

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE ADMINISTRATION OF RESEARCH-FOCUSED UNIVERSITY INTERNSHIP PROGRAMS

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May 21, 2011

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Abstract

Every year, undergraduate students endeavor into research-focused internship programs being hosted by universities. These programs generate benefits for both the interns and universities. As they become more popular, the understanding of how effectively to manage them is indispensable.

Consequently, given my experience as intern and involvement, I will present the most important guiding principles for the administration of research-focused university internship programs following a strategic organizational approach. The discussion starts with a case study.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE ADMINISTRATION OF RESEARCH-FOCUSED UNIVERSITY INTERNSHIP PROGRAMS

Outline

- LSU AgCenter / Zamorano Internship Program
- Mutual Benefits
- Conceptual Framework
 - Planning and organization
 - Requirements and selection
 - Execution and control
 - Working procedures
 - Results
 - Evaluation
 - Metrics and decisions
 - Learning, planning, and improving

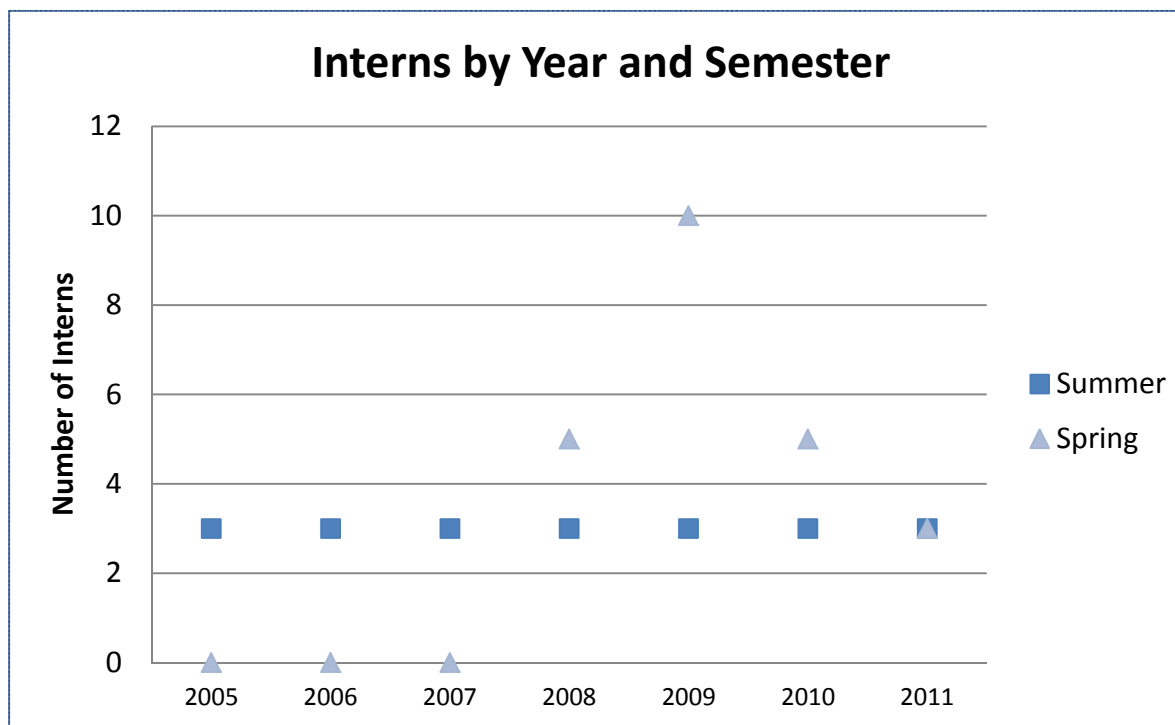
LSU AgCenter / Zamorano Internship Program

- Dr. Carl Motsenbocker (1995 – 2002)
 - Dept. of Horticulture
 - Housing + \$750/month
- Zamorano Agricultural Society at LSU (Spring 2004)
 - Student organization
 - Officially registered at Center for Student Leadership & Involvement
 - Internship program proposal (Spring and Fall 2004)
 - **Paradigm shift:** research focus and selection process
 - Refined proposal: International Programs (spring 2005)
- Chancellor William B. Richardson
 - Presentation and approval (Spring 2005)



LSU AgCenter / Zamorano Internship Program

- Call for applicants and selection (SPG 2005)
- Arrival of interns (SU 2005)
- Chancellor's visit to Zamorano (F 2007)



Data source: author.

LSU AgCenter / Zamorano Internship Program

- Interns: 44
- Academic Departments
 - Agronomy, Ag. Economics, Animal Science, Dairy and Food Sciences, Horticulture, Natural Resources, Plant Pathology
- Countries of Origin

Bolivia

Colombia

Ecuador

El Salvador

Guatemala

Honduras

México

Nicaragua

Panamá

Perú

República Dominicana

Data source: author.



