#### **Internship Design Team**

#### **Comprehensive Report and Recommendations**

#### December 2011

The Internship Design Team has concluded several months of intensive research, which included a review and analysis of all internal internship programs at MVCC. It also included review and analysis of several external internship sites. These sites represented a cross-section of community colleges, four year institutions and both public and private colleges. The external colleges that were researched include, Rockland Community College, SUNY Cortland, Finger Lakes Community College, SUNY Potsdam, Cazenovia College, and SUNY IT. Further, the team conducted interviews, gathered data, invited a speaker, and utilized media resources. Analysis also included research regarding internship programs and their impact and success on the national level. We believe that we have collected and analyzed an extensive amount of research. In addition, we carefully examined the SUNY guidelines for internships along with the Fair Labor Standards Act. All documentation and research is included with the comprehensive report.

#### I. Define Internships

The Internship Design Team recommends the following definition according to University Faculty Senate (2007), "Internships are offered as part of academic programs in a broad array of settings and for a wide variety of reasons. Some institutions may offer both credit and non-credit bearing internships. Internships discussed in this guide will be limited to those academic experiences for which a student earns academic credit in an

agreed-upon, short-term, supervised work experience usually related to a student's major field or area of interest. The work can be full or part time, on or off campus, paid or unpaid. Credit is awarded to the student by the college/university on the recommendation of qualified faculty. This guide does not include internships that are required components of a registered program leading to NYS licensure or certification (e.g., teacher preparation, social work, dental hygiene). For the purposes of this Guide, an internship is distinct from community service or service learning" (p. 1).

#### II. Design Team Recommendations and Rationale

Recommendation #1: A central internship office/coordinator to oversee the college wide internship process for students and companies. This person would work in conjunction with the faculty internship coordinators in their respective areas to support and enhance their programs. The coordinator would also oversee the development of the website and the implementation and offerings of the centralized internship fair each semester.

After extensive research of exemplary internship programs, we concluded that it is necessary to have an institutionalized or centralized model for conducting internships at the college. An institutionalized model means that any student who attends MVCC has the opportunity to participate in an internship. Furthermore, in order to achieve a centralized or institutionalized model, our research shows that the exemplary programs have an internship coordinator housed within an Experiential Education Office or Career Services department to facilitate the internship process. In fact, all six of the schools we researched had a central location for internship opportunities.

For instance, SUNY Potsdam has an Experiential Education Office for students who are interested in pursuing an internship opportunity as well as employers who would like to host a student intern. This office facilitates the process of connecting students with internship opportunities and also prepares them for the internship (resume, cover letter development, and interview preparation.) Additionally, this office serves as the central location for all statistical information regarding internships within the college. In other words, all contracts between the student, employer, and the faculty member are kept within this office/system in order to track progress and to keep records of this experience.

Likewise, Rockland Community College has an institutionalized Internship Program within the Career Services Center, which offers internships with hundreds of local and regional business throughout the area. RCC has a centralized office that aids in the process and helps students connect with qualified faculty members who mentor students through the internship experience. Lastly, Toby White, the Director of Experiential Education at SUNY Potsdam, who came to MVCC to speak and share his insight on the internship process, made it clear that an internship coordinator is critical to the growth and expansion of our current internship programs here at MVCC.

## <u>Recommendation #2:</u> A comprehensive Internship Fair for students, faculty and employers.

The Design Team decided to recommend an internship fair, which would consist of all the internships, across various disciplines, to represent their programs. We believe this would create a support network for the students and employers as well as create a connection between the college and the community. We would recommend that past

interns be invited to participate in the internship fair to showcase their experiences and any projects they created as a result. Our hope is that students will learn from their peers and will want to participate in an internship as a result. Lastly, the internship fair would be planned by the internship coordinator through the centralized model we have suggested above.

<u>Recommendation #3:</u> A central internship web site for all internship programs as well as a database to house all of the internship opportunities.

