

EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION PROGRAM



EMPLOYER HANDBOOK

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INTRODUCTION

This Experiential Education Employer Handbook has been prepared specifically for employer professionals interested in Experiential Education or internships. Based on our experience, we have anticipated questions you may have in utilizing students in the work setting. Naturally, you will occasionally encounter additional questions or need information that requires consultation with the University Experiential Education staff. Please contact the Program Coordinator when this occurs at 806-651-2345.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Mission Statement

The Experiential Education Program's mission is to guide undergraduate and graduate students in finding quality work experiences which relate to their major area of study at West Texas A&M University. In addition, the Experiential Education office promotes an environment in which students can explore various career options, develop job search skills, and learn professional standards of conduct. This enables graduates to be more competitive in the job market.

Employer's Role

Employers provide students with planned pre-professional work assignments, preferably with pay. These assignments can take a variety of forms including Cooperative Education placements (Co-ops) or internships. Co-op placements require multi-semester progressive, relevant learning experiences while internships are designed to be a one semester experience relating to the student's educational area of study.

Employers who are interested in co-op have the option of using one of two types of placement. The first type is an alternating assignment. Students work full-time for the equivalent of an academic semester and then return to the university the following semester to attend classes on a full time basis. The student should complete at least two work semesters. Employers often like this arrangement because they can hire two students for one position. While one student is on the job, the other is in school. The following semester, the students switch roles.

The second type of co-op work arrangement is referred to as a parallel assignment. This arrangement may only be utilized by employers located in close proximity to the university because it requires the student to work part-time (approximately 20 hours per week) and attend school taking at least ½ time course load.

Benefits for Employers

1. Employers get the “inside track” on recruiting quality students. Historically, many students have been offered and have accepted permanent employment with their Experiential Education employers after graduation. Employers, however, are not obligated to hire their students upon graduation.
2. Employers have an opportunity to evaluate a student’s on-the-job performance before making long term employment commitments.
3. Training periods required for new graduates are eliminated or reduced. Students who accept full-time jobs after graduation are already a long way up the learning curve.
4. Participation may reduce costs associated with recruiting and training potential permanent employees.
5. Employers have the opportunity to participate in the education of potential future employees.
6. Closer communication ties between employers and the university can be established as a result of Experiential Education agreements.
7. Students earn their salaries by providing useful services while they work.
8. Experiential Education students are exempt from state and federal unemployment taxes.

Types of Students Available

Experiential Education Programs are available to select students in many graduate and undergraduate programs at West Texas A&M University. The program is not specifically for disadvantaged or financially needy students. It is, in effect, more of an honors program whereby students are required to maintain at least a 2.5 GPA and exhibit above average maturity and motivation. Students generally enter the program during their sophomore or junior years. Graduate students can also be engaged in an Experiential Education work experience. In essence, we recruit students for the program who will most likely be in demand by employers when they graduate. Students who seek Experiential Education experiences most generally enter the program motivated by the desires to:

1. Obtain valuable on-the-job learning experiences which cannot be acquired in the classroom;
2. Realistically evaluate their choice of career study;
3. Acquire valuable recognition from potential employers by accumulating planned work experience in addition to their academic degree;
4. Establish a relationship with a potential long term employer; and
5. Earn a salary that may be used to finance a portion of a college education.

Getting Involved

Participation in the program does not entail any unreasonable commitments or “red tape”.

We do ask that employers:

- Provide a job description for the position;
- Evaluate the student’s performance; and,
- Make reasonable efforts to provide continuity of employment as long as the student performs well and the firm’s economic health allows continuance (see Exhibit B for details on employer responsibilities).

We want students to be invited to return for successive work terms based on job performance and academic performance in the classroom. Again, the employer is not obligated to hire the student after graduation.

For additional information about the program contact:

WTAMU Experiential Education Program
WTAMU Box 60728
Canyon, Texas 79016
Phone: 806-651-2345 Fax: 806-651-2925
Email: ssellars@wtamu.edu
<http://www.wtamu.edu/career>

The Roots of Experiential Education

Experiential Education is an offshoot of Cooperative Education. Cooperative Education began in 1906 by Professor Herman Schneider (University of Cincinnati) to provide engineering students work experience in a commercial shop. The program was endorsed in 1907 by the American Society of Engineering Education.

