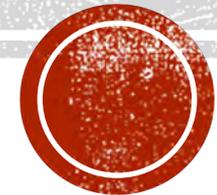


DESIGNING MEANINGFUL TASKS FOR INTERNS

2020 INTERN BRIDGE THOUGHT LEADERS SYMPOSIUM



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TODAY'S SESSION

Why examine the nature of internship tasks?

Review of the research and practitioner guidance

Introduction to the College Internship Study

Study findings: What makes internship work meaningful?

Tips and strategies for internship program design

BACKGROUND: WHY EXAMINE INTERNSHIP TASKS?

Tasks are at the heart of an internship (or any educational) experience

Common concern about menial, banal, tedious work for interns

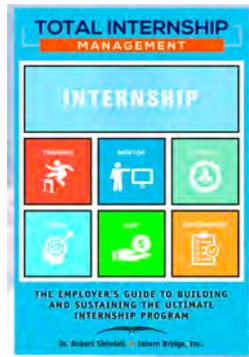
Crafting appropriate and enriching tasks is difficult!

Need to consider (and potentially reconcile) the different goals that all parties - student, employer, advisor - may have for tasks

REVIEW OF THE RESEARCH AND PRACTITIONER GUIDANCE

McHugh, P. P. (2017). The impact of compensation, supervision and work design on internship efficacy: implications for educators, employers and prospective interns. *Journal of Education and Work, 30*(4), 367-382.

Jackson, D. (2018). Developing graduate career readiness in Australia: Shifting from extra-curricular internships to work-integrated learning. *International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning, 19*(1), 23-35.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INTERN TASKS

- 1.** Create tasks or projects that are linked to the interns' coursework and/or career aspirations and offer opportunities for them to apply their academic knowledge.
- 2.** Give interns authentic work to do that is recognized as valuable by the organization and its staff.
- 3.** Make work assignments challenging yet achievable by the intern.



THE COLLEGE INTERNSHIP STUDY

A mixed-method longitudinal study funded by UW-Madison, the National Science Foundation, and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation



16 colleges and universities in the US
Regional comprehensives, HBCUs, HSIs, tech colleges



3 universities in East Asia
China and Japan

1. Does participation in internships vary by race/ethnicity, major, or socio-economic status?
2. To what degree does the structure (e.g., length, task clarity, mentorship quality) of internship programs influence students' career adaptability, wages, and employment?

STUDY FINDINGS: WHAT MAKES INTERNSHIP WORK MEANINGFUL?

CASE #1

University of Wisconsin-Parkside, Anthropology Major

Interned at archeological dig– closely related to major
Worked on excavating & cataloguing objects from 1836 cabin
Led analysis and writing of some artifacts – led to grad school



STUDY FINDINGS: WHAT MAKES INTERNSHIP WORK MEANINGFUL?

CASE #2

University of Texas-El Paso, History Major

Interned at auto insurance company – unrelated to major

Worked on group projects, data management, presentations

Student spoke of developing “professional” skills, boosted confidence



Photo by FotoAndalucia/Adobe Stock; Rand Corporation

STUDY FINDINGS: WHAT MAKES INTERNSHIP WORK MEANINGFUL?

CASE #3

Madison College, Interior Design Major

Interned at design firm– related to major

Did 1st internship w/firm, mostly did material intakes for vendors
At 2nd internship, led project designing “smart walls” – learned CAD



Photo by Wavebreak Media Ltd

STUDY FINDINGS: WHAT MAKES INTERNSHIP WORK MEANINGFUL?

