Final Report
Support Unit Program Review
Cooperative Education and Internship Program

Review Process

The Cooperative Education and Internship Program (“the Program”) prepared a self-study following program review guidelines. An external review team visited the campus, reviewed the self-study documents, interviewed unit personnel and university administrators, and submitted an external report. The Vice Provost for Academic Programs read the self-study and the external review. This document summarizes those materials and presents a synthesis and a set of summary findings and recommendations.

Summary of the Self-Study

Introduction

The Program offers four different program options to students: cooperative education, internships, the National Student Exchange, and the Washington Center. The Cooperative Education Program was initiated in 1978. The National Student Exchange and the Washington Center were added to the program’s responsibilities in 1989. Internships were added gradually; the name of the program was changed in 1999 to reflect the increased roll that internships were playing.

Cooperative education and internships. The purpose of both these programs is “to provide students with practical experience related to their major that will enhance and complement their classroom learning.” Co-ops extend for two to three semesters, and include training, increasing difficulty, and greater responsibility as the student continues. Internships are for one semester, and may be full- or part-time. All co-op students receive pay; not all internship students are paid. Academic credit for either type of experience may be awarded by the BGSU department involved; all students receive a transcript notation.

National Student Exchange. The National Student Exchange is a national organization with which BGSU is affiliated. Students spend a semester or an academic year at another affiliated institution, and receive BGSU academic credit for their coursework. Students from other institutions attend BGSU, with a similar arrangement with their home institution. Students pay the tuition and fees of BGSU
or their exchange institution, whichever is less. Through this exchange, students can take specialized courses not available at BGSU, explore graduate and professional programs, and/or broaden their personal experience by living and studying in a different geographic and educational environment.

**Washington Center.** The Washington Center is a nonprofit, independent educational organization. It offers students opportunities to do internships in public and nonprofit organizations in Washington, D.C. and surrounding area. In addition to the internship, students are required to attend lectures, enroll in a course, and do volunteer work. Students receive full-time academic credit (15 hours during the academic year and 12 hours during the summer). The Washington Center has a well-developed portfolio-based assessment that treats all aspects of the student’s Washington experience. Students pay a program fee, which is offset by an OBOR-funded scholarship program.

**Mission**

“The primary mission of the CEIP is to promote and nurture student success by providing students with practical experience in a professional work environment.” The co-ops, internships, and exchanges offered by the Program share the following learning outcomes:

1) to gain practical experience while applying classroom learning at the workplace;
2) to enhance professional skills; and
3) to experience personal and professional growth.

The self-study reports that the Program ranks “in the top 10% of programs in senior colleges in the U.S. in numbers of student placements and the largest in Ohio among universities without an engineering college.” Its NSE program is the oldest and largest in Ohio. BGSU is one of the top 20 colleges in the nation that work with the Washington Center. The self-study cites these data in support of the claim that the Program is contributing meaningfully to the University vision of becoming the premier learning community in Ohio and one of the best in the nation.

The Program has well-developed assessments of student outcomes. These indicate the Program’s contribution to students’ academic achievement as well as to their personal development in the core values of the University. Students participating in co-ops, internships, the NSE, and the Washington Center: gain self-confidence, increase their technological sophistication, become more productive citizens, learn and act on civic responsibilities, improve their practice of and appreciation for cooperation, and articulate pride in a job well done.

The Program reports to the Vice Provost for Academic Outreach, and it contributes in ways appropriate to that placement. Businesses report that they are well served by the Program Indeed, many businesses actively recruit our students, use co-ops and internships as vehicles to attract the interest of students, and report that they would employ more if more were available.

**Description of the Unit**
Services. The Program has three major sets of customers: students, academic units, and employers. The range of services provided to students is wide, beginning with informing students about co-op and internship opportunities. The Program has produced “Co-op at a Glance” flyers, specialized for different departments, that present assessment and placement data. These have been very effective in recruitment, not just to the Program but to the University in the first place. The Program helps students prepare/refine their resumes, and it coaches them with interviewing skills. It maintains student credentials and forwards them to prospective employers. It arranges interview schedules if the interviewer is on campus. It offers a Professional Orientation Workshop for students leaving on their first assignment. Furthermore, the Program serves as students’ liaison to BGSU when they are on assignment.