Experiential Education encompasses cooperative education along with other forms of work-based learning, internships, service learning, etc. West Texas A&M University has been involved in Experiential Education at department levels for many years, but was awarded an Administration-Part A Project Grant to implement a centralized program in fiscal year 1993.

THE EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP

What to Expect from the University

The purpose of the Experiential Education Program and the various college advisors is to administer the program in cooperation with participating employers. Specifically, the duties typically performed by university administrators are:

1. Inform the students about the program and its advantages.
2. Provide assistance to the student and the departments in completing the application process.
3. Identify and coordinate various employment opportunities with employers.
4. Assist with site visits as required and desired by the student's supervising department.
5. Develop new Experiential Education opportunities for students by working with business, industry, and government agencies.
6. Assist the departments with the placement of a student in an approved job.
7. Develop and accumulate brochures, websites & other material for distribution to students & employers.
8. Maintain appropriate records on Experiential Education students and employers.
9. Handle administrative tasks required to assist students, faculty and the employers so all benefit from the program.

Faculty advisors typically perform these duties:

1. Monitor the academic value and quality of the Experiential Education experience;
2. Evaluate student's Experiential Education term papers and assign semester grades;
3. Provide advice and policy direction to Experiential Education administrators; and,
4. Assist in developing new Experiential Education opportunities for students.

Expectations of the Student

Students should enter the Experiential Education Program with a clear understanding of its purpose and administration. Co-op students should be committed to completing the number of work terms planned through the Co-op degree plan with a single employer. Both co-op and internship students should be dedicated to a high level of performance so as to provide the employing agency a reasonable return on its investment. Students are expected to earn their invitation to return for subsequent work terms through productive performance and demonstrated long term potential. Students are expected to conform to the generally accepted measures of professional conduct in their relationship with the employer and university.

Expectations of the Employer

The employer should enter the Experiential Education Program with a clear understanding of its purpose and a strong belief in its merit. As with any new professional entering your organization, the student should be considered an asset. Your investment in the student through providing career related learning experiences and the opportunity to view the world of work in a natural environment could reap tremendous dividends. Also, the student returning to the campus becomes an ambassador for your overall college relations and recruiting program.

Key Ingredients of a Successful Experiential Education Program

Every successful Experiential Education employer organization has supportive people in the roles of:

1. Upper level management;
2. Internship Coordinator;
3. Direct supervisor; and,
4. Employees in the employing department.

Support for the program from top level management is important to assure direction, develop a sense of importance for human resource development, and provide rapport with the university. Employer “Internship Coordinators,” whether in the personnel department or supervisors fulfilling the role, are the key contacts for regular communication with University Experiential Education Coordinators. Direct supervisors probably make the greatest individual impact on the quality of the student’s experience. Their understanding and energy are invaluable for making a significant impact on the quality of the student’s Experiential Education experience. Direct supervisors understanding of program objectives and willingness to plan for and integrate the student into their mission is vital. Finally and sometimes overlooked, employees who work in the same environment with the Experiential Education students serve as trainers, role models, mentors, and companions. Often, returning students report that their most positive feeling about the experience is attributed to positive relationships in the work place, especially relationships with supervisors and workers who took the time to answer questions and explain the work.

MANAGING THE PROGRAM

Developing the Experiential Education Job

As with any new position, careful planning is required in designing an Experiential Education position. Naturally, the supervisor should expect that the student be productive and contribute to the organization’s mission. This should be balanced with efforts to expose the student to a variety of professionally related experiences and the opportunity to interact with professionals in his or her chosen field. Under the Experiential Education concept, students should be allowed increasing levels of responsibility for subsequent work terms as earned through accumulated on-the-job experiences and academic course work. This, of course, is a natural progression for any employee. A job description, work plan, or list of learning objectives is important. This document should be discussed with the students at the beginning of a work period and during periodic reviews. The document also serves as a necessary recruiting tool. The Experiential Education Program provides a brief job description form for employer

completion (See Exhibit C). Certainly, the employer may choose to develop a more thorough document.