CASE #4

University of Texas-El Paso, Electrical Engineering Major

Interned at manufacturer of beauty products– related to major
Firm had identified problem w/hair dryer – gave student challenge
Designed more efficient dryer design, saved firm \$\$

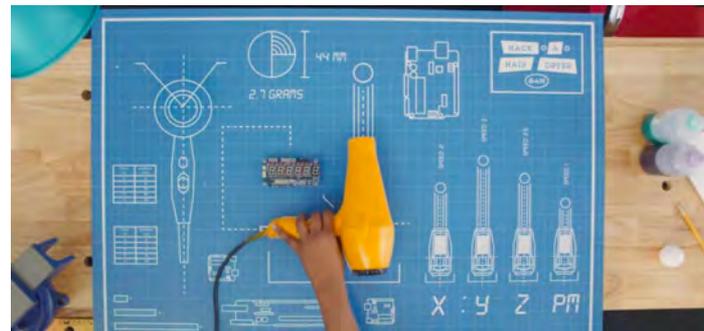
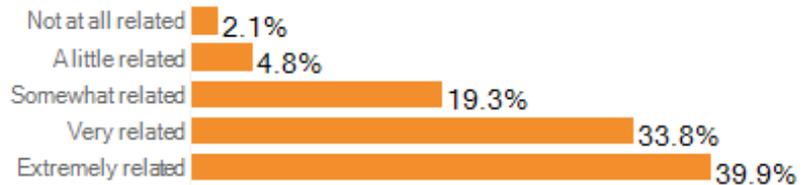


Photo by The Verge

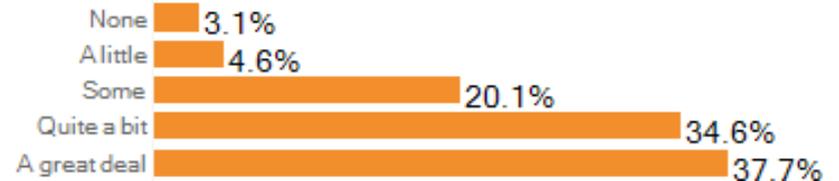
STUDY FINDINGS: WHAT MAKES INTERNSHIP WORK MEANINGFUL?

Online Survey

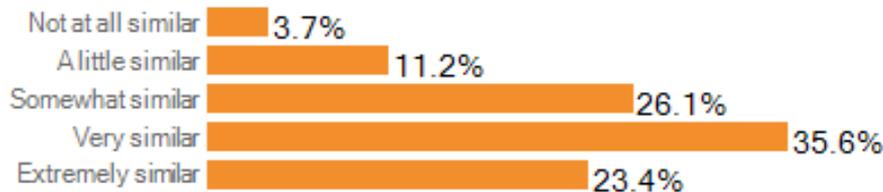
How related do you feel your internship was to your academic program? (N = 332)



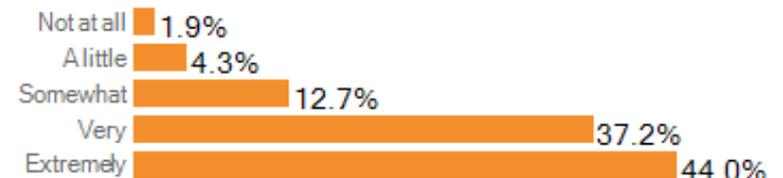
In this internship, how much flexibility did you have in how you completed your work? (N = 324)



During your internship, how similar in nature were your tasks to those in entry level jobs in the organization? (N = 332)



How important were the skills or knowledge you learned at this internship for your career development? (N = 332)



PRINCIPLES OF DESIGNING MEANINGFUL TASKS FOR INTERNS

1. Think about “meaningful” tasks in two ways: (a) tasks related to students’ major/career goals, and/or (b) tasks related to professionalism
 2. Plan! Encourage employers to identify relevant and challenging tasks beforehand. If possible, coordinate w/academic advisors to link with coursework.
 3. **Scaffold** tasks from easy to hard, with trained mentors available to assist interns.
 4. Provide feedback to employers (about task quality) and students (about performance on tasks). Then continually improve....
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REFLECTIONS ON YOUR OWN EXPERIENCES WITH MEANINGFUL INTERNSHIP WORK

- 1.** What have been some of the most meaningful tasks/projects that interns with your institution or organization have performed? Are there patterns across these successful cases?
- 2.** What was the process leading up to the development of those tasks? (eg., random, pre-planned, group planning, etc).
- 3.** What are some challenges you are experiencing with respect to finding meaningful internship tasks or projects for your students?

THANK YOU!

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