The Program serves departments by offering their majors an experiential education opportunity. It provides placement data, employer evaluations, and student assessment to department faculty. The Program also puts employers in contact with appropriate departments and faculty. According to the self-study, “there is intense inter-university competition for corporate resources.” Through its focused employer nights and targeted employer fairs, the Program wins an advantage in this competition for BGSU departments.

From the point of view of the participating businesses, the Program provides a cost-effective method of recruiting students. Career Services is informed about interviews with graduating seniors, which are scheduled on occasion as a courtesy to employers. Students in internships and co-ops provide a workforce for project and seasonal work. Business representatives have described the Program as win-win-win: it benefits the students, the University, and the business community.

Almost all co-op students and full-time interns are paid. In 1999-2000, their aggregate salaries were estimated at over $4 million, a substantial resource for students looking for ways to pay for their education.

The Program also provides services for students in the NSE and Washington Center programs. In addition to the placements themselves, services include registering for (and dropping) courses, generating fee waivers, and arranging housing.

Personnel Resources. The Program staff comprises a director (a faculty member, contracted for 60% commitment to the Program), two assistant directors, and two secretaries. This number has remained unchanged since the mid 1980s.

Financial Resources. The operating budget for the co-op and internship programs was $25,178 in 1999-2000. The operating budgets for NSE and the Washington Center are part of the special program budgets. The NSE operating budget for 1999-2000 was $94,567, of which $87,907 was for fee waivers. The Washington Center budget was $35,404, of which $29,729 was for unprocessed instructional fee waivers. The Washington Center also has a rotary budget, based
on fees collected from students, which amounted to $58,614, which covers instructional fees, adjusted program fee, and reduced general fee.

The Program received $17,000 in corporate donations in 1999-2000, substantially more than in previous years.

Facilities. The Program is housed in a suite of offices in Saddlemire Student Services Building. The location is an advantage to businesses because of access and parking, but it is a disadvantage to the academic community because there is little drop-in traffic from students or faculty. The facility issue of greatest significance is computing. The Program has recently acquired new PC’s from ITS, but it has an outmoded database. The acquisition of a new database is a high priority for the Program.

Numbers Served. In 1998-99, there were 951 student placements in co-ops and internships, the largest number of placements in the history of the program. Some of the demand was driven by employers’ needs surrounding the Y2K computer problem. Also, due to staff turnover, changing enrollment patterns, and the retirement of a key supporter in the College of Business Administration, placements in 1999-2000 numbered 856. The College of Business Administration accounts for 50 to 60 percent of the total; the departments of AMIS, Management, Marketing, and Finance are the biggest sources. The College of Arts & Sciences is the second largest in terms of student participation (30 to 40 percent of total placements), with large numbers of placements coming from Computer Science, IPC, and Scientific and Technical Communication.

In 1999-2000, 22 students from BGSU attended other institutions through the National Student Exchange. About three quarters were in the College of Arts & Sciences. Approximately 20 percent of the total student participants were minority students.

Prior to 2000-01, there have been 15 fee waivers for students to participate in the Washington Center. If students change their minds late in the process, not all 15 positions are used. Thus, in 1999-2000, 11 students participated in the Washington Center. The number of waivers increased to 20 in 2000-01. Typically, students come from the Departments of History, Political Science, Environmental Studies, Interpersonal Communication, and International Studies.

Assessment

The Program has well-developed assessments based on the learning outcomes stated earlier. Both employers and students are asked to assess co-op and internship experiences on a questionnaire. The questionnaires are linked with the learning outcomes of the academic units, emphasizing that the experiential learning experience is fundamentally an academic experience. The self-study notes in this regard “…that faculty control the curriculum that shapes the knowledge base of the students, which in turn will have a major impact on their performance at the work
site. If there are curricular deficiencies that adversely impact co-op students’ performances, only the faculty can remedy the problem.”