LSU AgCenter / Zamorano Internship Program

- Costs incurred by LSU AgCenter (2004 –2011) \approx **US \$ 250,000.00**
 - Spring (23 interns)
 - Summer (21 interns)
 - Fall semester (extension \approx 50%)
- Graduate school (Spring = 10% and Summer = 63%): **42.1%**



Spring 2011 (left to right):
Carlos I. García (Guatemala, 1999),
Federico Hill (El Salvador, 2011),
Michelle Mite Rzepka (AgCenter)
Maria A. Caldera (Nicaragua, 2011),
Jorge R. Díaz (Perú, 2011),
Damir Torrico (Bolivia, 2006).



Data source: author

Benefits for Universities and Academic Units

- Help
 - Ongoing research projects
 - Theses & dissertations
- Research publications
- Cultural exchange and public relations
- Enhance undergraduate education
- Recruitment of future graduate students

Benefits for Interns

- Research experience
 - Knowledge of the profession
 - Integrate knowledge with experience
 - Learn new technologies and gain new skills
- New perspectives and visions
- Organizational knowledge of universities
 - Depts., Graduate School, cosmopolitan environment
- Access to new networks
 - Make new friends and contacts

Planning and Organization

- Define objectives
 - Requirements and selection procedures
- Cooperative agreements
 - Commitment from faculty (involvement)
 - Strategic partnerships (academia / industry)
- Define financing sources for stipends
 - Internal
 - External
 - Grants
 - Counterpart

Requirements

- Application form to identify the applicants
 - Major, GPA, vitae, English skills, diversity, involvement and disciplinary record, transcripts, contact information
- Letters of recommendation
 - Trust, dedication, ability, and professionalism
- Statement of purpose and future involvement
 - Attention to details
 - Identify attitudes and aptitudes for research
 - Prospects for the future
 - Elicit commitment
 - Will they apply to graduate school?

Execution

- Call for applicants
 - Selection criteria (minimum requirements)
 - Define deadline, procedures, contact information
 - Share some testimonies
- Application package (Printed, Word, PDF)
 - E-mail and package delivery companies
- Communication methods (create awareness)
 - Network of friends and colleagues
 - Students, professors, and academic administrators
 - National and international
 - Information sessions / campus visits
 - E-mail, brochure, website, be creative!

Selection

- Selection process (pool of candidates)
 - Criteria
 - Compliance with minimum standards
 - Evaluation scale by requirement
 - Professional peer review
 - Diverse group of evaluators for better assessment
 - Favoritism versus the outstanding (merit)
 - Good application versus evaluator's knowledge of the applicant
- Interviews for selection and matching
- Selection Results
 - Letters of acceptance and rejection (thanks)
 - Select a second tier for possible interns
 - International: I20, DS2019 and Visa J1

Matching and Placement

- Good matching produces efficiency
 - Needs of the faculty
 - Interns' education
 - Qualifications
 - Interests
- Placement
 - Clear terms and conditions
 - Obtain commitment from faculty
 - Supervision and follow up
 - Share criteria for evaluation and termination

Readiness, Welcome and Orientation

- Housing, arrival, information package
- Legal documents (employer / employee)
- Introduce Direct Supervisor (faculty / staff)
 - Tour
 - Modus operandi
 - Duties and responsibilities
 - Set expectations
 - Professional and ethical considerations
 - Conflicts and contact information
 - Cultural shocks (stress management)

What do interns do?

20–40 hours / week

- Research experience
 - Working on diverse duties
 - Know how (methods, machines, processes, etc.)
- On-campus instruction
 - Classes taught by direct supervisor
 - English
- Active involvement
 - Extension and education
 - May become active in organizations
 - Learning beyond classroom and work
 - Short trips (field work, cultural, recreational)

Inventory of Achievements

- Follow up
 - Regular meetings
 - Document as your program evolves
- Documentation
 - Request final reports (major accomplishments)
 - Gather testimonies (interns and professors)
- Solving conflicts
 - Gather information
 - Choose course of actions

Evaluation

- Evaluation (middle-final)
 - Objectives
 - Support decisions
- Metrics for Assessment
 - Completion of the program
 - Help to professors, graduate students, and staff
 - Poster and paper presentations
 - Extension activities
 - Effects of the **mentoring quality** on intern's performance
 - Completion of theses
 - Grades: Pass/Fail, A-F scale, verbal assessment

Evaluation

- Obtain and Share Feedback
 - Interns
 - Faculty
 - Administrators

- Assessment of the Costs and Benefits
 - Continuation, expansion, contraction
 - Financing and support from stakeholders

Future

- Research-focused University Internships
 - Likely to become popular in the future.
- Interns versus Student Workers
 - Selection based on qualifications
 - Learning rate
 - Continuity of schedule
 - Commitment
 - Less training and supervision

Final Comments

- Universities contribute greatly to society through internship programs
- Research-focused internship programs enhance the quality of undergraduate education
- Administration of these programs require the application of guiding principles for its success
- Exchange of information
 - Obtain and share feedback
 - Faculty (needs)
 - Administrators (costs and benefits)
 - Interns (qualifications and interests)

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