Creating a Culture for Internships and Experiential Learning

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**Objective**
Sharing of information related to established cultures of experiential learning with faculty, staff, and administration who desire to learn more about how universities implement methods of engagement with business and industry professionals who interact with college students in the classroom environment and provide guidance related to internship opportunities.

**Description**
At the University of South Carolina, student interns have spent numerous summers working with such companies as Blue Cross/Blue Shield, Boeing, BMW, Capgemini, IBM, Lowes, Michelin, and more.  With a dedicated director of the internship program, the university continues to build upon relationships with domestic and international companies and expands on internship opportunities that allow career choices for USC graduates.

A full-time work experience is required of all undergraduate Integrated Information Technology (IIT) majors. Prior to graduation, students must enroll in the Professional Internship (ITEC 495) course which is focused on the student’s career goals within a technology career.  For example, students who are interested in network administration are encouraged to seek an internship in a networking position. Students who are interested in becoming a project manager may elect to complete an internship with an organization that will expose the student to an assortment of technology projects.

Internships may be taken during the junior or senior year and students usually select the summer term to complete their 400+ hour job experience.  As part of a six-credit hour course, students must complete additional course work and assigned projects that add value to the experience.  The instructor requires time logs and daily discussion boards to allow students to ask technical questions and for interaction with classmates relating to work related issues. Students show initiative by completing assignments and researching new technologies to support the problem-solving process that helps the supervisor with active projects. All assignments are completed online and allows for verification of work experiences between the cooperating company supervisor and student intern.  At the end of the experience, company supervisors submit an evaluation of the student’s aptitude and understanding toward current technology skills applied in the market space and the use of soft skills as it relates to communication with customers, colleagues, and supervisors. Students post a reflection activity at the end of the internship outlining their insights and the technical skills obtained from working in the real world.

By completing a required internship, the student will experience both the technical and professional aspects of the corporate world and gains a hands-on experience within a supervised environment.

Prior to the Professional Internship course (ITEC 495) students are required to take a prerequisite entitled Internship Seminar (ITEC 301) which prepares students for the internship and future entry level employment. During the course, students learn the proper employability skills to be successful and the proper documentation to build their portfolio to gain full time employment.

Course content begins with the understanding of proper business attire, handshakes, and introductions when meeting company representatives. Students prepare elevator pitches and learn how to network in the business community by understanding social norms when meeting individuals from a variety of sectors that impact technology. Content emphasized during the semester includes business research, cover letters, resumes, interview questions and techniques, negotiations, and thank-you letters.

The unique aspect of the course includes the daily participation of business partners which include career advisors, recruiters, human resource representatives, and company supervisors who are in search of technology students for a variety of positions that impact the areas of computer support, networking, security, programming, data analysis, project management, and other technology areas of concentration. Most of the corporate job openings are for internships and/or entry level positions that could lead to full time employment. Other openings considered by company representatives include part-time and co-op positions.

The classroom visitors allow for students to interact and ask questions of business professionals while getting a better understanding of each company and how they search for a candidate. The casual classroom environment provides a level of comfort for learning and discussing the benefits of small and large companies. After each class, students have the opportunity to network and/or submit a resume for possible employment without following the usual processes of job fairs and online applications.