The self-study provides a very detailed account of assessment results, including both quantitative information and selected qualitative comments. In summary, “the student and employer assessment data suggest that the specified learning outcomes are being achieved.” For instance, “…employers report that about 98% of the students met or exceeded employers’ expectations in their knowledge, performance as well as quantity and quality of work.” There were only a few areas where results were weak. The percent of students indicating that the experience involved working with diverse racial/cultural groups was low. This is likely due to the composition of the employer base, but the Program will work to improve the situation. Assessments also indicated room for improvement in students’ writing skills. Also, opportunities for leadership were not strongly in evidence in the entry-level positions available in co-ops and internships.

The employers reported a desire to increase the number of candidates in certain majors. The Program has responded by working with high schools to recruit students into those majors.

Students participating the NSE report a high level of satisfaction with the exchange. Many took specialized courses related to their major while on exchange. Over 90% of students are able to do their exchange at their first choice college. On the down side, students reported problems with course availability at the exchange institution. In order to avoid these problems, the Program will encourage students to get information about course availability by email, rather than relying on catalogs.

The Washington Center has a well-developed portfolio assessment, based on learning outcomes similar to those of the Program, but with more emphasis on civic responsibility. The data, presented in detail in the self-study, reveal that the learning outcomes “are being realized by the vast majority of the WC students.”

The self-study also provides evidence on the Program’s staff and operations. Survey results reveal that 94% of students judged staff availability and responsiveness as “excellent” or “very good”. On-campus interviewers rated the staff even higher than the students did. Another indicator of quality is taken from a 1996 survey of co-op programs: “the CEIP ranks in the top 10% nationwide in terms of number of placements (Hutcheson, 1996). Moreover it is the largest optional program in Ohio without an engineering college.” The self-study presents a comparison of co-op and internship programs at public universities in Ohio, and concludes, “in terms of placements per staff member, BGSU leads the state.”

The self-study reports positive interaction and cooperation with several offices and programs on campus, including: the co-op office in the College of Technology, Registration and Records, Financial Aid, Bursar, Housing, International Programs, and Career Services.
In its review of finances, the self-study summarizes its situation by calculating cost in operating dollars per placement. “Between the 1990-91 academic year and the 1999-00 academic year, the cost in operating dollars of each placement dropped by almost 50% from $57.97 in 1990-91 to $29.10 in 1999-00.” During this time, the number of placements increased by almost 13%.

**Planning**

The self-study presents six goals to be accomplished over the next five years. The goals are prefaced by the observation that “the staff is working at close to, if not at, full capacity. Thus implementation of new activities would require the reassignment of staff from the office’s core mission, which most probably will reduce the number of student placements.”

*Enhancing the learning environment.* Working from research that suggests structured reflection enhances learning in co-op and internship situations, the self-study proposes to implement distance learning technology to help students undertake reflection on their experiential education assignments. WebCT will provide a vehicle for this, as well as for exercises and/or reflection in writing and leadership. Finally, the Program intends to initiate activities that explore the core values, focusing on “cooperation.”

*Technology.* The self-study notes that “…improvement of technology is the greatest hope for expanding the CEIP’s operation both quantitatively and qualitatively.” Thus, the acquisition of a new database is a goal of highest priority. The Program plans to develop a resource plan for this purpose, as well as for scholarships.

*Increase student participation in the Washington Center.* The goal to increase participation in the Washington Center from 20 to 25 will depend on getting approval for five additional fee waivers.

*Expansion in the College of Arts & Sciences.* Increased participation of students in Arts & Sciences is desirable. With the advice of the College office, the self-study plan is to target units that have expressed an interest, such as biology, chemistry and history. There are significant obstacles to overcome to achieve this goal. Primary among them is that it will require additional personnel and information resources. Also, few paid positions exist in these fields, and faculty in such departments have less contact with and knowledge of potential employers.