Currently we do not have a central location for students, current employers or future employers who would like to search for information and post internship opportunities. However, all six of the colleges we researched have a centralized website, which consist of internship information, appropriate forms, a website for employers to post opportunities, faculty sponsor information, site supervisor guides, contact information, and much more.

Furthermore, most of the schools we researched had a job/internship posting program that houses all of the internship and service learning opportunities. For example, SUNY Potsdam has something called BearTracker, which is a searchable database for full, part-time, summer internship, and volunteer opportunities. Similarly, SUNY Cortland has a database called JobConnect, which is their version of an on-line job and internship posting database. MVCC has an online job search database called the College Central Network, which currently focuses on job and career postings, but could be the database to host internship opportunities as well. As a design team, we recommend the possibility of utilizing the College Central Network or another program that will successfully accomplish these goals.

Lastly, we feel the management and oversight of the website and internship posting system described above should be done by the internship coordinator. The management of this information needs to be done regularly and will be time consuming, which is why we recommend this be one of the tasks for the coordinator.

### **Recommendation #4:** A comprehensive internship orientation for all internship sites participating in the MVCC internship program.

In addition to the internship fair, the Design Team felt an internship orientation for the employers would be a great way to integrate the various employers who work with different academic programs at the college. The orientation would be beneficial for all employers to visit the college, meet the faculty, learn about the program requirements, and pose questions. This would ensure a consistent approach to the internship process across all programs and would allow employers to network with each other. Our hope is to create a sense of community between the employers and the college.

#### Recommendation #5: Internships should be offered on a paid and unpaid basis.

Currently at MVCC, the majority of our internships do not offer opportunities that are paid, with the exception of a few programs including Hospitality. As a team we decided it was necessary to offer our internships as both paid and unpaid experiences. Specifically, according to our proposed definition, University Faculty Senate (2007) "The work can be full or part time, on or off campus, paid or unpaid" (p.5.) We believe by offering both paid and unpaid internships, our students will have a broader array of opportunities to choose from, which may result in a job offer at the conclusion of the experience.

In fact, according to NACE's 2011 Student Survey "Class of 2011 graduates who took part in a paid internship were more likely to get a job offer, have a job in hand by the time they graduated, and receive a higher starting salary offer than their peers who undertook an unpaid internship or no internship at all." Therefore, we feel it is critical to offer both paid and unpaid internships in order to expand our opportunities and not limit our students in any way. However, if we offer paid internships, we must make sure we are compliant with the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) which can be found on p. 11 of the University Faculty Senate's (2007) Internships: A Guide for Planning, Implementation, and Assessment view book.

### <u>Recommendation #6:</u> Standardization of internship hours for credit: 1 credit=45 contact hours.

After doing our internal research it became very evident that each department has a different requirement for what constitutes a credit hour. One of the main goals of the design team was to determine what a credit hour stands for and to ensure every student is putting the same amount of time and work into earning one academic credit.

Pursuing this further, we discovered that the SUNY system in conjunction with the Commissioner's regulations have criteria that determine a credit hour. According to University Faculty Senate (2007) "This is the New York State Education Department formula for calculating the minimum number of instructional and supplementary hours required for 1 credit in a course. Because this adds up to 45 hours of work, the minimum number of combined instructional and supplementary hours per credit for an internship is also 45. Since the State Education Department requirement is a minimum requirement,

departments may require more than 45 combined instructional and supplementary hours of internship experience per credit earned (p.5.) Therefore, as a team, we recommend that we are compliant with SUNY guidelines, which means 1 academic credit hour equals 45 hours or more combined instructional and supplementary hours (p.5.) Lastly, the policy on experiential learning states, "When life or work experience is to be credited as a concurrent portion of an academic program design, as in an internship, one semester credit hour will be awarded for each 40-45 clock-hour week of supervised academic activity that provides the learning considered necessary to program study" (p.5.) In other words the credit for life experience is based on a 40 hour work week as opposed to a 45 hour limit for each academic credit.