Recruiting Experiential Education Students

The Experiential Education Program or appropriate University Coordinator should be notified of the employer's needs for Experiential Education students in terms of numbers of students by academic discipline. It is important to notify the university at the earliest practical time about anticipated Experiential Education vacancies so they may be posted on a timely basis and to allow time for the staff to recruit qualified students. It is best that the employer's needs be known at least one full semester in advance of the actual employment of students. For example, Experiential Education jobs that need to be filled for the spring semester should be posted in the Experiential Education office by September of the preceding fall semester. Vacancies for the summer and fall work terms should be posted by February. Another important advantage for listing jobs early is that competition is extremely keen for prospective Experiential Education students in certain academic disciplines.

There are many methods an employer can use to enhance its recruitment of Experiential Education students. Company brochures or websites can be made available to students through the University Experiential Education Coordinator. A good job description is essential to let the student know what he or she will be doing. Competitive salaries and benefits are important. Most importantly, word of mouth among students about the better Experiential Education employers reaps big dividends. A great way to raise visibility on-campus is to participate in job fairs and other Career Service events. Contact Career Services @ 806-651-2345 for involvement details.

Selecting Experiential Education Students

Employers find the selection process for Experiential Education students somewhat different than for graduating seniors. Whereas graduating seniors register for employer interviews during their final two semesters in school, prospective Experiential Education students may inquire anytime during their sophomore, junior, or senior years of study. Rather than interviewing a great many graduating seniors for a few positions, employers most often find prospective Experiential Education students are referred on an individual basis after careful prescreening and self-selection through the University Coordinator. Initially, some new employers find this uncomfortable, but in time they gain confidence in their University Coordinators and find the arrangement works well. The University Coordinator also has the responsibility of representing both employers' and students' needs and interests when making referrals.

The normal selection process requires that the student do some research, with the assistance of the University Coordinator, before choosing a company for application. The

Coordinator will then submit the student's resume and other information requested by the employer. The employer is encouraged to act on the information within three or four weeks. Often the employer invites the student for an on-site interview. Occasionally, the employer may choose to interview the student by telephone, arrange an interview when company representatives are on campus, or even hire the student strictly on the basis of the University Coordinator's recommendations. Setting up Experiential Education student interviews on campus can be successfully accomplished in certain situations. The employers should consult with the appropriate University Coordinator to arrange this.

Timing and Spacing of Work Terms

While an internship is one semester of experience relating to the student's educational area of study, co-op work schedules reflect two to four work terms on alternating or parallel semester patterns.

A co-op student must complete two full semesters of work for each 3-semester hours of credit. Typically, the maximum amount of credit a student can receive from a co-op placement is 3 semester credit hours. However, faculty advisors may change the amount of credit issued depending on job duties, responsibilities, etc. Also, faculty advisors reserve the right to approve or disapprove credit assignment. The work terms are generally defined as fall (approximately August 26 through January 10), spring (approximately January 10 through May 30), and summer (approximately May 30 through August 26). Students, however, can start in the middle of a semester if this works with their schedule.

Salary and Benefits

The amount of salary and benefits provided to Experiential Education students is the prerogative of the employer. For competitive reasons, there has been a tendency for compensation levels to cluster in relatively well-defined norms based on such factors as the student's academic major, credit hours completed, work terms completed, job location, and industry type. Information of this nature can be obtained from the appropriate University Coordinator.

There are a number of questions that need to be resolved under this general area such as:

- 1) What pay increases will be granted as a result of the student returning for subsequent work terms (allow credit for additional credit hours completed, work experience, outstanding performance)?
- 2) Will the student be allowed to participate in any of the company insurance programs?
- 3) Will the student be eligible for other benefits, such as tuition reimbursement for taking evening classes?
- 4) Will the student receive longevity credit for his or her experience to consider vacation accrual, pay, etc. if he or she is offered and accepts permanent employment after graduation?
- 5) Will the student be compensated for travel expenses incurred in

interviewing or moving to the employer location? 6) Will the student be provided any assistance in locating short term housing, if requested?