*Academic integration.* Broadening and strengthening relationships with academic units is a key to students’ success in internships, co-ops, and exchanges. Activities and programs to build on include discipline specific recruitment and advising materials, joint assessment mechanisms, employer nights, and the co-op prep course taught with computer science. Some departments would like more of their majors to take a co-op or internship. There are other departments where there is potential to develop new co-op or internship experiences, particularly in Arts & Sciences.
**Electronic internships.** “Just as telecommuting is practical for some American workers, it is feasible for some students to tie academic and work experience together without relocation.” An electronic internship might best occur after the completion of a traditional assignment.

**Summary of the External Report**

An external program review report was prepared by J. Ernest Simpson, who is Director of Co-op Education at California State Polytechnic University in Pomona, CA, and E. Sam Sovilla, who until September, 2000 was Associate Provost and Director of the Division of Professional Practice at the University of Cincinnati.

The external reviewers perceived that “the programs of the CEIP have been successful and are serving the Bowling Green State University community very well.” They offer the following observations:

1) The staff interact with “a significant number of students”, both on a one-to-one basis and in group meetings. Assessment data reveal that the learning outcomes of the Program are being achieved. Employers are very pleased with the Program.

2) The location of the Program within the University is both appropriate and consistent with the arrangement for leading programs in the field.

3) The Program has positive relationships with service and administrative offices at the University.

4) The Program has an emphasis on student learning. “Bowling Green is taking a leadership role in developing a pedagogy for fostering learning from experiential education. The self-study itself reflects this value and differs considerably from reports at many other institutions.”

5) The purposes and activities of the Program are aligned with those of the University.

6) The employer nights and the co-op prep course in computer science are especially noteworthy. The staff have an “orientation to look ahead rather than maintain status quo.”

7) The Program serves students in over 50 disciplines at BGSU. The staff are working at full capacity; future expansion would require additional staff resources.

8) Program staff have positive relations with a number of academic units.

9) The staff have “significant experience” and function well as a team.

The external report notes that the few program shortcomings were minor in scale and were adequately portrayed in the self-study. Its summary of the state of the Program is laudatory:

Bowling Green State University has developed a relatively large-scale cooperative education and internship program. To understand the context of BGSU’s program, over the past 30 years hundreds of post-secondary institutions in the United States have made significant efforts to develop large-scale programs. Only a relatively few have achieved BGSU’s size.
despite access to many thousands of dollars of federal funding that was formerly available. In reality, BGSU is among a modest number of institutions over the past three decades that have been successful in developing a stable and relatively large-scale program. Based on the experiences of other institutions, it is obvious that it is extremely difficult, today, to build a program of the magnitude offered by BGSU. This point is emphasized since the Reviewers have the impression that some faculty and administrators may not fully appreciate the institutions’ success story in experiential education.

Planning

As a preface to a point-by-point review of the Program’s plan, the external reviewers listed several issues that impose constraints on the system as a whole.

1) The plan cannot be implemented without new resources for personnel, technology and operation.
2) The implementation of a new database may be more complicated and time-consuming than anticipated.
3) Plans for succession for the next director should take place within the next five years.
4) It will be a major challenge to obtain the increased level of faculty participation that will be required to implement aspects of the plan.
5) Expansion of services to more students may not be practical, given the current number of staff and their workload. Expansion might entail a tradeoff with program quality.

Goal 1: Enhancing the learning environment. The external review team finds this is the most important goal in the plan. They note, “…many institutions have lost sight of the primary purpose of cooperative education, which is education.” The BGSU Program, in contrast, recognizes the ways experiential education can enhance classroom learning. The external reviewers strongly encourage the use of WebCT to undertake the “virtual reflection” of co-op and internship experiences. However, they warn that a five-year timeframe may not be enough to accomplish this goal.

Goal 2: Technology. The external team state that the implementation of a new data base is a “must”. They caution that it is very important to develop a resource plan for this acquisition immediately, so that fund raising can occur during the 2001-02 academic year. They also note that to make this a priority in the development office will likely require strong support from a senior-level academic administrator.

Goal 3: Increase student participation in the Washington Center. Noting the effective track record of this program, the external team supports the expansion to 25 students in 2001-02.