## <u>Recommendation #7:</u> Standard legal contract regarding liability for the student, college, and employer.

We recommend one universal liability contract for all internships across the college. The legal team at MVCC has been consulted and has created a document to utilize in particular internship programs. However, legal team is still in the process of finalizing a contract that could be used for each program. Most of our external research proved that each school has their own liability waiver or contract that the student/employer must sign (please see a sample in our documents section.) Additionally, Toby White from SUNY Potsdam informed us that there is a SUNY Affiliation agreement that has already been created by SUNY Central, which may cover our liability as well. Pursuing this further, the legal team at the college will have to determine the best contract to be used as a universal document for all internships.

# <u>Recommendation #8:</u> Internships should be offered during all semesters (fall, spring & summer.)

Throughout our internal research we discovered that some of our academic internships are only offered during one semester of the academic year. As a result, our students are limited to opportunities and experiences that occur throughout the entire year. This especially hinders the students who do not follow the traditional academic track for their major, which is very common for community college students.

Consequently, it is difficult for employers to fit within a stringent structure as well.

All six of the schools we researched offer internships in the fall, spring, summer, and some during the winter break. For example, at SUNY Potsdam, any student, as long as they meet the minimum requirements academically, can pursue an internship during any semester. In fact, they have many students who want to obtain a summer internship opportunity and can receive up to 12 credits toward their degree. Similarly, SUNY Cortland offers internships year round, including a winter term as long as the student meets the minimum requirements and submits the Learning Agreement by the deadlines, which are outlined in their internship guidebook. To that end, we feel that our internships at MVCC should be offered during all semesters, which will not only benefit the students, but will help strengthen our employer and community relations.

<u>Recommendation #9:</u> Development of a college wide document/contract for supervisors, students, and faculty to determine the learning outcomes for the internships.

As a design team, we decided that a learning agreement should be established between the faculty member or internship coordinator, the site supervisor, and the student participating in the internship. We believe this would alleviate any questions between the various constituents and help to clarify academic learning outcomes as well as legal issues. Furthermore, all six of the schools we researched had some form of a contract/learning agreement that had to be signed by all three parties mentioned above. University Faculty Senate (2007) states "A learning agreement is an arrangement between the college and the field site to identify the learning activities that will be part of the internship. A learning agreement should be completed between the department faculty or internship coordinator and the site representative prior to course registration and commencement of the internship" (p.4) The University Faculty Senate's (2007) guide, also states some important information that should be considered for our learning agreement form:

"Important elements to consider in the internship learning agreement include

A. necessary course registration information (e.g., course title and number, number of credit hours, name of faculty supervisor, date and semester of participation);

- B. the required number of hours in the workplace;
- C. a clear description of both the site requirements and the required academic components (e.g., log, journal, paper, oral presentation);
- D. a clear description of intended learning outcomes and activities;
- E. a clear description of the responsibilities of the college, the student and the site;
- F. signatures by the appropriate parties, which must include a site representative and the appropriate departmental supervisors. Student signatures may also be required on this form to indicate understanding and acceptance of course requirements" (p.4.)

Therefore, we are proposing that the learning agreement be in place and signed by all constituencies prior to the start of the internship. (Please see sample learning agreements in our documents section.)

#### Recommendation #10: Internships to be offered on a credit and not-for-credit basis.

After doing our internal research, we realized that the majority of our internships are offered on a for-credit basis, either paid or unpaid. However, we realized that there are opportunities that could be not-for-credit, paid, and still fit the criteria of an internship. As a design team we felt it was important to be flexible with our internship offerings as long as the college wide document discussed above are approved by the appropriate constituents.

Furthermore, if an employer contacts the college with an opportunity that is not for credit, the internship coordinator could handle the documentation and proposal forms, but there wouldn't have to be a faculty member overseeing the internship. To that end, we propose that a notation could be added to the transcript to verify the student completed the internship.

### References

NACE. (2011). Paid internships key to job-search success. *Spotlight for Career Services Professionals, September 28, 2011.* 

Senate, U. F. (2007). *Internships: A Guide for Planning, Implementation, and Assessment*. Albany, NY: State University of New York.