Orientation and Work Plan

A well-planned welcome and orientation for Experiential Education students, whether done individually or on a group basis, contributes greatly toward starting a rewarding cooperative arrangement. Students are highly motivated, very curious, and somewhat anxious about their new environment. A good work plan should be shared with the student at the beginning of the assignment. It is critical that the student be aware there is a sense of direction and purpose for the work assignments that he or she will perform. Students should know there are tedious tasks to be performed with any job, but these can be good learning experiences. Students, as well as other employees, can handle the more routine tasks in stride if they are afforded the opportunity to participate in some challenging projects. A supervisor's efforts to provide this "spice" can add measurably to the quality of the co-op or intern experience. It is also advisable to plan and discuss projects or tasks that can be performed during slack periods. Most students feel very uncomfortable when they are not contributing. Also, the employer should expect a reasonable return on his salary investment in the student.

Employer's Evaluation of Student

The Experiential Education student should be evaluated and counseled in a formal way about his or her job performance at least once per work term. This is normally accomplished in a conference between the student and his or her immediate supervisor in the last two or three weeks prior to the end of the work term. Certainly, any good supervisor knows that evaluation and individual counseling should take place on a continuous and informal basis throughout the work term. Experiential Education students, being new to the professional world of work, are constantly concerned about the issue: "How am I doing?"

As a part of administering the program, the University Coordinator needs your feedback on each student. An online evaluation for is sent to supervising employers at the end of each semester. Some employers feel strongly about using their own evaluation forms, in lieu of or in addition to the online evaluation. This is certainly acceptable.

The completed performance evaluation form is normally not used to determine a student's grade for an Experiential Education credit course. These grades are based primarily on the student's term paper or other academic assignment. The evaluation used primarily as a counseling tool and does not readily lend itself to comparisons of different students, particularly when they are evaluated by different supervisors.

Some Final Suggestions

1. Should one of your active students approach you about changing his or her Experiential Education work term schedule, insist that he or she first obtain approval from our office. Normally, such changes are not approved unless the student has strong justification. While the unique circumstances of individual students will be considered, the University Coordinator must consider the following questions: Will the change negate planned learning experiences? Will the change deny prospective Experiential Education students the opportunity to begin an Experiential Education experience? Will this inconvenience the employer? Will the change conflict with an alternating co-op student's schedule? Will the change disrupt key sequential courses, which were carefully planned for by the student and approved by the academic advisor prior or the Experiential Education assignment?
2. Please do not encourage Experiential Education students to accept permanent employment with the organization prior to graduation, and consequently, drop out of West Texas A&M University or transfer to a local university.
3. Please discuss the Experiential Education student a tentative return starting date for the subsequent work term. Also, you should discuss what the student's work responsibilities and pay will be for the subsequent work term. An ideal time for this is at the student evaluation conference held near the end of each work term.
4. The employer may elect to review students' written term papers to assure that proprietary information is not released, if this is a concern of your particular organization. Students should also be aware of this requirement.
5. Please do not approach us with a proposition to consider either minority only, female only, male only, or non-minority only applicants for Experiential Education jobs. As are most employers we work with, we are committed to the principle of placing Experiential Education students without regard to race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, handicaps, or status as a disabled veteran or a veteran of the Vietnam Era, except where age and sex are essential bona fide occupational requirements, or where handicap is a bona fide occupational disqualification.

Please don't hesitate to contact the Experiential Education Program with questions or if there is anything we can do to help you find a great student!

WTAMU Experiential Education Program

P.O. Box 60728 * Canyon, TX 79016

(806) 651-2345 * (806) 651-2925 fax

ssellars@wtamu.edu

<http://www.wtamu.edu/career>

WORK ASSIGNMENT RESPONSIBILITIES & ORIENTATION PLAN

INSTRUCTIONS – Experiential Education students should discuss this form with their direct supervisor(s). The purpose of this form is to help the student gain a better understand of the chain-of-command at the organization; who the student should report to; the primary and secondary responsibilities of the job assignment; other learning opportunities which may be available; and the criteria used for evaluation of the student’s performance.

CHAIN-OF-COMMAND - Beginning at the level of the Experiential Education student, list the names and titles (if appropriate) of people in the student’s chain of command which can go up to the manager of the organization (plant or facility) where the student is located. If the organization has a central Experiential Education coordinator (i.e., personnel representative), the student should clearly understand the appropriate communications procedures between the direct supervisor, the organization’s Experiential Education coordinator, and the student.

REPORTING RESPONSIBILITIES - List the names (and title, if appropriate) of all the people in the organization who will be assigning work projects to the student. Help the student to understand priorities of completing work assignments when more than one person is giving instruction/assignments to the student.

