

Update for Quality Enhancement Plan Project

College of Business/UWF Career Services – Career Strategies Course

Institutional Model for Senior Year Experience

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Abstract

In 2007, the College of Business (COB) at the University of West Florida (UWF) and the UWF Career Services office collaborated to offer a **one hour General Elective Business Course** to seniors. The course promoted to seniors that it would focus on students' transition from college life to life after college. The intention of developing this class was to provide a model for the institutionalization of a course focusing on Senior Year Experience. The course was offered as a pilot program during the Spring Semester in 2007. This collaboration between the COB and UWF Career Services was to base theories taught in this course to the student's "senior year experience" (Gardner 1998).

Because of difficulty in offering the course under the original form "Career Strategies", the course changed focus and the core of the course was adopted into the Internship Pensacola Program as a professional development seminar. Because of this change, adherence to the original Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) was not current and therefore null. The course direction however became a good model for student transition to the world of work and has become a noteworthy development for UWF and the Pensacola community.

Project Results and Interpretation

Much change occurred after writing the original abstract and QEP for “Career Strategies”. The Career Strategies course was offered as a pilot program during the Spring Semester of 2007. Unfortunately it became impossible to offer the course in its original form as initiated in the QEP. ***Fortunately in 2007, a new community program was being developed outside of the University named Internship Pensacola that allowed the core of “Career Strategies” to continue.*** Internship Pensacola is an effort led by the Pensacola Young Professionals with support from the University of West Florida. The primary objective of the program was to attract and retain talent within the Pensacola Bay Area and to enhance quality internship experiences in the area. The program is targeted to juniors rising to seniors and current seniors. The initiators of the Internship Pensacola program became very interested in pairing the internship experience with an academic seminar designed to compliment work experience and polish professional and leadership skills. ***The Career Strategies course became the model for this new course, now in its third offering as the Internship Pensacola Professional Development Seminar (GEB 4991).***

One of the difficulties in offering the Career Strategies course was the challenge of getting students to enroll in the course as an elective. With the Internship Pensacola Professional Development Seminar being a mandatory piece of the Internship Pensacola program, the class has reached out to approximately 50 students and has benefitted greatly in pairing the topics with professional work. Qualitative reflective feedback of the course has been exceptional. Students have said that, “...this class should be mandatory for all students” and that the class was greatly beneficial in “...helping me find a job.” Shared experiences through the internship allows for a team or group to be developed, promoting weekly active reflection on new experiences in the world of work. Currently GEB 4991 is a graded, 3 credit hour course with expanded topics and text books. Funding for the course comes from the Internship Pensacola Program and the College of Business. The process of participating in the QEP made this class better and the instructors still feel it is a model for the Senior Year Experience.

Research was conducted to instill mentoring, active reflection, and a new leadership component. Guest speakers have spoken on Leadership including the CEO of Gulf Power: Susan Story, Quint Studer of the Studer Group, and others. A text has been added – ***“Conquering your Quarterlife Crisis”*** and careful yearly assessment has been conducted by the instructors to enhance the program and the overall classroom experience each year.

Dissemination and Institutionalization

With respect with QEP, information and updates of this course was shared with the campus community. In 2007, a presentation was made through a CUTLA campus seminar by Nathan Ford and Eileen Perrigo, now facilitators of the Internship Pensacola Professional Development Seminar. A nomination of the Internship Pensacola program and seminar were also submitted formally for a NASPA program award, in 2008 for its collaborative rewards and emphasis on reflection. Formative assessment does occur throughout the span of the class. The instructors, career services professionals, and employers informally provide feedback. Throughout the class, students are asked to discuss and reflect upon the direction of specific projects and class assignments. Each year, changes are made by instructors after debriefing.

Conclusion

Courses are often very difficult to create, but there is still a national and local interest in the Senior Year Experience and the transition from college life to work life. Colleges and Universities are still investigating curriculum “...designed to facilitate student transition to post-college life, provide regular opportunities for self-reflection regarding professional readiness, and help integrate and bring successful closure to the undergraduate experience” (Bulger, Lindauer, Jacobson 2007). As the Internship Pensacola program continues to grow, a plan of revisiting overall support of the Senior Year Experience concept will be investigated. Additionally, the course has many assessment opportunities. Graduates of the Internship Pensacola program and their successes are being tracked by the Internship Pensacola and Pensacola Young Professionals committees. Although the focus of this program has shifted, we attribute part of the success of the Internship Pensacola Professional Development Seminar as a result of the QEP process. The process provided a great foundation for the adherence to the Senior Year Experience in this course.

References

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