**What is an Internship?**

Most internships incorporate three elements:

* **Deliberate learning.** Students set learning goals for their internship experiences that typically include learning about a career, honing professional skills (e.g., teamwork, impression management, taking initiative, etc.), and developing career-specific competencies.
* **Reflection.** Students reflect on their internship experiences, relating them to other personal experiences and college coursework.
* **Mentoring.** Students receive onsite supervision, guidance, and feedback for improvement. Site supervisors function much like mentors, providing opportunities for professional development and networking with professionals in the field.

It is these three components that differentiate internships from volunteering and other forms of experiential learning (O’Neil, 2010). When one volunteers, the focus is on helping, not necessarily on learning a new skill or analyzing one’s experiences. In community service learning students engage in deliberate learning as they participate in meaningful and planned service experiences in the community that are substantially related to course content. Through reflective activities, students enhance their understanding of course content, general knowledge, sense of civic responsibility, self-awareness and commitment to the community. The difference between community service learning and internships lies, in part, in the mentoring component. In internships the primary focus is on the individual student’s professional development and the mentoring relationship between students and their site supervisors. Students engaged in community service learning rarely receive sustained one-on-one mentoring on site.

Not all internship classes or programs, however, are structured in the same way. In fact, they can vary considerably along several dimensions:

* **Pay.** Some internships are paid whereas others are unpaid
* **Course Credit.** Some internships involve course credit (letter grade or pass/fail); others do not. Some academic departments require the course for graduation whereas other departments offer it as an option among other choices (e.g., studying abroad), or recognize it as an upper-division elective.
* **Seminar Participation.** Although all internships involve some form of reflection and analysis of internship experiences, how that is handled differs. In some departments, students meet with their peers (15-20 students) to reflect on and discuss their internship experiences. Across the semester students might meet as a group just twice (beginning and end), monthly, or even weekly. In other departments, students meet instead, one-on-one with the class instructor, tailoring the course assignments to each student’s specific needs. Yet another approach involves a hybrid of in-person and online peer interactions.
* **Assessment Methods.** The assessment of student learning is done in a multitude of ways. Common methods include journals that document students’ on-site experiences, reflection papers that analyze internship experiences and incorporate course theories and concepts, resumes, site visits and interviews with community professionals, workshops at the Career Development Center, site-specific projects, and professional multi-media presentations documenting internship outcomes.

O’Neil, N. (2010). Internships as a High-Impact Practice: Some Reflections on Quality. *Peer Review: Publication of American Association of Colleges and Universities*, Volume 12 (4). <https://www.aacu.org/publications-research/periodicals/internships-high-impact-practice-some-reflections-quality>