premise of this document is that experience when combined with a process involving intention, reflection, and application enables lifelong learning. This template could apply to internships, research assistantships, teaching assistantships, and other experiential internship programs.

Theoretical bases from Harding (2019)

- Agentic Learning (Yanchar, 2011; Yanchar and Spackman, 2012; Yanchar, Spackman, and Faulconer, 2013).
- Self-determination theory (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Specifically autonomy, relatedness, competency.
- Narrative Learning theory (Clark, 2010; Clark & Rossiter, 2008).
- Experiential Learning theory (Kolb and Kolb, 2005; Kolb, 2015).

Operating procedures/Ground Rules

- Reflection comes through discussion and writing (a hybrid of narration and reflection)
- Experience is mentored (Face-to-face contact with an experiential learning advisor)
- The elements of intention, reflection, and integration are recursive, cycled through, rather than being tied to stages in the program (all intention is created at the beginning, all reflection and integration come at the end).
- Evaluation of individuals and program focuses on qualitative, individually shaped data, with quantitative data viewed as less essential.
- Stakeholders understand why the time commitment is worthwhile

Roles of participants

- The learner (student, intern, experiencer),
- a manager who directs the physical experience (the boss, the lead scientist, the teacher),
- the mentor (internship coordinator, English 394 teacher, field studies coordinator). The mentor sees herself as a professional competencies coach, fostering intention and reflection and helping identify lifelong learning skills. It may work for the manager and the mentor to be the same person, but the roles are very different.
- A peer mentor could help the learner translate or contextualize the manager's direction and help identify and implement skills.

The Process

Intention

- **Program design:** The guiding documents (syllabi) of the program help the students focus on the process of learning from the experience and use the theories described above (agentic design, self-determination theory, narrative learning theory, and the experiential learning cycle—Kolb).
- **Meet with mentor:** Personal goal setting is accomplished with the mentor and the learner face-to-face in interviews and during the prep class. This meeting is to create bridges between the student's personal objectives and the Professional Competencies. This meeting also clarifies the roles of those involved: manager, mentor, learner, and peer mentor. The mentor helps the intern design personal goals, designed with understanding of the Humanities Professional Competencies.

Reflection/integration

- **Narrative/Reflective writing:** Periodic written narrative/reflective response essays (a paragraph or two) read by the mentor, with feedback returned to the learner. The assignments/prompts are drawn from the professional competencies, are open-ended, and help the learner focus on the total experience:
 - What do you hope to get out of this internship experience?
 - What are your professional goals that this experience will help meet?
 - Describe your initial experience on your internship in terms of understanding your duties, opening lines of communication, and knowing how to get help.
 - What have you learned in your first week?
 - Describe professional skills you've learned and tie them to anecdotes of experiences where you learned those skills.
 - What experiences have you had which may help you fulfil your goals?

The later assignments foster integration. Slightly longer responses will also help the intern process experience:

- Report on your work and achievement of your goals (2-3 pp.).
- Reflect on an experience that seems especially meaningful (2-3 pp.).
- Evaluate your internship provider in terms of clarity of expectations, lines of communication, and respectfulness.
- Write a cover letter and resume.
- Final report--a narrative/reflective essay.
 - For an example of a structured set of writing assignments see Harding "Agentic Design" (pp. 23-6).
- **Communication with and feedback from the mentor:** Correction is not usually good feedback. The mentor takes on the role of a lifelong learning and professional competencies coach,

asking questions that will help the learner refocus on competencies, reflect more deeply, reexamine assumptions made in the writing, and learn more from the experience.

Assessment

- **Evaluation of students should be educative, not just performative.** Evaluation relies on the writing assignments, especially the final narrative/reflective essay that synthesizes and integrates the whole experience.
- After the experience, mentors, administration, and managers use the student responses to evaluate the program.

References

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