Goal 4: Expansion in the College of Arts & Sciences. The external reviewers had significant reservations about this goal and its feasibility. They note that “experiential programs in disciplines without an easily identifiable job market are
very labor intensive to operate,” and so note that this goal carries with it a demand for personnel resources. They also note that other institutions that have tried large-scale experiential programs in the liberal arts have had difficulty getting student participation. Given these reservations, the external reviewers propose a “bold modification in the CEIP’s plan.” The modification entails limiting the mission of the Program to provide clarity and limit confusion. They recommend maintaining the current cooperative education program (with its minimum of two semesters), and renaming the internship piece the “Professional Internship Program,” which would focus on full-time employment for one semester. Under this modification, the Program would not engage in more “casual” internship opportunities (e.g. less than full-time), and would make sure that all internships would have high academic standards. They also recommend that faculty be required to review and formally approve participation in the program as a way to promote faculty ownership.

**Goal 5: Academic Integration.** The external report points out that an additional Assistant Director would be necessary to cultivate greater faculty participation. They also see this goal as closely related to the previous one, on expansion in the College of Arts & Sciences.

**Goal 6: Electronic Internships.** Although they are generally positive about this goal, the external reviewers do not see electronic internships becoming a major activity of the Program.

**Summary Findings**

The Cooperative Education and Internship Program is a successful program, contributing effectively to the educational and outreach missions of the University. The data and self-evaluation presented in the self-study are supported by the external report in noting that the Program has achieved distinction in terms of number of placements. In co-ops and internships, we are among the top 10% in the country and number one in Ohio among schools without an engineering program. The data show that the Program has increased the number of placements and decreased the programmatic cost per placement, over the past ten years. The Program is first in the state in terms of placements per staff member. All data suggest that employers are well served, and that the Program is making a significant contribution in terms of outreach to the business community. The Washington Center program, too, is highly regarded and successful. Both the Co-op and internship programs and the Washington Center program have well-developed assessment programs. The assessment programs are effectively used to identify and correct weaknesses in program processes or student outcomes. The National Student Exchange is somewhat different in character, but shares the goal of providing our students off-site educational opportunities. Overall, the Program stands out for its emphasis on making experiential education a significant enhancement of the students’ classroom learning.

The major weakness of the Program lies in its old database. The Program could also make increased use of web-based resources. The Program’s plans are
ambitious in light of current funding and staffing levels. Evidence suggests that the office is currently functioning at or near peak capacity. Implementation of the self-study plan, including expansion of the number of placements, will require additional personnel, technological, and budgetary resources.

**Summary Recommendations**

1) Pursue the goals established in the self-study, with the modifications suggested by the external team.
   a) The emphasis on the “education” in “experiential education” is clearly a program strength. The Program should continue to pursue this approach both in principal and through the implementation of WebCT for reflective exercises.
   b) The Program must acquire a new database. The director should work with the Vice Provost for Academic Outreach and the Provost to determine the appropriate source of funding. If the Development Office is to be engaged in this project, the Provost should communicate the priority of the database to Development.
   c) Request expansion of the Washington Center to 25 students.
   d) Expansion of co-ops and internships in the College of Arts & Sciences will require additional personnel resources. The director should present a personnel and budgetary plan to the Provost for this expanded mission. Details of which departments to work with should be developed in consultation with the Dean of Arts & Sciences. The external team’s recommendations to limit the internship program to full-time placements and to students with a suitable academic record is excellent.
   e) Increasing academic integration is an excellent principal, and should be pursued where ever possible. In terms of concrete action, this goals seems closely related to expansion in the College of Arts & Sciences, and is dependent on additional personnel resources.
   f) The electronic internship should assume a lower priority. This should be pursued as time and resources allow.

2) The Program has an excellent assessment program. Continue to use assessment for program improvement as well as for recruitment purposes. File an annual report with SAAC, as has been done.

*The Cooperative Education and Internship Program should report annually to the Vice Provost for Academic Outreach, with a copy to the Provost, on the implementation of these recommendations.*