Internships and Co-ops

The Office of Career Services is responsible for coordination and oversight of the non-academic credit activities associated with experiential learning experiences for students through qualified cooperative learning and internships. In working together with the academic units responsible for evaluating the components of the experiential learning opportunity to determine applicable academic credit, Career Services ensures the professional standards of the National Association of Colleges and Employers and laws of the U.S. Department of Labor are closely followed while maintaining appropriate documentation for student liability, code of conduct, active enrollment, University reporting and accreditation.

This document seeks to further define a Cooperative Learning and Internship (Paid and Unpaid) experience, Academic Credit, and the role of Georgia Southern Career Services.

Cooperative Learning (Co-ops)
Cooperative education provides students with multiple periods of work in which the work is related to the student's major or career goal. The typical program plan is for a student to alternate terms of full-time classroom study with terms of full-time, discipline-related employment. Since program participation involves multiple work terms, the typical participant will work three or four work terms, thus gaining a year or more of career-related work experience before graduation. Virtually all co-op positions are paid and the vast majority involves some form of academic credit.

[National Association of Colleges and Employers]

Internships (Paid and Unpaid)
An internship is a form of experiential learning that integrates knowledge and theory learned in the classroom with practical application and skills development in a professional setting. Internships give students the opportunity to gain valuable applied experience and make connections in professional fields students are considering for career paths; and give employers the opportunity to guide and evaluate talent.

1. The experience must be an extension of the classroom: a learning experience that provides for applying the knowledge gained in the classroom. It must not be simply to advance the operations of the employer or replace the work that a regular employee would routinely perform.

2. The skills or knowledge learned must be transferable to other employment settings.

3. The experience has a defined beginning and end, and a job description with desired qualifications.

4. There are clearly defined learning objectives/goals related to the professional goals of the student’s academic coursework.

5. There is supervision by a professional with expertise and educational and/or professional background in the field of the experience.

6. There is routine feedback to the intern and the Institution by the experienced supervisor.

7. There are resources, equipment, and facilities provided by the host employer that support learning objectives and goals.

[National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) Board of Directors, 2011]
**Internships (Additional Unpaid)**
The following six additional criteria must also be met for an UNPAID internship to be considered valid and legal. The criteria for this experience have been established by the Department of Labor in the Fair Labor Standards Act, Fact Sheet #71. This applies only to internships with “for-profit” organizations.

1. The internship, even though it includes actual operation of the employer’s facilities, is similar to training that would be given in a vocational school.
2. The internship experience is for the benefit of the student.
3. The intern does not displace regular employees, but works under the close observation of a regular employee.
4. The employer provides the training and derives no immediate advantage from the activities of the intern. Occasionally, the operations may actually be impeded.
5. The intern is not necessarily entitled to a job at the conclusion of the internship.
6. The employer and the intern understand that the intern is not entitled to wages for the time in the internship.

[US Department of Labor, Wage and Hour Division (WHD), 2010]

**Academic Credit**
Academic Credit is determined by the Academic Department by evaluating the job description and duties of the Cooperative Learning or Internship experience against the expectations of the Department, University, and all appropriate Accreditation standards. The Policy Statement on Credit Hours is further defined by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges as referenced below.

Career Services does not have a role in deciding appropriate academic credit; however, can assist with obtaining the necessary documentation from the employer regarding the details of the Experiential Learning opportunity. Additionally, Career Services can provide students with Non-Academic Credit placeholders on their course registration to assist a student in remaining full-time for the purpose of insurance and student loan deferments.

[Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges, 2012]

**Role of Career Services as it Pertains to Experiential Learning:**
1. To actively recruit, establish, and promote internship and co-op opportunities for all students.
2. To maintain the University’s cooperative accreditation status from the Accreditation Council for Cooperative Education (ACCE).
3. To protect the University and student interests by collecting and maintaining the Waiver of Liability, Student Code of Conduct, and student/employer evaluations.
4. To maintain the University database of Experiential Learning and provide a central point of contact for all non-academic related issues during an internship/co-op experience.
5. To register students in Non-Academic Credit for the purpose of insurance and student loan deferments.
Workplace and Emotional Intelligence Development Seminars
Research has shown that graduating college students enter the workforce lacking several of the necessary skills that employers desire. This new wave of students-turned-employees are highly skilled in their academic course work but have an overall underdeveloped sense of Emotional Intelligence. This suggests graduates do not have the ability to effectively use self-management and interpersonal skills to work successfully in a team environment nor independently, and may have difficulty managing change positively in the workplace.

An analysis of more than 300 top-level executives from fifteen global companies showed that six emotional competencies distinguished stars from the average: Influence, Team Leadership, Organizational Awareness, Self-confidence, Achievement Drive, and Leadership. All of these skills are part of an individual’s Emotional Intelligence framework.

Career Services at Georgia Southern University offers a voluntary seminar that is taught through distance learning while a student is participating in a cooperative learning or internship experience. The Instructors are certified to administer psychometric measurements and interpretations to enhance a student’s development and the course utilizes specific modules which connect a student’s emotional competencies with the practical learning opportunity.

This particular program continues to set the Georgia Southern student and their internship/co-op experience apart from other institutes of higher education.

Works Cited