PRIMARY JOB/PROJECT RESPONSIBILITIES - List/describe the primary job assignments for the student along with target completion dates. Help the student to understand the resources and key contact people within the organization needed by the student to complete the assignments.

“SLACK TIME” & OTHER LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES -List/describe secondary assignments, training/reading assignments, exposure to other parts of the organization, etc., that the student could do when unable to work on the primary job assignments. This will assist the student in avoiding “slack times” which occasionally occur.

EVALUATION - Experiential Education students are required to submit an Employer Evaluation of their work performance each work term, along with the required written report, to the WTAMU Experiential Education office. It is often helpful to students to receive an informal (written or oral) evaluation at the mid-point of the work term. Students should understand the criteria used for the evaluation and should know who will be completing the final written evaluation near the end of the work term.

MEASURABLE LEARNING AGREEMENT

Name: _____

To be completed by student and the employer: Goals are one basis of student evaluation for those receiving credit.

Learning Objective (What I want to learn)

Activities (What I will do to achieve my objective)

Documentation (The way that I will demonstrate to my faculty advisor what I have learned)

To be completed by faculty advisor if student is receiving credit:

Criteria (Standards used to assess my learning)

Date of completion (Due dates for the documentation described above)

Faculty Signature: _____

Date: _____

Employer Signature: _____

Date: _____

Student Signature: _____

Date: _____

*With few exceptions, state law gives you the right to request, receive, review and correct info. about yourself collected by this form.
Revised: 5/27/2010*

West Texas A&M University Experiential Education Memo of Understanding

In consideration of the mutual benefits of the Experiential Education Program, WTAMU, the employer, and the student agree as follows:

A. The **EMPLOYER** agrees to:

1. Designate an individual to supervise the student and to serve as liaison between the employer and WTAMU.
2. In conjunction with the student and faculty, establish measurable learning objectives at the beginning of each work term.
3. Provide the student employment averaging _____ hours per week.
4. Pay a minimum salary of _____ per hour.
5. Notify the university immediately of any change in the student's job duties and/or work supervisor.
6. Evaluate the student at least once per semester on a form provided by WTAMU Experiential Education Program.

B. **WTAMU** agrees to:

1. Provide a faculty coordinator to monitor the progress of the student.
2. Make periodic contacts with the employer.
3. Determine a grade and award college credit in designated courses for successful job performance and completion of related assignments.
4. Notify the employer if the student withdraws from the Co-op & Internship course and/or the university.

C. The **STUDENT** agrees to:

1. If approved, register for the appropriate number of internship credits through their academic department.
2. Work an average of _____ hours during each of the work terms.
3. Develop a well-planned series of learning objectives, in conjunction with the faculty coordinator and the employer, related to the goals of his/her instructional programs.
4. Immediately notify the Experiential Education office and faculty coordinator of any problems or changes in job responsibilities.
5. Abide by the regulations and policies of both the Experiential Education Program & the employer.
6. Remain employed the entire semester or risk the loss of credits.
7. Drop all credits if he/she leaves the program without the consent of the Experiential Education office or if he/she is discharged from the job prior to the completion of the required amount of time in the job.

SIGNATURES

We agree to comply with the terms and conditions of the Agreement.

For WTAMU / Date

For the Student / Date

For the Employer / Date

Please return this form to:

WTAMU Experiential Education Program | WTAMU Box 60728
Canyon, TX 79016 | Phone: (806) 651-2345 | Fax: (806) 651-2925

Revise 5/26/2010

EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION JOB DESCRIPTION

Date: _____

Employing Organization: _____

Employer Contact Name: _____

Address: _____

City & State: _____ Location of Work: _____

Job Title: _____ Hours for Job: _____

Desired Major: _____

Brief Description of Assignments and Goals Expected of Student:

Working Conditions: _____

Salary \$ _____ per hour or \$ _____ per month

Company Paid Benefits: _____

Additional pertinent information about job (security clearance, special skills, etc.)

Other: _____

Please return this form to:

WTAMU Experiential Education Program | WTAMU Box 60728

Canyon, TX 79016 | Phone: (806)651-2345 | Fax: (806) 651-2925

Or email to Steve Sellars | ssellars@wtamu.edu